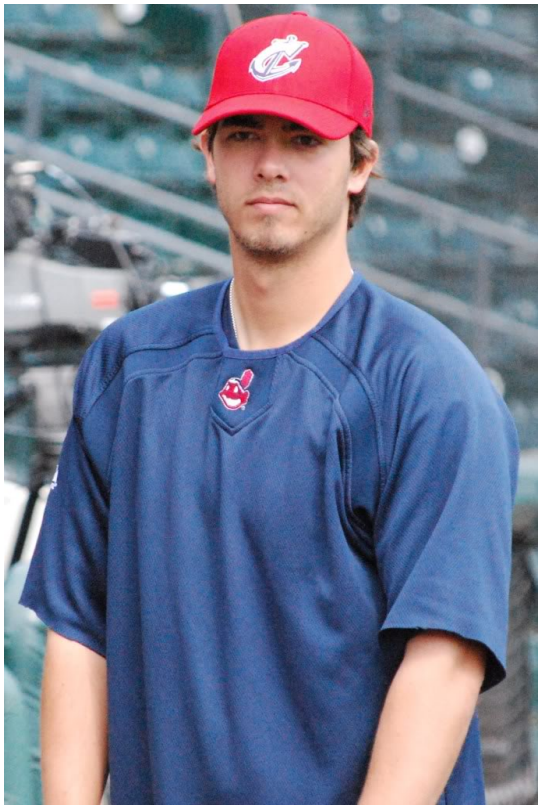

Indians left-handed pitcher Scott Lewis has been through a lot of ups and downs over the course of his seven year professional baseball career. Unfortunately for him, it has mostly been a struggle with the downs, and largely because of injuries.

The injuries started for Lewis all the way back when he was a sophomore in college at Ohio State University. In his sophomore season he was the Big Ten Pitcher of the Year going 9-1 with a 1.61 ERA while striking out 127 batters in 84 innings. There was thought he could go in the 1st round of the 2004 Draft, but shortly after his 2003 season ended he came down with an elbow injury that resulted in Tommy John surgery and pretty much wiped out his 2004 season. The Indians still took him in the 3rd round of the draft even though they knew he was still not 100% recovered from his Tommy John surgery.

Lewis pitched sparingly after he was drafted as he made three appearances (5.1 IP) at short-season Single-A Mahoning Valley in 2004. A recurring bicep injury in the early part of 2005 kept him out of action for most of the following season as he only made seven appearances (15.2 IP) in a return trip to Mahoning Valley. Finally healthy in 2006 he went to High-A Kinston and on a strict pitch count of 60-65 pitches he showed what he was made of as he won the Minor League ERA Title with a 1.48 ERA for Kinston in 27 starts (115.2 IP).

After making it through 2006 without any setbacks, Lewis had a strong 2007 at Double-A Akron where he made 27 starts (134.2 IP), but was put on the disabled list in the playoffs because of inflammation in his left elbow and had some tingling and numbness in his hand. The unfortunate end to his 2007 season was an omen for the start of his 2008 season as he missed the first three months of the 2008 season after he pulled a lat muscle in spring training. He came back strong from the injury and breezed through Akron and Triple-A Buffalo that year and eventually made his big league debut with the Indians in September and impressed by winning his first four big league starts (4-0, 2.63 ERA).

Just as Lewis and the Indians thought the arm injuries were behind him, he came down with a sore left forearm with pain near the bicep area late in spring training last year which he eventually went on the disabled list for after he could no longer deal with the pain one start into his season.

"It was a rough one last year," recalled Lewis in a recent interview at Huntington Park in Columbus. "I really didn't take advantage of my opportunity I had last year, but so far I am feeling pretty good. I am a little rusty and still trying to shake off some bad habits I got into last year as far as trying to pitch somewhat hurt. I got a little out of whack so I am still trying to find my release point on certain pitches. For the most part I am feeling pretty good."

After one heck of a finish to his 2008 season, Lewis went to the Dominican Republic to pitch in the offseason and that is where the problems for 2009 all started. The issue carried over into his spring training where he was very ineffective and his performance suffered.

"Whether that was it or not I don't know as I might of stopped finishing certain pitches because it was bothering me a little bit," said Lewis about the arm possibly affecting his spring performance last year. "I think what was causing that was kind of overthrowing the changeup a little bit and trying to get it to do something early on and it just wasn't doing what I wanted it to do. I was almost trying to make it do something instead of just throwing it, and I was almost throwing screwballs with my changeup. I was putting a lot into it the last few starts in camp. Even before opening day I mentioned it [was bothering me] and they backed off a little bit. As [my start in the home opener] went on it kept getting tighter and tighter and I felt something stretch. After that it was just a real long year."

The injury to Lewis' forearm and bicep last year were just two more setbacks to what has become an extensive and sometimes mind-boggling injury history. What most people don't

know is he has a chronic bicep issue which comes and goes, and there has been no diagnosis on how to fix it. As a result, he has often been forced to pitch through the bicep pain or find ways to circumvent the pain by altering his mechanics, but the byproduct to that may be some of the injuries he has recently suffered.

