On Sunday afternoon, left-hander T.J. House made his advanced Single-A debut in the Carolina League for the Kinston Indians. He did not disappoint, going five strong innings where he allowed two runs on six hits and one walks, but most impressively had ten strikeouts.

Depending on what publication you refer to House is a top ten prospect in the Indians system or just outside of the top ten. That along with his young age (20), draft pedigree ($750K signing bonus), and performance last year at Low-A Lake County as a 19-year old (6-11, 3.15 ERA) have him targeted as one of the most interesting players for fans to follow this season in the minors.

With the season underway, House feels strong and is ready for the challenge of the new league and what may be in store for him this year.

"I [felt] a lot better coming into spring training this year," said House in a recent interview. "Just with the knowledge of what is expected, what's going to go on, and how things are coming in. Getting that year under my belt where I am not that new guy. Now I am getting into the organization and getting to the point where I know what is expected of me physically."

One of the things that House really worked on in the offseason was his conditioning. Last year at Lake County, while the overall numbers were nice, his performance dipped in the second half of the season mostly because he got tired since he was not used to such a long season. In the first half of the season he went 2-7 with a 2.74 ERA in 13 starts before the All Star break, but was 4-4 with a 3.58 ERA in 13 starts after the break. With that on his mind entering the offseason, he made it a point to build up his strength and endurance so he could handle the physical toll of starting 26-27 games and pitching 150 innings this season.

“I [worked] out with Brett Fischer of Fischer Sports in the offseason and trained out there for about a month,” said House. “Kerry Wood goes there, Matt Thornton and J.J. Putz from the White Sox. He does a lot of the core strengthening of the legs. I also did a lot of working on my shoulder to keep me from falling off in the second half. My main goal is to be consistent all year. I realized it is such a long season that you have to really come in prepared to handle it."

House had a good year last year, though his win-loss record was deceiving on how well he really pitched. If you were to just look at his 6-11 record, you would think he did not have a good season; however, wins and losses are typically not indicative of how an actual pitcher performed as it is more of a team oriented stat that relies heavily on not only how he performs as a pitcher, but how his defense around him plays, the bullpen pitches when they come in, and the run support he gets from his offense. Looking deeper into his numbers, he had the very good 3.15 ERA on the year, but his rate stats were solid to very good in that he had an 8.5 H/9, 0.5 HR/9, 3.3 BB/9, and 7.3 K/9.

At the end of last season, House was satisfied with the final numbers but more importantly felt he learned a lot about himself as a pitcher and what it will take to have future success.

"I learned a lot about myself as a pitcher,” said House. “Like what my strengths are, and what I need to work on. I feel like I went out this past offseason and really busted my tail trying to get mentally stronger, learning the aspects of the game and how to control things, and trying to read hitters better. That's one of the main things I need to learn is to become a pitcher and not just a thrower. I am getting there, but it's a work in progress."

One of the things that contributed to House’s poor win-loss record last year was his pitch count. Since he was on a strict 75-pitch count he quite often was only able to go five innings a start. In

fact of his 26 starts, six times he went less than five innings, ten times he went less than six innings, eight times he went exactly six innings, and only two times did he go over six innings. As a result, he often left the game with three to four innings to play which lessened his control considerably on whether he would get the win or loss in the contest. This year he is up to a 90-pitch count so he should be able to go six to seven innings an outing on a much more frequent basis, and in turn allow him to control that win-loss record a little better.

"My pitch count is up 15 pitches this year as I will be up to about 90," said House. "Last year I was told going in I would go 120 innings, but I ended up going 134, so hopefully this year if I can get to 150 maybe they will let me go to 160. What's important is to get to that 200 mark and stay there. That's the goal. To eat innings up and give your team a chance to win. Just go as long as you can in a game. I have a little more leeway with my pitch counts so it is easier to go seven or eight innings."

Stuff-wise, House is still pitching with his three pitch mix of a fastball, slider and changeup. His fastball sits at 90-93 MPH and has touched as high as 95 MPH, and the slider is a plus pitch in his arsenal while the changeup is a pitch he is still working on. There is very little he has done since last year with his repertoire, though he is currently toying with a new grip on his slider to see if he can make it an even more effective pitch for him.

"Right now everything is the same," said House about his pitch mix. "I changed the grip up on the slider a little bit. I used to hold it a little more like a curveball, but now I am throwing across the seams instead of going along with the seams. I am getting a little more bite out of it and shape. It's not so much like a slurve as now it is harder. But it is still kind of a feel thing. I am seeing if it works for me and will keep trying it, and if I don't progress with it I am going to go back to the way I used to be with it."

There is very little House is working on mechanically at the moment as the season has just started, though he is working on staying out front and driving through the zone.

"Mechanics-wise, I am still the same, just working on not cutting myself off with my front foot," explained House. "Sometimes I don't open my hips enough where I am able to drive because I cut across my body. It causes me to lose a little velocity and my ball to not go where I want it to go as it tends to float across the plate a little more. I am just working on making sure I stay out in front, stay behind myself and drive through the zone."

The issue with his front foot was noticed last year and he and the coaching staff are keeping an eye on it this year in order to have the minor problem not become a bad habit that he cannot break down the road.

"It was something that last year I struggled with a little later in the season," noted House. "Me and [Lake County Pitching Coach] Tony Arnold talked about it and he told me to just keep a conscious mind of it because he doesn't want it to get worse. So this past offseason I did a lot of work on where my front foot is going to land. He is working on it with me now because he knows that while it is not something that will hurt me greatly now, in the future if it isn't fixed it will be very hard to change. It's a habit, and you gotta break it when you catch it and not let it get progressively worse."

With one start already in the books this year, House's main goal is to stay healthy this year and to go out every fifth say and give his team a chance to win by going six or seven strong innings. If he can do that and also continue to show development as a pitcher, he will be in line for a move up to Double-A Akron to start the 2011 season or perhaps late this year.

"Main goal is to stay healthy," said House. "Just being consistent as a pitcher, going out there a little better, and knowing the job I have to do. I want to have a better second half than I had last year. I want to be able to extend it through the whole season, and not just have a great first half and a so-so second half. I want to go out there, get the job done, and get better. Like I said last year, the only thing I can do is just try to put myself in a position to move up the ladder, but it all comes from learning, watching, listening and actually taking it in and using it and not just paying attention to them and then saying to myself I will just continue to do it my way anyway. I understand the coaches and managers we have are very knowledgeable and they know a lot about the game. It would be kind of dumb for me to think that what they are telling me couldn't help me. Just try it out, and if it doesn't work then it is was not for you as everybody is different. [But in the end], I just want to be consistent with all of my pitches and throw them for strikes and being an all around better pitcher."

The season started off as an unpainted canvas for every player in the Indians organization. Their performance, health, and development over the course of this season will go a long way at determining how nice of a picture they paint of their future potential by season's end.

"I'm excited," said House. "My arm is healthier this year as hopefully it doesn't get as winded as it did last year. I feel a little more confident knowing what is expected out of me and what I can expect out of it the whole year. If I don't have the greatest season as long as I get out there and make every start and do my best to work on things I think it will be successful all around. The numbers take care of themselves. You just gotta go out there every fifth day and do your best. It's going to be fun and I am ready to see how it is going to play out."

Follow Tony and the Indians Prospect Insider on Twitter @tlastoria . His new book the 2010 Cleveland Indians Top 100 Prospects & More is also available for purchase on Amazon.com or his site .