Lastoria delves into yet another Q&A with minor league Indians prospect guru Chris Kline. In this edition, Kline provides some updates on the progress of some prospects to date, some of the disappointments and surprises this year, the current status of some injured prospects, and more in this insightful interview.

A special thanks to Chris Kline (pictured to the right) for chiming in again and giving a mid-season update on some of the prospects in the system. For those unfamiliar with who Chris Kline is, Chris is a former beat writer for the Cleveland Indians Class A farm team the Kinston Indians, and is now currently working for Baseball America in a full-time capacity as a national writer.

Chris is very familiar with the Indians front office and farm system from his time working at the Kinston Free Press and Baseball America, as well as working exclusively on the Indians Top 30 Prospect list for Baseball America ’s annual "Prospect Handbook" in 2005 and 2006.

Over the past few years, I have had the opportunity to talk with Chris many times, and this past April he did a two part Q&A for the site:

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_http://www.swerbsblurbs.com/article_detail.php?id=313 _

_http://www.swerbsblurbs.com/article_detail.php?id=324

With that, onto the Q&A:

Q: What is the anatomy of a typical day/week in the life of Chris Kline as Baseball America National Writer? What is your routine, and what type of process do you use to come up with news for the Dish? How do you fit in interviews, all the traveling?

Chris Kline (CK): Wow . . . errr . . . it's tough, though every conversation I have with a Mary Kay representative on a plane (and I'm somehow always next to them), I always say it's nice to have to travel some place and not have to sit in a conference room somewhere when I arrive wherever I'm going. And that's the truth-in my eyes, it's totally a luxury to have someone send you anywhere to go watch players and talk to people about them. If I'm not traveling, the typical week is 10 a.m.-to-6 p.m. at the office Monday thru Friday and try to squeeze in as many games regionally as possible. Interviews are easy; unless it's something like the Futures Game or something we all call "The Scrum," which is about a thousand media folks descending on the major league all-stars like it was last week. For me, that was a total nightmare. I had a total of 16 guys to talk to, and I got them all—with the exception of Kenny Rogers, who decided not to come. Even the Futures Game was kind of different for me, since I had to wait in line to talk to guys for the most part, and I volunteered for coverage of the World Team over the U.S. . . . mostly because I think those guys get ignored on the way up—but that's another story for another time. In terms of Dish, it's fairly random. I go through the web for a long time each day and have contacts that will either email me or call me to give me the heads up on stuff.

Q: What is your take on Kevin Kouzmanoff? Now that he is hitting at Akron at a ridiculous pace, is he getting more credit for past numbers? Is he now a legit prospect? With Marte entrenched at 3B, do you think Kouzmanoff can play another position?

CK: I ranked him in the 30 the past two years, so given that, I've thought of him as legit, and it goes beyond the bat. Kouzmanoff is also a legit defender—he's not super-slick on the corner or going to do anything to grab your eye defensively—he'll just make all the plays. Can he move? I don't really know. He's athletic enough to play first, but you can't really move him there with Ryan Mulhern and Ryan Garko in front of him. It's a tough situation, but he just keeps proving he can hit at all levels. Again, there is obviously some medical, but don't ever question his desire—to me, he is one of the most driven players in the organization . . . he and Chuck Lofgren and everything he's dealing with seeing so many guys pass him by.

Q: You did a piece back in late May for the Daily Dish where it seemed you and scouts were really down on Andy Marte. With his recent resurgence, has that stance changed?

CK: Let's get this straight on Marte: I have two sons and he's been their favorite player since 2002. And even though they call him "Andy Market," they obviously have good taste. My flavor on Marte soured a little bit in 2003, and that increased in 2004, though I still think he's one of the better third base prospects in the minors. Is he the best? Not for me—to me he ranks

third or fourth behind Alex Gordon (Kansas City), and Brandon Wood (LA Angels-once they finally move him there). I just think Marte's going to be a solid everyday big leaguer, not a major superstar. In his defense, and his body aside, his swing was all screwed up when he came over to the Tribe, and it literally took all of spring training and nearly the first three months of the season to get him to stop dropping his back shoulder and pulling off balls away from him.

Q: Which of your preseason ranked prospects have fallen off your Top 30 and Top 10 list. Who has jumped into the Top 10 or 30? Why?

CK: Good question. In terms of falling off, I'd have to say Dan Denham, Matt Whitney, Michael Aubrey and Jason Cooper. None of those guys has gotten it done. And I was reluctant to put Aubrey in the top 10 to begin with. You have to remember that although this year's Prospect Handbook came out in March, I had to finish this top 10 by the end of September. All these guys come off and to me, Whitney is the biggest disappointment of them all. I mean, I called some BA guys in spring training, telling them he was my top guy to jump into the 2007 top 10 because this spring he was UNREAL. But he's just been so lackadaisical all season, I'm out on that bandwagon. Guys who have the chance to jump in—without involving this year's draft for this question—are guys like Aaron Laffey (though I'm not completely sold on him—I think he'll be an OK lefty specialist more than anything) and Joe Ness—if he actually develops some sort of breaking ball to keep hitters off-balance. Everything's hard with that guy right now.

