One of the best things about being a Tribe fan is that the players are an easy bunch to root for. They seem like a genuinely good group of guys and appear to have a lot of fun playing baseball. The roster is made up of high character players who play the game with a lot of passion and emotion. That passion and emotion rubs off on the fan base and energizes them, just like we saw with the attendance spike last season after the dramatic wins of April and May.

There is no shortage of guys around Major League Baseball who reek of arrogance and would appear, at least on the surface, to not be very good teammates. Meanwhile, the 2011 version of the Cleveland Indians was comprised of guys who would open their wallet to help a teammate get home to see the birth of his firstborn child and support each other through blown saves, three strikeout games, off-field legal issues and frustrating injuries. It was a team where every one of the 25 guys on the roster would play hard for the guy who has the locker next to him.

Nearly all of the players from that 2011 team are back for the 2012 season with renewed focus and another year of experience under their belt. One of the key returning members back for another shot at the AL Central crown is Vinnie Pestano. Pestano, probably the most vocal Twitter member of the “Bullpen Mafia”, put together an impressive, and rather surprising, 2011 season despite not even being a lock to make the ballclub out of Spring Training in Goodyear,AZ.

Pestano was the Indians most consistent reliever, racking up 55 scoreless appearances out of his 67 games. For a guy with just five appearances prior to the 2011 season, Pestano bridged the gap between the middle relievers and closer Chris Perez beautifully, with 84 strikeouts in 62 innings.

Pestano was nice enough to agree to do a Q&A interview with me for TheClevelandFan.com, in which he tries to narrow down his all-time top five movie list, talks about being a Cal State Fullerton Titan, discusses the mindset of a late-inning reliever and looks forward to the 2012 season.

Adam Burke: What was it like going from making the team in Spring Training 2011 to being thrust into a critical late inning role pretty much from Opening Day?

Vinnie Pestano: Making the team out of camp might have been a surprise to everyone but my family and I. I was told I had a shot at the end of 2010 and then again right before spring started, so I tried to make every bullet count. I got lucky with Joe Smith's injury and, although unfortunate, it probably was the reason I made the team. I was hoping I would be able to work myself into that role, so when the time came, I felt like I was ready for it.

AB: I think I speak for all of the fans when I say that we love the Bullpen Mafia name and the camaraderie you guys have. How do you think that relationship helps the bullpen as a group?

VP: I love the fact we have a moniker (laughs). In 2010, we dubbed our AAA squad the "Columbus Cartel" and had a lot of fun with that. Personas are fun and they do bring a pen together, I think. It takes the individual out of it and gets people on a team basis. With that being said, we don't have a problem with guys being individuals in our pen or on our team. It would be cool to look back 15 years from now and still have people talking about the Bullpen Mafia.

AB: Tell me about the sprint from the bullpen to the mound.

VP: The sprint just kind of happened. My first appearance in college, I was called in and I just took off and it just became part of my routine. I tried shutting it down when I got to pro ball, but I didn't feel the same on the mound after a slow jog and thought my performance suffered. So, I brought it back and don't plan on it going anywhere anytime soon.

AB: With two strikes on them, hitters hit just .092 off of you in 2011. What's the key to putting hitters away?

VP: It's funny for me to talk about striking out guys. Before 2010, I was a pitch to contact guy and threw from a lower arm slot, similar to Joe Smith. Before the 2010 season, I raised my arm slot to hopefully alleviate some stress on my elbow that has given me problems in the past. That's where I picked up some velo and some deception. As far as putting guys away, I usually just pick out a spot the size of a trash can lid and throw it as hard as I can.

AB: Do you think you face any additional challenges by being predominantly a two-pitch pitcher?

VP: I throw two different kinds of fastballs and I do a fairly good job of locating them, so I like to think of myself as like a two-and-a-half [pitch] guy (laughs). As a late inning guy, if you mix your pitch sequences well two pitches is fine. You just run into the problem of facing the same guy in your division over and over again. Late in the year, it's a chess match and we know all each other's favorite moves.

AB: What prepared you for being able to handle the pressure of pitching in a key setup role?

VP: I've been a late inning guy all my life and that adrenaline rush you get from putting someone down with the game on the line is something I look forward to every day. Granted, I don't always get the job done (laughs), but, that's part of the game, too, being strong enough to bounce back after failing the night before. The school I went to believed a lot in the mental side of the game and we worked with Ken Ravizza, a well known sports psychologist, and I still use things that I learned in my three years there. My greatest attribute is my mental game I feel like.

AB: Cal State Fullerton has one of the most successful and respected programs in NCAA Baseball. Why did you choose to go there and what was your experience like?

VP: My dad got me a batboy gig at CSUF when I was 11 and I fell in love with the program. The coaches, the players, the history there, it was something that shaped my early baseball career and gave me something to work towards in high school. George Horton (Fullerton's head coach at the time) was the first coach to call [me] the morning you were able to commit, and five minutes later, I was going to Fullerton. I could have received a bigger scholarship going somewhere else but I wanted to win.

AB: One of the best things about being an Indians fan is the way that so many players have made themselves accessible to the fans via Twitter. What do you get out of being able to communicate with the fans?

