For those unfamiliar with Baseball America, it is considered THE premier baseball magazine. They cover everything that is baseball with great depth….from high school and college baseball, to the minor and major leagues.

Having been around for almost 20 years, one of Baseball America's biggest areas of expertise is the information they provide to their readers regarding prospects and minor league baseball. For the baseball fan that wants to keep track of their favorite team's farm system and what the future holds, no other publication comes close to what Baseball America offers.

Recently, I had the chance to correspond with Baseball America's Chris Kline on several occasions, and in our correspondence he agreed to do a Q&A session for SportsTalkCleveland.com . Chris is a former beat writer for the Cleveland Indians Class A farm team the Kinston Indians, and is now currently working for Baseball America in a full-time capacity.

Chris is very familiar with the Indians farm system not only because he used to cover it for the Kinston Free Press, but also because he recently compiled the Indians Top 30 Prospect list for Baseball America's annual "Prospect Handbook." The "Prospect Handbook" is an annual book that Baseball America prints that profiles every major league teams top 30 prospects, and also provides in depth reviews of each team's farm system and draft history, and also provides an early draft board for the upcoming Amateur Draft, overall organizational farm system rankings, and overall prospect rankings among other things.

Chris will tell you that that he is very different from your typical sports writer, and it definitely shows in his willingness to answer the questions proposed. His professionalism and candor in his replies do not go unnoticed, especially at a time when things are hectic at Baseball America with the start of the baseball season. Before going forward with the Q&A, it would be an injustice if I did not give a large thank you to Mr. Kline for agreeing to do the session. Thanks Chris.

With that, onto the Q&A.

Q: How long have you been a contributor to Baseball America, and what inspired you to become involved with them?

Chris Kline (CK): If there's one thing I've learned in my short time of being in this business--at least from my perspective, my job, as a writer is simply to relay the story to readers. In other words, not have an ego or anything about what I do. While what I do is very cool, it is what it is. For me, it's fun--plain and simple. And I try to treat players like human beings, not horses. Some people have criticized me for doing that too much over time, but to me, makeup is just as important as any of the five tools when it comes to prospects and can be the difference maker between, say an every day player and a utility guy or a frontline starter and a middle reliever.

That said, I've only been doing this since the 2001 season, when I started in Kinston, NC working for the newspaper there. I started contributing to Baseball America (BA) soon afterward, just sending them anything I thought they might find interesting.

What inspired me to become involved with them? I guess it was a combination of how much I loved the game and more directly, how much I love the game on the minor league level. I grew up outside Philadelphia and my grandfather, father and I would travel around to different parts of the country seeing minor league games in some of the most remote places every summer. I guess that's where I learned to love being on the road.

What is your area of focus for the magazine?

My main area of focus for the magazine is the minors during the season. In the offseason, it is contributing and producing our books, as well as doing Arizona Fall League coverage and covering the international scene up to and including the Caribbean Series.

Before you wrote for Baseball America, you were a beat writer for the Cleveland Indians High A minor league team in Kinston, NC (Kinston Indians). Since most people in the Cleveland area are not as familiar with the Kinston team as they are with Buffalo, Akron and Lake County due to the proximity of the teams, what was it like to follow the team on a daily basis?

Wow, being around any of those teams from 2001 to 2003 was awesome. I mean, I was apprehensive about being in any clubhouse that first year, but that waned after like the first week. After that, it was very easy. I got to know so many players,

managers and coaches and it only grew from there. Once you build that trust and have a good working relationship with anyone involved in the game, you can do anything.

But it was a ton of hard work. I don't think a lot of newspaper guys get that. I mean, when I was a beat writer, I was at the ballpark early every day for BP and infield--even before that on most days. That actually used to get me in some trouble with various editors over the years, because they were worried about hours or whatever, but they quickly learned that I was going to do what I was going to do because I loved it--on or off the clock. To me, all that time was not only an investment--it was what I needed to do to quench my knowledge for how things worked inside the game from their perspectives.

Speaking of Kinston, what is the area like? The stadium? Fan support?