Q: This may tie into the question above, but who are your candidates for biggest breakout player this year? Biggest disappointment?

CK: It totally does. But for me, my biggest disappointment, regardless of recovering from injury is Miller. My biggest breakthrough this year is Crowe. He's proven that they probably don't have to move him to 2B because of his outfield defense.

Q: Speaking of Crowe, how soon could Trevor Crowe be in the big leagues? Is he now the #1 position player prospect in the system? Are the Indians still considering a position switch to 2B?

CK: The move is still out there, though I think they see him more now as a pretty solid left fielder than a second baseman. If there is no move, the bat and the speed on the bases will play

next season in the big leagues. Is he the No. 1 position player in the system? Probably, but don't forget about Marte at a premium position . . . and I'm debating if he's No. 1 overall right now.

Q: What are the thoughts regarding Adam Miller's progress thus far at the season's halfway point? Is he back on track?

CK: I was all fired up for him to pitch in the Futures Game, then I got the report that "he's really sore." And beyond the numbers, which to me are just OK—I mean, he's shown flashes, but not much in the way of consistency—has he really been that impressive? To me, he's the organization's biggest disappointment. The stuff is there; I just started to question A) whether he needs to have more intestinal fortitude and have more passion for the game or B) just go in an have his arm fixed. Everybody says he's healthy, so I think it's more the former than the latter and I hope I'm right in that regard. I mean, show me something like you used to.

Q: What is Michael Aubrey's status? Is it about time to call a coroner because his career is about dead?

CK: Another good question I'm not sure anyone has the answer to. It was tough talking to him about what he was going through this spring, simply because he's such a great guy. But seriously, being a great guy has little to do with the amount of money invested—no matter how much I personally try not to treat players like horses. He's got to stay on the field—bottom line. And Aubrey hasn't done that. I love his bat and doubt if the back thing will ever allow him to be the future Gold Glover we originally saw, but the bat still could be a presence. It's disappointing, but for a different reason than Miller.

Q: How is JD Martin's rehab coming along, and do you think that he will recover to the point where he can dominate batters like he did in 2005? What are the plans for him the rest of the year?

CK: The plan is to obviously bring him back slowly, as is the course for any Tommy John survivor. I'm not sure if I mentioned it here before, but J.D. looked bigger and stronger to me in spring training this year—a sign that he's growing into that frame—which is awesome. I'm pretty

psyched for him strength-wise, and I hope that translates to a quick return to the dominance he showed last season. As he gets more innings, he'll get stronger. It's just going to take time.

Q: With Sean Smith's recent surge at Akron, is he just having a good season, or is he just a late bloomer and this is a breakout year where his talent is finally starting to show?

CK: Smith has always had the talent. We ranked him in the Top 30 two years ago, but he had a bunch of minor injuries in 2005, which is why I left him off the list this season. Honestly, he gave one of the best performances I saw last year against Frederick in the Carolina League finals series last year, which was a sign of him on the rise. It's not surprising to me—he's a command/control guy who just needed more innings and be completely healthy. Is he a starter down the road? He might be, but the medical—no matter how minor—is a red flag. I look at him along the same lines of Brian Slocum—very similar to me, just on pure stuff. He might be a middle reliever or a swing guy as he moves along.

Q: Where is Justin Hoyman?

CK: Hoyman is in Akron rehabbing from shoulder surgery he had two months ago. You likely won't see him on a mound competitively this season, but maybe the GCL. It's more likely he pitches in instructional league.

Q: What do you think of Jeff Stevens, the guy the Indians got as the PTBNL for Brandon Phillips? Would you have given up on Phillips so quickly?

CK: He's OK. And re: Phillips, I don't think you can blame anyone. They knew they had to make a move because he was out of options. And while he showed flashes of brilliance, he was never consistent. I remember talking to him last year and he kept saying about having a steady approach. And then he went out and tried to hit home runs in three out of his five at-bats for Buffalo . I also recall a time talking to then-Buffalo manager Marty Brown about something when Phillips beeped in on his line asking him what time he had to be at the ballpark that day. And that was at nearly 4 p.m. You can only put up with that attitude and sense of entitlement for so long.

Q: Any thoughts on the newly acquired SS Asdrubal Cabrera?

CK: Cabrera was holding his own in Triple-A in a bad system, but he's got some tools. I'm not sure he's an everyday shortstop, however. He might end up being the short term answer at second, actually. He's got plus range, arm strength, hands and instincts. I'm just not sold on the bat.