



Mikolas Settling In

by Brian Stull

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It may not qualify as pressure, but living up to expectation can often affect the performance of an athlete—a big contract, new teammates, a change in the lineup spot, etc. So while new St. Louis Cardinals pitcher Miles Mikolas wasn't feeling pressure earlier this spring, there was some extra emotion to contend with.

"I'm a lot more relaxed now," admitted Mikolas after throwing five shutout innings on Friday. "I didn't really feel any pressure, maybe almost just a little too excited. So excited to be back, so excited to want—no pressure to impress, just the want to impress. Like a dog chasing, I finally got the ball or the bone. And I was happy to get it, I kind of maybe over-did it. But once I can relax and get into a routine, go about my business, and try to soak things in from everybody and get that feeling back."

Soaking things in as he got his feet back under him after three years in Japan included taking some things from the "Chalk Talk" meetings each morning and also picking the brain of several teammates.

"I talked to Carpenter the other day when he was around we talked about how to use that kind of cutter/slider," shared Mikolas. "He was a great guy to talk to. Talked to Wainwright about curveballs. I've talked to Gregerson about other sliders. Getting feedback from Maddux, all that and the live BPs—kind of everything just coming together."

After allowing a combined 16 runs in his first three starts, Mikolas has not allowed a run in his last 9 innings and given up seven hits in that stretch.

"They remind you that you've had success," said Mikolas. "Maddux kind of likes to remind of that—what my last outing for the Rangers was before I left for Japan."

In that last start, he threw eight scoreless innings.

“I kept working on those things in Japan and to bring them back,” continued Mikolas. “That reminder, ‘hey, you know what you’re doing we’re just going to help you out a little bit with some other stuff’ those small things.”

Pitch selection, but also location and velocity have been among those topics.

“Over here, it’s been balls in the middle of the plate, slightly elevated,” described Mike Matheny of those early starts. “Those get hammered in Japan. They get hammered in Little League. He’s making better pitches. His stuff has been good since he got here, he’s just making better pitches more consistently.”

In Friday’s start, Mikolas had several fastballs that were in the 96-98mph range but also mixed in breaking pitches in the high 80s and his slowest pitch is the curve, which dips into the high 70s.

The sinker, cutter, and split-fingered fastball are similar in velocity but offer different movement. Though Mikolas is also working on how hard he wants to throw the splitter, bumping it up in Friday’s game.

“I’m still playing with some of the breaking ball grips—trying to add a little bit, take a little bit away,” he said. “But I think to have a few pitches that are the same speed that move differently, is where I get a lot of weak contact from. It might not be a wipeout type pitch, it’s a really good weak contact pitch because it’s not so much off my fastball, it’s just moving in a different direction.

And there is also finding that right velocity up in the zone.

“He’s actually over-cooking those where he’s trying to throw them so hard that they’re irrelevant,” stated Matheny. “To me, that’s a pitch that he hasn’t capitalized on all spring. I know he has—he’s got the spin rate for it and it’s something he’s done in the past...that top of the zone pitch, we keep talking about it. That’s a pitch, I think is 100% there for Miles, but he’s trying to throw it 98. He needs a well-placed four seam that is probably going to be without even trying, it’s going to be 95. Which is way more effective than a 98 that is two feet out of the zone.”

That was a point Mikolas had also made before his manager’s post game comments.

“At times, I’m probably a little less accurate the more I reach back for it,” he said. “But I think for a guy like me, varying speeds on my fastball can really help me. Mix in some two-seamers in the low 90s, kind of let that four-seam eat when I want to.”

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