The area in Kinston? Ummmm, not so much. There is more there now than there was just a couple years ago and that still isn't much. I remember talking to some guys from a visiting team about the town and they were all ticked off. Apparently they took a cab to kill a few hours at the local mall, which they explored in about 10 minutes.

But that's one of the things the Cleveland brass loves about it--no distractions. The playing surface there is big league quality. Much better than a lot of surfaces in the upper levels of the minors, that's for sure.

Fan support? Let's just say that Kinston is usually near the bottom of the Carolina League in attendance, which really is a shame for how quaint of a park it really is. They don't know how good they have it to have an affiliated club there, honestly. Don't get me started on that…

Any great memories from your days covering the Kinston team?

Memories . . . I remember when Victor Martinez hit for the cycle on July 7, 2001 (I didn't even have to look that up, I swear). He needed a single in his last at-bat and he smoked a line drive into the right-center gap. He had no idea what he had just done, so he took this big turn rounding first base and Luis Rivera, who was coaching first at the time, was going nutso yelling at him to stop. He eventually turned back, but could have been on second standing up.

Or the relievers in 2003--they were great. Talk about odd balls. They had contests for who could eat the most bugs, that sort of thing. Or the difference Grady Sizemore made to the 2002 team. I could go on forever about memories. Orioles right-hander Beau Hale getting tossed while charting pitches? Now that was awesome.

Who was your favorite player to watch during your time in Kinston? Why? Was there a particular player who you loved to interview or talk to?

I write the stories for the Kinston program each year, and each year I ask for no money, just some gear. Usually that gear comes in the form of a game-worn jersey, so I have a Martinez jersey, Brian Tallet, Derek Thompson, Travis Foley, Jake Dittler and Brad Snyder jersey.

I think that's it. I liked each of those guys in their own way, but, and don't strangle me for saying this, but I think my favorite guy to talk to, simply on a mere fascination standpoint, was Corey Smith. He didn't talk to the media much at all, but for whatever reason he talked to me. I thought he was alright and I really hope the change of scenery works out for him.

But my favorite player to watch was easily Sizemore. I hadn't seen anyone get after it like he did/does. He does all the little things right. But there were tons of good players to come through there, both with the Indians and with other clubs. I mean, it's hard not to think of Zack Greinke in 2003 doing what he did as a teenager.

Explain briefly what goes into the Daily Dish pieces you put out for Baseball America each day. I.e. How do you and others involved with this daily article go about condensing down the large amount of information and news from the previous nights minor league games?

Dish was crazy last year, as I was thrown in to the role after Josh Boyd left to follow his second dream job as a scout. So I just went to my strengths and wrote a player feature everyday, and added notes after going through each and every box score. Needless to say, I was a little burned out by the end of the season.

So this year, we have a better idea about what we want to do. And we've kind of split it up accordingly. Mondays will now feature a weekend wrap-up, similar to what we've done forever with college coverage. Tuesdays will be a player

perspective, which is basically a guy talking about different aspects of the game, his life outside the game, etc. Wednesdays are a view from a scout, Thursdays are our Prospect Showdown days, and Fridays, we're hoping to pull out the best pitching matchups for the upcoming weekend and break them down. So there is more structure this year than last, which is cool.

Putting together the notes is another story--we've split those up as well. And this season, I'm only doing four leagues, so my eyes are already thanking me in advance. Dish is a ton of work, and I need a life outside of here--or at least that's what my girlfriend tells me.

You compiled the Indians Top 30 Prospect list for Baseball America's "2005 Prospect Handbook" which profiles each team's minor league system and lists the top 30 prospects (among other things) for each team. Can you summarize and explain the process that goes into an enormous project like this? Where do you start, and what do you do to get to the final result?

I only did one Top 30 this past year, and while I was disappointed I didn't get more organizations, I can't imagine what it must have been like for someone like John Manuel, who did six (I think). You spend a ton of time on the phone with people in the organization and outside it as well. If you haven't seen a guy--like this year's Cleveland list with all the 2004 picks--you have to find resources to give you good information.

Where that information comes from can be varied. I try to get as much feedback as I can from scouts, front office people, managers, coaches, roving instructors, etc. and go from there. I mean, I revamped my list quite a few times. I started with about 60 guys and whittled it down to 30.

