The Bullpen Mafia might rule the streets of Cleveland, but just down I-77, a new gang of fire-balling outlaws is making its name in the relief-pitching game— and what a confusing name it is! According to the media guide, Rob Bryson, Bryce Stowell, and Bryan Price are, in fact, three distinct members of the Akron Aeros pitching staff. But for the average Indians fan— ADD-raddled and/or elderly-- they are an undistinguishable triumvirate; the Snap, Crackle, and Pop of the Double-A crop. … The Bryce Krispies.

Preface: If At First You Don't Succeed, Bry Bry Again

For a franchise perpetually short on top-tier minor league prospects, the Indians' farm clubs sure do seem to win a lot. Last year, Cord Phelps and the Columbus Clippers took home the International League title. And this season, the Akron Aeros— already winners of three Eastern League Championships in the past decade— are off to a 21-8 start, brought about largely by a bonkers team ERA of 2.26! Admittedly, a large portion of the credit for that sparkling stat has to go to the Akron starting rotation, which has seen early season heroics from 23 year-old T.J. McFarland (5-1, 2.62), 27 year-old Steven Wright (3-1, 1.12), and 21 year-old Giovanni Soto (3-0, 3.33)— the somewhat forgotten byproduct of shipping Jhonny Peralta and his chinstrap beard to Detroit. From this point forward, however, we're going to thoroughly ignore these starting pitchers' fine accomplishments and focus all of our attention on the Canal Street Mafia that picks up their garbage.

Bullpens don't tend to function quite the same way in the Minors as they do up in the Bigs. Things are far less regimented, and roles bounce around based less on performance and more

on random experimentation. “How does this guy handle pitching in the ninth? How about stretching him out for two innings? Or against a couple lefties? Or dressed in lady’s undergarments?” It’s old school, carnival baseball-- where t-shirt guns inspire mass hysteria and every player gets their chance to shine. Case in point, five Akron relief pitchers have already recorded saves this year, including the fairly unheralded Preston Guilmet (4), Matt Langwell (3), and Kyle Landis (2). Combined, those three fellas have tossed 34 innings thus far for the Aeros, allowing just 7 earned runs (1.85 ERA) and striking out 42. Pretty impressive, to be sure. But sadly for them, not as impressive as having names that sound the same.

The Bryce Is Right

Not since the glory days of Bob Milacki, Dave Mlicki, and Mike Bielecki has the Indians organization attempted a name-based pitching staff recruitment project quite like this. It began in the summer of 2008, when the 6-foot-2, UC-Irvine right-hander Bryce Stowell was selected in the 22nd round of the Amateur Draft. With a heater in the mid to high 90s, Stowell moved up the ranks in a hurry, going from Kinston to Akron all the way up to Columbus in 2010. Elbow problems subsequently raised some serious concerns, but Stowell started back at square one last season and worked his way back to Akron, where he dominated out of the pen again. Now 25, he was off to a monster start for the Aeros this year, allowing just three hits in seven innings of work and striking out FIFTEEN. The bad news is, Bryce is currently on the disabled list with a sore right forearm. His journey back to Columbus, and possibly Cleveland come September, may be on hold again.

Back When Indians Hunted Bryson on the Plains

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