VP: Twitter has been great. 98% of things said are positive and uplifting, the other 2% you retweet and let the 98% fight your battles for you (laughs). Cleveland fans are very passionate and I've enjoyed letting them get to know me and see that they can relate to us. I'm not just some GQ model that looks great in a pair of baseball...well, I'm not that either, but I want them to know I'm just a regular guy.

AB: You used to post a Movie Quote of the Day on Twitter with plenty of Dumb & Dumber references. What would be your all-time top five movie list?

VP: Yeah, I think Dumb and Dumber is the most quoted movie ever, and for good reason. I try not to go back to the well too many times but there are just so many good one liners in that movie. Top 5 movies....tough. I own almost 800 (I have a problem I know). Dumb and Dumber, Caddyshack, Goodfellas, Wall-E, anything with John Wayne. That's my top five (laughs).

AB: Wall-E seems a little out of place in that list.

VP: I like Pixar and Dreamworks movies a lot and I just found myself going back to that one.

AB: How about your ultimate concert lineup?

VP: Ultimate concert lineup would be tough to pull off for me. If there was a way to get Country, Metal and House music to coexist under one roof, I might check it out. Start off quick with Slipknot and Killswitch Engage, slow it down with Luke Bryan and Lady Antebellum and then end with Avicci and Deadmau5.

AB: Slipknot and Lady Antebellum in one show? Slight contrast there, no?

VP: My mood changes a lot, so I have stuff on both sides of the spectrum.

AB: If you could invite three people to dinner, living or dead, who would they be and why?

VP: Jim Carrey, George Carlin, Eddie Murphy. Why? The lineup speaks for itself, I think (laughs). I could have gone a more philosophical route or chose baseball greats but I like to

laugh, so those are my guys.

AB: Who has been the biggest influence on your life and what did they do that made such an impact?

VP: The biggest influences in my life are my parents. I couldn't have achieved anything in my life without them giving me the proper tools to do so and making sure I always kept my head on straight.

AB: What would you want to be after your playing days are over?

VP: Depends on when my playing days are over. If I go on and have a long career, then I could see myself going a Curt Schilling route and trying to open up my own studio to produce video games. Something a friend of mine in the industry and I have talked about. If I'm on the flip side of that, I'm too high strung for a desk job, so, I'd have to stay in the game somehow. Maybe latch on as a Mental guy somewhere. I don't know what I'm doing half the time on the mound, so I couldn't knowingly coach people on how to throw.

AB: One of the joys of interleague play is seeing pitchers hit. What kind of hitter are you?

VP: If I ever have a bat in my hand, we are in a real tough spot (laughs). My last AB was when I was 16, I think. I'd probably try to lay a drag bunt down and beat out the throw to first or take

one in the back Roger Dorn style.

AB: When the coaching staff and members of the front office met with you at the end of last season, what did they ask you to work on in the offseason?

VP: I don't think I had the typical end of the year meeting. It was more critical than I expected, but that's perfectly fine with me because they were being honest. Chris [Antonetti] and Manny [Acta] told me I needed to find a way to be more effective against lefties and Manny reminded me that right handed relievers have the biggest revolving door in the big leagues and not to get complacent. It might sound rough, but I don't like being coddled and told everything is going to be just fine the way it is and they know that. They did drop a few "attaboys" in there also.

AB: What individual goals do you have for yourself for the 2012 season?

VP: I don't place individual goals for myself since I had surgery [in 2006]. You can make all the plans you want, but the game will dictate the outcome regardless of what you would like to see happen. I work to win and that's it. I can't stand losing. Last season was the only losing team I have been on since I was like 9. It hurt a lot taking the loss the final day of the season to push us below .500. I don't have goals. I have things that motivate me to be the best I can be, whether it's baseball or heartbreak, or a good metal song.

AB: What should Tribe fans know about the 2012 version of the Cleveland Indians?

VP: I hope everyone is as excited as I am for the season to kick off. We have a group of such talented guys that, I think, learned a lot through either success or struggle last year. The injuries we suffered hurt, but a lot of guys got at bats and playing time they wouldn't have got otherwise, and that's gonna show this year I think. We're hungry and I can speak for a lot of guys when I say that we have our sights set on the playoffs this year.

We fans have our sights set on the playoffs, too, Vinnie. One of the encouraging things about the 2012 Cleveland Indians is that they do have a lot of experience with winning. Some of the veteran guys were on the 2007 team that won the Central Division and won a playoff series. The younger guys were a part of championship teams at Double-A Akron in 2009 and with Triple-A Columbus in 2010 and 2011. Learning how to win is an important concept in professional sports and, though the majority of the team hasn't won at the big league level yet, they are still ahead of the curve.

At times, each of us is guilty of forgetting that the players are just like us, just with a hell of a lot more athletic talent. In getting a chance to talk with Vinnie Pestano, that is exactly what he is - your everyday 26-year-old with a special gift for throwing a ball really fast and accurately. I, too, quote Dumb & Dumber every chance I get and love the comedic genius of Jim Carrey and George Carlin. And, just like Vinnie Pestano, I'm excited for the 2012 season.

Special thanks to Vinnie Pestano for taking time to do this Q&A with me and if you're not already following @VinnieP52 on Twitter, shame on you.