Regarding the Indians Top 30 Prospect list, was this the first time you headed up this project? What players just missed the Top 30 list? What players not on the top 30 list this year have the most potential to make it next year? What players in the top 30 could crack the top 10 next year?

Yeah, this was my first year being credited with doing the Top 30. Jim had done it before me. What players just missed the list? Well, first let me say that I fought very hard to get Juan Valdes where he is (at No. 13). A lot of people don't see it, but I love the way he plays. I think as he matures, he's got a real chance to be a

special player. Ok, so I'm trying to defend myself a little bit.

Players that fell through the cracks this year were guys like Ivan Ochoa, Cirillo Cumberbatch, Jose Constanza, Ben Francisco, Argenis Reyes, Brandon Pinckney, Chris De La Cruz, Pat Osborn, Chris Gimenez, Javi Herrera, David Wallace, Wyatt Toregas, Aaron Laffey, Brian Slocum, Dan Denham, Sean Smith and I could go on. Of those guys who have a good shot at making it next year, I like Reyes, Constanza, Toregas and Laffey the best.

Players to crack the Top 10 could be guys like Mike Butia, Kevin Kouzmanoff, Ryan Goleski, Chuck Lofgren, Tony Sipp, Justin Hoyman, and the way he's pitching, J.D. Martin again. Oh, and for the record, I ranked Rafael Perez too low. My bad, Raffy.

Is Franklin Gutierrez going to be able to push his way up to the majors sometime this year?

The only way Gutierrez is going to be able to push his way to the majors this year actually depends on a couple things: A) how crowded the outfield picture is in Cleveland and B) how comfortable he is at the plate. Gutierrez is perhaps the most polished outfielder in the system and only really needs to hone his pitch recognition to move up.

That said, its no small task. Over his career, Gutierrez was known for basically standing on top of the plate, they've moved him further back to give him more time to get a load and see pitches more efficiently. Everything else is there--he hits for average and power, good speed and both the range and the arm strength to play center or right field.

But when you think of him, think of how the club handled Victor Martinez, whom everyone thought was ready for the big leagues after he dominated Double-A in 2002. It still took him another year to stick. I think you can expect a similar path for Gutierrez. He begins the year in Akron with probably the entire second half, if not more, in Buffalo. Depending on how quickly he makes the adjustments at the plate, he could be your every day right fielder--or center fielder--in Cleveland in 2006.

Even though it's early, who is most likely to be called up at the end of the year if the Indians are in a major race for the division? In other words, what

minor league prospect could have the biggest effect on this team in 2005?

My initial reaction to this question is probably the bullpen. And I think there are at least three guys who stick out in this role: Brian Tallet, Fernando Cabrera and Andrew Brown. Tallet is being stretched out with Buffalo with the thought process being that they can bring him in for either role, but his future could be as a set-up guy.

To me, and I know he's struggled some, but Cabrera has all the makings of a power closer. So does Brown, who arguably has better pure stuff than Cabrera. But the makeup questions surrounding Brown bother me, especially in that role. He had a great spring and has been money in his new role in Triple-A so far this season, so if he's finally gotten past all the mental (and to some extent, physical) things that have kept him from becoming a legit dominant big league pitcher, then he's the guy.

As far as impact bats this year go, I don't really see too much outside of Ryan Garko or maybe Jake Gautreau, considering how he's been swinging it early on. But Garko will hit for you anywhere and Jake The Rake has done nothing but prove he can too. The well-documented problem with both these guys, more Garko than Gautreau, is where do they fit?

Do you feel calling up players like Gutierrez or Aubrey this year would be detrimental to their development for making next year's squad, specifically if they don't receive as much playing time as they would if they were not called up?

Well, in both these cases, yes. Aubrey needs as many at-bats—and particularly reps in the field to prove himself healthy for a full season. He hasn't done that yet. Yeah, he played 98 games last season, but most of the time he was in Akron, he was limited to DH b/c of the hamstring problem. Not getting the time in winter ball (he was slated to go to the Dominican Winter League, but they held him back) might have been the best thing for him--just to go home, work out and get healthy for this season.

