The Indians are a team that has been built on young talent, and by now fans should know that the Indians will continue to build this team around young talent. As players like Travis Hafner, C.C. Sabathia, and Jake Westbrook hit free agency in the next few years and potentially become tough to re-sign, the Indians will need to look to their minor league system for future core players.

With that, over the course of the 2006 season, the Indians will look to several young prospects to help fill voids at the major league level, and hopefully prove to be a long-term solution.

At this time of the year, numerous baseball publications and websites churn out their top prospect lists. SwerbsBlurbs.com will continue this effort, although with a much different approach. Our prospect list will not necessarily be the Top 10 Prospects in the Indians system as far as talent goes, but are the Top 10 Prospects on the major league doorstep who can have an affect on this team in 2006.

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Top 10 Impact Prospects for 2006:

1. Fernando Cabrera RHP

Cabrera is the only prospect who has a job locked up with the Indians, as he will make the team out of Spring Training and be relied upon to be a big contributer in the bullpen. In late 2005, Indians fans saw glimpses of what makes him a premium relief prospect when he posted a 1.47 ERA and .212 batting average against (BAA) in 15 appearances for the Indians. He is viewed as the Indians best in-house closer solution in the coming years, but for 2006 should initially figure into Rafael Betancourt's 2005 role of pitching in the 6th/7th innings. If he impresses, by season's end he could be the primary 8th inning setup man or even the closer.

2. Kelly Shoppach C

It remains to be seen if the Indians will go with one of the veterans Einar Diaz or Tim Laker at backup catcher, or if they will give Shoppach a chance. Most likely, the Indians will break camp with Shoppach as the backup catcher and keep Diaz and Laker in Buffalo for depth. Shoppach provides a much more potent bat than previous backup catcher Josh Bard did, and comes highly regarded defensively. In 2005 as AAA Pawtucket, he hit .253 with 26 HRs and 75 RBIs in only 371 at bats. **For a more thorough look at Shoppach, check out the previous article on him at SwerbsBlurbs.com.**

3. Ben Francisco OF

While Francisco is not one of the Indians top prospects, he does figure into the team's immediate plans in the outfield.

Francisco projects as a 4th outfielder, and can play any outfield position, has nice speed, and provides some nice pop from the right-hand side of the plate. In 2005, at Akron and Buffalo he hit a combined .316 with 7 HRs, 49 RBIs and had 16 stolen bases in 87 games. His dazzling minor league season in 2005 combined with his outstanding showing in the winter leagues this offseason have put him into the Tribe's 2006 plans. In Spring Training, the battle for the backup role in the outfield will likely come down to Francisco and minor league invite Todd Hollandsworth. Barring injury or a complete collapse by Hollandsworth he will probably win the job. Even still, Francisco will debut and have a chance to make an impact with the Indians at

some point in 2006.

4. Andrew Brown RHP

Andy Brown will go into Spring Training as a candidate for the lone open spot in the bullpen where his main competition will be Jason Davis, Kaz Tadano, Steve Karsay, Jeremy Guthrie and Danny Graves. Brown possesses a powerful mid-90s fastball that touches 96 MPH, and projects as a late inning reliever with the Indians beyond 2006. Last year in Buffalo, Brown

started slow but finished strong, and ended the season with an impressive 1.02 WHIP and 81:19 K/BB ratio in 69.2 IP. Since Brown does have one option remaining, he likely will start the season in Buffalo and be the first call-up when a bullpen arm is needed.

5. Andy Marte 3B

Marte is unquestionably the #1 prospect in the Indians minor league system. However, with

Aaron Boone the incumbent 3B in 2006 and making $3.75M, Marte doesn't stand much of chance to make an immediate impact this year unless Boone is hurt. As a 21-year old at AAA Richmond (a noted pitchers park) in 2005, Marte hit .275 with 20 HRs and 74 RBIs in only 389 at bats. While Marte won't impact the Indians right away, he could be a big addition to the team in the 2nd half of the season.

For a more thorough look at

Marte, check out the previous article on him at SwerbsBlurbs.com.

6. Ryan Garko 1B

After an impressive two years in the minors, Garko lies on the major league doorstep. In 2004 Garko combined to hit .332 with 22 HRs and 102 RBIs in

three different stops in Kinston, Akron and Buffalo, and he followed that up in 2005 by hitting .303 with 19 HRs and 77 RBIs at Buffalo. He has a short swing, which as a power hitter allows him to adjust to pitches and keep the strikeouts down (6:1 AB/K ratio in minors). While his bat is major league ready, he is slated to spend at

least the first two months in Buffalo working on his defense at 1B. Like Marte, Garko could be another mid-season addition to the club that gets significant playing time.

7. Brad Snyder OF

Snyder currently projects as the Opening Day RFer in 2007. He has the best power in the organization, and his wide range of skills and makeup are similar to Grady Sizemore's. In 2005, Snyder combined to hit .278 with 22 HRs and 82

RBIs with 17 stolen bases at Kinston and Akron. One big concern is he strikes out a lot (158 times in 513 at bats in 2005), so he will start the season in Buffalo (possibly a return to Akron as well) to work on his approach at the plate with

two-strikes and become more disciplined as a hitter. If he is sensational early in 2006, and Casey Blake struggles, Snyder may be the first option for Indians GM Mark Shapiro to turn to in RF.

8. Tony Sipp LHP

This might be a surprise to some, considering Sipp isn’t even on the 40-man roster or that he hasn’t made a pitch

above A-ball yet. Most fans don't know who Sipp is, but the best way to describe him in look, delivery, and repertoire is Arthur Rhodes. Sipp is a power pitcher, and

dominated at low-A Lake County and High-A Kinston in 2005, posting a combined 2.40 ERA and .198 BAA with a 130:42 K/BB ratio in 116.1

IP. The Indians plan to move Sipp fast through the system this season, and if he impresses enough, he could be a valuable late addition to the

Tribe’s bullpen as a second lefty during the pennant race like Cabrera was last year.

9. Franklin

Gutierrez OF

When the Indians traded Milton Bradley in a deal that

landed them Gutierrez in April of 2004, the Indians probably envisioned Gutierrez being the starting RFer by 2006.

Unfortunately, injuries and slow development have kept that from becoming a reality. His power has been muted due to an

elbow injury suffered in 2004, going from 24 HRs in 2003 to only 17 HRs combined the last two years. He possesses

above average speed, and is widely considered the best defensive outfielder in the Indians system. Gutierrez will get

some consideration for the 4th outfielder role, but ultimately the Indians want him to play everyday to

develop more as a hitter, so he will start in Buffalo. Depending on the need, he could be the first called up if a

need arises due to injury.

10. Jeremy Sowers LHP

Sowers is

arguably the Indians #1 pitching prospect, and prior to the signing of

free agent Jason Johnson was a good bet to win the #5 starter job out

of Spring Training. Sowers is not an overpowering lefty (fastball

ranges 88-92MPH), but his excellent command and

intelligence helps him work all four corners of the plate to keep hitters

guessing. A common comparison for him is Tom Glavine. In 2005, in a

combined three stops at Kinston, Akron and Buffalo he went 14-4

with a 2.38 ERA and 149:29 K/BB ratio in 159 IP. With Johnson in

the fold, Sowers will go to Buffalo and provide depth to the Indians

starting pitching in 2006. Since he is not on the 40-man roster, the

Indians may choose to limit his service time and not waste an

option calling him up prior to Sept 1st.

Honorable mentions: Fausto Carmona RHP, Jason Cooper

OF/DH, Chris Cooper LHP, Jeremy Guthrie RHP.