Alex White violently shook his arm on the Progressive Field mound, obviously in pain. White had just delivered a pitch against the Cincinnati Reds in his third major league start, and something was clearly wrong. White remained in the game for the rest of the inning, but was removed after he finished the third inning. Indians fans everywhere were left wondering what was wrong with their young fireballer. After the game, word came down from the front office. White would miss at least 8-12 weeks with a strained middle finger. An injured middle finger. For most fanbases, it would be nothing more than an unfortunate injury to a top prospect; a blow to a contending team early in the year no doubt, but nothing to be too worried about. For Indians fans, the injury strikes fear in our hearts because we've been down this road before. We've seen a 1st round draft pick suffer a finger injury, and it has not gone well. It's the story of Adam Miller.

The Adam Miller story is well known to most Indians fans by now. He was drafted in the 1st round in 2003 out of a Texas high school and was immediately one of the top prospects in the Indians organization. Miller was rated as one of the top-100 prospects in all of baseball by Baseball America from 2005-2009. He dominated every level of the minors, and everyone who saw him pitch labeled him as a future ace. Sports Illustrated named him part of their "dream rotation" back in 2007, along with Tim Lincecum, Cole Hamels, Daisuke Matsuzaka and Phil Hughes. He was seen as the leader of the "wave of arms" that would soon be cresting on the shores of Lake Erie. But Miller's body began to betray him.

Miller's injury history is long, but distinguished. I'll briefly rehash it here:

- 2005: Miller is limited to 70 1/3 IP with right elbow soreness
- May 2007: Miller first injured his middle finger on his throwing hand while pitching for

Buffalo

- Spring 2008: Miller has blister issues in spring training on the same middle finger he struggled with in 2007
- May 2008: Miller hashis first surgery on his right middle finger, due to the blisters on the tip ofthe finger
- April 2009: Miller tries to pitch in spring training, but is forced to have another surgery on his middle finger, this time on the tendon
- July 2009: Miller has a second surgery on the same tendon in the same finger
- December 2009: Miller has a third surgery on the same tendon in the same finger (seriously)

So to sum it all up, we have an elbow issue and four surgeries on the middle finger of his pitching hand over what should have been four seasons of baseball. There were some winterball stints mixed in there, an inning in the instructional leagues, and some innings in minor league spring training games here and there, but for all intents and purposes, Miller hadn't thrown a real inning in a real game since 2008. On April 30, 2011, that long layoff finally ended when Miller took the mound for the Kinston Indians.

It wasn't a great outing, as Miller gave up 4 runs (3 earned) in his one inning of work. He walked one, struck out one, and gave up a HR, and ended up taking the loss in the game for Kinston. But the result wasn't the important thing; not by a long shot. The important thing was that Miller was *pitching* again. Not just throwing a bullpen, not just throwing simulated games in Arizona, but actually back and pitching against a real opponent in a real game, with real fans. Miller went on to make 8 appearances for the K-Tribe, totaling 11 IP. He gave up 6 earned runs, struck out 14 and walked 5. On May 28, he was promoted to AA Akron. He picked up a win in his first appearance, throwing a scoreless 9th inning in a 1-1 game that the Aeros ended up winning in the bottom of the inning.

I caught up with Miller when he was still with Kinston, and we talked about just how great it was that he was back pitching in real game action again. "It's awesome," said Miller. "It's just good to show that it's a success so far, despite the setbacks, its rewarding to get back on the field. Technically I threw last year in instructs, but it's not the same feel. It's a game, but it's not full pressure. Being back with actual fans…it's great to be back with a team around the guys again."

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