And, with Gutierrez, you can see the answer above. He needs to see as many pitches as he can at the upper levels of the minors to learn what pitchers are going to try to do to exploit him.

What three Indians prospects would a team most covet at the trade deadline, and do we have enough depth where Shapiro may be willing to part with one for a difference maker?

Outfield is where they're deepest, and I don't think anyone is untouchable--though to hear some officials talk, that short list of untouchables would include Sizemore, Gutierrez and Snyder. But for the right deal and if the team is in the hunt, I don't think Shapiro would be at all shy on the trigger.

But keep his value system in mind—the organization sees certain players as 'Cleveland Indians type players.' In short, what that means is team players. They didn't view Ryan Church as one of those types of players. And I can see that to some extent, knowing Church from his days in the lower levels. I also know that the three aforementioned players ARE those kinds of players--quiet leaders who put their work in and the team first.

So now, in turning to some players teams might covet…I think J.D. Martin is certainly making a name for himself, and I know there is a buzz among the scouting community as to what he's doing in Akron and what he did during the second half of last year. Right-handed pitching is also pretty deep in the organization, so I wouldn't be surprised if some teams would go after the likes of Martin, Francisco Cruceta or Kyle Denney.

Jeremy Guthrie. Are the Indians close to giving up on him, and is he a bust, or is there still hope? He would appear to have reasonable stuff and command. If so, is it the mental side that holds back his growth as a pitcher?

Perhaps the most intriguing question to me, personally. We're talking about a guy who is perhaps the most intelligent player in the organization. And while some have intimated that his intelligence has played against him—and to some extent I believe that to be somewhat true--I think it was more him trying to incorporate all kinds of different types of instruction into his whole package as a pitcher, instead of picking and choosing different techniques to use and then use them to his advantage.

I don't think the club has given up on him, but he certainly has something to prove this year. In short, my personal belief is that he needed to tone down everything he was learning and figure out what works best for him. But maybe that's just me.

Q: Is this a make or break year for the "Big 4" (JD Martin, Dan Denham, Jake Dittler, Travis Foley) from the 2001 Draft? Right now, looking back, would you consider the 2001 draft a bust?

Chris Kline (CK): If you look at that draft, we grade it out as a C (in the 2005 Prospect Handbook). Though with the strides Denham and Martin have made this season, it could improve.

Martin's new cutter has given him much-needed confidence and he frankly is a different pitcher since being shut down midway through 2003. I was standing next to the dugout in Kinston when Torey Lovullo went over the MRI with Martin and unveiled the plans for him, which was really something. JD felt like he was turning a corner right at that time, and then the elbow injury shut him down. But last season was a crucial year of development for him and he's parlayed that into continued success this year in a much, much more difficult league.

I was intrigued by Denham going into this season after I had pretty much given up on him. He worked with former big league pitcher Steve Ontiveros, who is now a personal instructor for pitchers based in Arizona while Denham was in the Fall League. Apparently his changeup is so much better, which was lagging behind his other pitches--just has a lot more depth to it and there is a lot of deception in his arm speed. Ontiveros had some positive results with A's right-hander Huston Street, so I was looking forward to seeing how Denham looked this season. So far so good.

Foley has been relegated to the bullpen, and it really could be the best thing for him in terms of getting to the big leagues faster. And I think Dittler is still the best of this bunch. Yeah, Mike Conroy has had injury problems and hasn't progressed, and Alan Horne didn't sign, but those four all still have strong chances of making it--maybe not quite what the organization had hoped for, but not a legit bust either.

And if you throw out some other names from that draft--Luke Scott (9th round), Matt Knox (13th round), Sean Smith (16th round), T.J. Burton (18th round), Chris Cooper (35th round), and Todd Pennington (46th round), it certainly was an intriguing draft to say the least. With Scott already in the big leagues, albeit with the Astros, I'd say Smith and Cooper have legitimate chances of contributing in the big leagues. And Knox is one of the coolest stories around the game today. I once saw him eat a box score. Talk about intense.