"Last year it was a strain of the flexor tendon in the forearm and elbow area," explained Lewis. "That bothered me for the first three weeks or whatever, and then I just had some kind of chronic bicep soreness. I don't even know as doctors can't even pinpoint [the issue] either. It is a nerve issue I get and certain years it is worse than others. Last year the bicep pain was just throbbing every time I tried to come back. It was two weeks of shutdown and then two weeks trying to get back and every time I tried to crank it back up it just kept coming back and I just couldn't seem to shake it. It just gets bad enough where I can't pitch with it. So far this year it hasn't bothered me, and hopefully it will stay away like it did in 2008 and I feel good all year."

The chronic bicep issue is something that has really bothered Lewis since the day he became an Indian, and is something he likely will have to learn to cope with for the rest of his career. He has often been able to manage the pain or work around it, but sometimes the pain is too great to pitch through.

"It is there all the time a little bit for me," said Lewis about the bicep issue. "Even before last year I have had seasons where it is there and I can feel it between starts. But I usually have a routine and pitch with it every five days and it doesn't bother me on start days. But last year for some reason it was back to where it was staying around longer than normal and was still there and as the game wore on it got worse. It gets to where I am not focused on pitching as I am just trying to figure out how to throw with the pain in my arm. It's tough, but like I said so far this year I am able to focus on my pitching instead of the pain in my arm."

Lewis will turn 27 years old in September, so his chances of sticking with a big league team have about run dry. It is about to the point where he needs to go out this year and pitch all out and whatever happens, happens. If he stays healthy he will likely put himself back on the big league map, but if he gets hurt again it may be time to consider throwing in the towel on his pro career.

"Yeah, if it comes back again this year, there is nothing more I can do," said Lewis. "I have tried everything. I am trying to find an arm slot that will work, and where I am at [currently] should do the trick just by the way it has been going. I feel like I have some life on it even more than I had

in spring training. Hopefully I can carry it and build from there."

Lewis has certainly looked good in the early going this season as in three starts for Triple-A Columbus he is 2-0 with a 2.12 ERA. In 17.0 innings pitched he has allowed 12 hits, 4 walks, and has 18 strikeouts. But while his strong start to the season is good to see, the injuries unfortunately came at a price. In the offseason the Indians removed him from the 40-man roster, which was not unexpected given his health, but now he faces the cold reality of life off the big league roster and the tough fight ahead of him to get back on it.

"It's tough and that's the way this game works," said Lewis on being removed from the 40-man roster. "You are up, you are down. There are only so many who go up and stay up their whole career. It is just part of the process. I just have to get back on track and find that rhythm I was in back in 2008. Hopefully I can pitch healthy all year and effectively at the same time."

When the Indians removed Lewis from the 40-man roster in the offseason he first had to clear waivers before the Indians could outright him to the minors. Players who are removed from the 40-man for the first time have no say on where they go as the club still controls them, so he did not have the option of signing with another team as a free agent after he cleared waivers. However, if he is still not on the 40-man roster at the end of this season he will become a free agent and have the chance to go to any team that he likes and that has an interest in him. So, that is another incentive to come back strong this year.

"You always go out and try to pitch well," said Lewis. "It would be a free agent year after this season, but I don't want to be a minor league free agent. I want to pitch up there [in Cleveland]. I like playing in Cleveland and I would like to get back up there and pitch for however many years I can and become a major league free agent."

The main focus for Lewis to get back on the big league radar is to show he can remain healthy. One way he hopes to help ensure better health is with some adjustments he has made this year with his mechanics and arm slot.

"I am working on the arm slot a little bit," said Lewis. "I am trying to get my timing and everything down. I feel like last year with the arm getting sore it may have been dragging a little bit and I was opening up a little early and putting more stress on the arm than I should have

been. This year I am feeling a little smoother and the timing is better, and I can feel it when it comes out. As a pitcher you can tell when the timing is not right as the ball doesn't come out with the same life. I am just trying to get back to how I was in 2008 as I just went out and every pitch felt great and my arm felt great in between. I am just trying to get back to that as I didn't really do anything structurally that should still bother me, so I should be able to get back to where I was."

While Lewis would obviously rather be pitching in the big leagues for Cleveland, by playing for Columbus he is afforded the luxury of playing close to home and near his friends and family. He lives in the Columbus area year round and bleeds scarlet and grey as a former Buckeye.

"The ticket list gets kind of long sometimes, but it's nice," said Lewis about playing in his hometown. "It is a little strange as I broke camp this year and came straight here and pretty much went straight to my house. It is a little strange not living in an apartment and you have your own stuff and going home after each game instead of some random apartment in some random city. So it is kind of nice."

And of course Lewis still hates Michigan.

"Yeah, absolutely," laughed Lewis. "That's never gonna end. When football season comes around it's a good time. They don't have a whole lotta room to talk right now. When was the last time they beat us? It's been awhile. They could beat us every now and then so it still feels like a rivalry (laughs)."

While Lewis can laugh about the fortunes the Buckeyes have had over the Wolverines of late in football, he knows it is serious business when it comes to dealing with and coming back from the misfortunes of his professional career to date.

"This is a big year," said Lewis. "I gotta stay healthy and this is kind of make it or break it right here."

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