Q: What role do the minor league staffs have on the draft? Does Scouting Director John Mirabelli include them at all?

CK: While there is an open door policy throughout the organization, I doubt that any minor league managers or coaches have much say in who the club drafts. I say this simply from a time standpoint. I mean, how many coaches or managers have time to go see amateur players? I'm sure they ask Mirabelli from time to time about certain guys and what he thinks of them, but I imagine it ends there for the most part.

Q: Has the environment in the low minors like Kinston changed dramatically in the past 20 years?

CK: I think just in terms of facilities, certainly the answer would be yes. Along with all the new ballparks across the country at every level, there are brand new hitting tunnels, weight rooms, etc. But players still have house families at the lower levels. I mean, Atlanta's No. 1 prospect Jeff Francoeur is staying with a family in Pearl, Mississippi. So, while some of these guys get huge bonuses, they still aren't pampered. There is a lot more attention on those guys than there was 20 years ago, but we have a lot to do with that.

Q: Here is a short list of pitchers that are a little below the top prospect radar: Dan Cevette, JD Martin, Dan Denham, and Nick Pesco. What is your personal impression of each? What is their potential ceiling, and what do they need to work on to reach that ceiling?

CK: Dan Cevette is still pretty raw, but I like him a lot. He needs a full season in low Class A to work on his slurvy curveball. But I like the fastball command and already having a plus changeup at his stage of development is huge.

JD Martin (see above) felt like others were passing him by a little bit last season, particularly in the first half. But after he went to Buffalo for a spot start (where he got rocked around for six runs on nine hits in five innings), he ironically came back to Kinston with newfound confidence in his place in the organization. We're seeing what that's done to him right now as he just keeps dealing in Akron.

I always thought Denham was bigger than he was, and when I saw him for the first time, I was admittedly disappointed. He's taken awhile to develop and probably won't be anything more than a middle reliever at this point, if you're going

to project him. Hopefully he proves me wrong.

I have sort of a man-crush on Pesco. That big frame, the plus-plus changeup and plus curveball and the way he commands the fastball are enough for anyone to like. And now with a developing slider in the mix…he just has a TON of potential. And I mean, Adam Miller is his best friend. Can't think of a better brain to pick in terms of how to attack hitters.

Q: Like the pitchers above, here is a list of position players a little below the top prospect radar: Ryan Goleski (OF), Wyatt Toregas (C), Kevin Kouzmanoff (3B), Pat Osborn (3B). What is your personal impression of each? What is their potential ceiling, and what do they need to work on to reach that ceiling?

CK: With Goleski, this year is huge for him in terms of how he handles more and more off-speed stuff. He's struggled with it in the past, but seems to have the intellect to make the necessary adjustments to his load and swing path. And for such a big body, he's extremely athletic. Great pick beneath the 20th round.

I saw Toregas for the first time this spring--and when I say that, I'm talking multiple at-bats and multiple rounds of BP. The guy can rake. Personally, I'm higher on him than I am on say, Javi Herrera.

If you've ever been to Kinston, you know who Delmont Miller is. If you haven't, you're missing out. The K-Tribe's scoreboard operator for the last 16 or 17 years (I forget) gives his list of shout-outs during every home game and always tells you what he's eating. Anyway, the other night, Delmont gave his first shout-out to Kouzmanoff, who he called, "The Russian Bear." What exactly that has to do with a third baseman from Nevada, I'll never know, but that is the beauty of Delmont Miller…And so, getting to Kouzmanoff…He is what every third baseman should be--works hard, gets dirty and hits like crazy. There is nothing flashy about his game--he's the prototypical blue-collar player.

I left Osborn off the Top 30 this year for two reasons--1) the medical history and 2) he had a GREAT year, but for me, he should have had that year in Double-A. I like his bat more than his glove and he's going to have to hit to get through the upper levels of the minors.

Q: How is Matthew Haynes (the Australian high school project) developing?

CK: Haynes has a great curveball, but is still super raw. He hasn't really pitched all that much as an amateur or as a pro, so getting him in more game situations is crucial. I like him, but he's had command issues as well in the past. With him, you're just going to see what you get when you get him on a mound. He was left behind in extended again this year, so they obviously feel he's not ready yet. He'll be in Mahoning Valley.

Q: The organization has made some interesting comments regarding pitching to contact, but it would seem that this philosophy would stop pitchers from working on supplementary pitches and reduce strikeout numbers. Is this philosophy just to get pitchers to throw strikes and trust their stuff? And given that strikeout rate is probably the biggest indicator of future success, how does this philosophy sit with other teams?

CK: I think pitching to contact overall makes pitchers realize what they need to do in order to get hitters out via the ground ball, etc. It makes their overall package in terms of attacking hitters that much more dangerous. I think Fausto Carmona is a pretty good example of this, in terms of a high-profile guy who doesn't have the overwhelming K numbers that people expect from a guy who pounds the zone the way he can.

In a way, you're right, stat guys seem to put a huge emphasis on future success by the number of strikeouts someone puts up, but at the same time, I feel like strikeouts are overrated too. With the strict pitch counts guys find themselves under these days, most are so competitive that they're looking to get out of situations with a limited number of pitches thrown.

Talk to any pitcher and it's the same story--they'll do anything to get out of an inning-and if it's a ground ball pitcher like a Carmona or a Sowers, they aren't thinking about the strikeout, they're thinking about getting the hitter to roll over. So I think that while high strikeout numbers are important, they don't necessarily dictate future success as a whole. They show an advanced ability to pitch, maybe, but they aren't the end-all, be-all statistic when looking at pitchers. To me, low walk rates and a decent K-BB ratio is much more important and paints a clearer picture of the command a guy has.

Q: What prospects do you see having their "breakout" season this year?

CK: Kouzmanoff. I like him better than a lot of guys in the system that maybe rank higher and I've talked about him already. I think Rafael Perez is underrated. He's raw, but he maybe gets overlooked on that Kinston staff a little bit. Both are off to good starts. I really liked what I saw out of shortstops Bryan Finegan and Chris De La Cruz during spring training, as well as Nathan Panther gaining some strength and showing some more pop in his bat. I'm also a big believer in Argenis Reyes and of course, Juan Valdes. But for me, in terms of looking at the top 30 and who will make the biggest jump on next year's list, it's Kouzmanoff and Perez. I'm assuming this question was limited to the Indians system . . . otherwise I could talk all day.

Q: What do you think of Fernando Pacheco, Eider Torres and Ben Francisco?

CK: Pacheco's really raw and hasn't shown much power in three years. But that's changed this year with four homers and a .467 slugging in 75 at-bats in Lake County (as of a few days ago). His career-high was five last season in Mahoning Valley, so something's starting to click. Ryan Mulhern's off to a good start as well in Kinston, so unless he gets hurt, Pacheco is likely to stay the whole year in low Class A. Tough to say what his ceiling is, and he isn't very good defensively. His bat will have to speak.

Torres shocked just about everyone under the sun when he was suspended for violating the drug policy, which was an outrage. We usually save the No. 30 spot on the list for interesting players who have an outside shot—players who are intriguing. Originally, I had Reyes, Corey Smith, Francisco, Panther, Toregas and Javi Herrera all vying for the 30 spot, but settled with Torres. He's a switch-hitter who can run, but doesn't draw a ton of walks, which hurts his game as a guy who needs to get on-base. Defensively, he's one of the best 2B in the system, but the fact that he tested positive for violating the substance-abuse policy is disturbing and probably didn't do anything to win him any fans in the organization.

I like Francisco a lot, though he didn't really hit last year. But again, numbers can be deceiving. He hit the ball hard a lot and had little to show for it. But in an organization that is loaded with outfielders, Francisco is going to need to hit if he's going to go anywhere. And even if he does, he's a fourth outfielder at best in my opinion.

Q: Do you think guys like Matt Davis, Todd Pennington and Dan Eisentrager,

being that they are minor league relievers, have realistic shots at making it to the majors?

CK: If you look at it, it doesn't happen very often. And I think guys like Eisentrager, Pennington and Davis are organizational fodder for the most part. They really have the toughest time to move anywhere because it takes a lot to raise eyebrows as a reliever in the minors. From Double-A on down, I think the best shot at someone making an impact in a big league bullpen are guys like Denham or Foley, and that isn't just because of their draft status.

Q: Aside from the article a few weeks ago you wrote for Baseball America, we rarely hear anything about last year's 1st pick Jeremy Sowers. What are his strengths and weaknesses?

CK: He lacks any glaring weakness, really, other than a lack of experience. He's a command and control guy--and a well-located fastball is the toughest pitch to hit. He commands all his pitches exceptionally well, and also has the savvy to understand his own limitations and improvise from day-to-day, from hitter-to-hitter to figure out how to get outs consistently. Still, this is a guy who is at least another year or more away. He needs to pitch and understand how game situations change from level to level and what hitters can do to exploit you. But if there's one thing I learned from Sowers, it's that he has the intelligence level to make adjustments--if something isn't working, he is quick to adapt and alter his mindset in order to get the bottom line--outs on a consistent basis.

Q: Do any of the Indians' minor league prospects actually have what it takes to be a front of the rotation starter in the big leagues? To further that, last year Farm Director John Farrell stated that he felt that we had three minor leaguers whom he felt could be future #1 starters (Adam Miller, Fausto Carmona and Nick Pesco). Do you agree or disagree? Are there more than what Farrell mentioned?

CK: I agree with the Miller assessment, but to me, Pesco and Carmona are more like solid middle of the rotation guys. Carmona pounds the zone with great results, but I like a No. 1 to be a big strikeout guy, which we haven't seen in him up to this point. Pesco is a lot like Miller, other than the out pitch of choice. His changeup is unreal. When I think 'dominant No. 1 starter,' I want someone to take you out of your tracks, someone to instill a sense of fear in the opposing lineup--someone like Miller. Pesco has the stuff, minus the slider (though he has incorporated one

this season), but his velocity is not like Miller's and he doesn't have that power slider either . . . yet? So in short, I'll go with Miller as the lone No. 1 candidate, though Pesco could certainly be one in the future if the slider comes along. He certainly has the size and the moxie to be that. And, since Miller and Pesco are such good friends, I think they secretly might see themselves as the 1-2 punch of the future.

Q: What current major league player would you compare Franklin Gutierrez's potential to?

CK: Great question. And a tough one to answer. Being a Philadelphia guy originally, I'm thinking a cross between Garry Maddox and Gary Matthews. Defensively, Gutierrez covers a lot of ground in center, but also has more than enough arm strength to play right. He is easily the best defensive outfielder in the system. Sometimes, I question the power potential, but he showed good power over the winter in the Venezuelan League and you can't throw out the number of doubles he's hit--56 in the last two seasons. He could be a 20-plus HR guy with speed, just like Matthews was.

Q: Do you feel Kazuhito Tadano would be a better starter or reliever?

CK: My thought is he's durable enough to start and give you seven innings each time out, but that arm could be more valuable coming out of the pen. I've been following him since before the whole negative thing came out in the press--and for the record, we reported that six months before the Associated Press even caught wind of it--and really like his stuff. It wasn't surprising to see him move to the big leagues last year, but he needs to be more consistent. And that's something I think will come in part from a steady routine. I think with all the acclimating this guy has had to deal with--along with the negative press and ignorant comments from people--it's a much tougher road than we might think.

Q: Will Matt Whitney's name ever again be mentioned in the same sentence as Manny Ramirez?

CK: The simple answer is no, Matt Whitney won't make anyone forget or get over losing Manny. And for as many times as I see Rookie-level Burlington play, fans there are likely never to forget Ramirez there. Some scouts who have seen Whitney think he is done, that he will never be able to play the field with any type of agility ever again. But the organization remains confident that he can still

progress--it's just a matter of how long they are willing to wait. I mean, the second half of last year, his toes were pointed downward due to the scar tissue that accumulated there during that time, so he was basically running on top of his toes on that leg. And he hit .250 or whatever last year essentially on one leg. And I mean, he's still only 21. But three surgeries on the same leg is obviously disturbing and how he comes back from that over the next two seasons will be very, very interesting.

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