

DARK HORSE PITCHING // LEARN // PLAYER DEVELOPMENT

What It Actually Takes to Sign Out of Indy Ball

Jackson Hicks · Personal Frontier League Dataset (n=14) vs. 2025 MLB Statcast Benchmarks

When I was getting ready for my first indy ball season in 2021, I thought I'd have to be perfect to get picked up by a major league organization. Based on what I saw on TV or heard from the pro guys at my facility, I thought everybody in affiliated ball had a fastball in the upper 90s. And since I didn't, I thought I'd need to be flawless to get a look, and that every run I gave up might cost me my shot. But I got signed after six weeks, which made me wonder what teams are actually looking for when they're scouting indy ball pitchers.

Methodology

I looked at 14 Frontier League pitchers who had been signed by a major league organization by July of this year, and compared each one's pitch and movement data against the top 25% of major league pitchers on every traceable trait — fastball carry, breaking ball movement, changeup depth, and velocity — using 2025 MLB Statcast data as the benchmark population. The question wasn't whether these pitchers were complete, finished products. It was whether they shared a common thread that predicted the signing.

Results

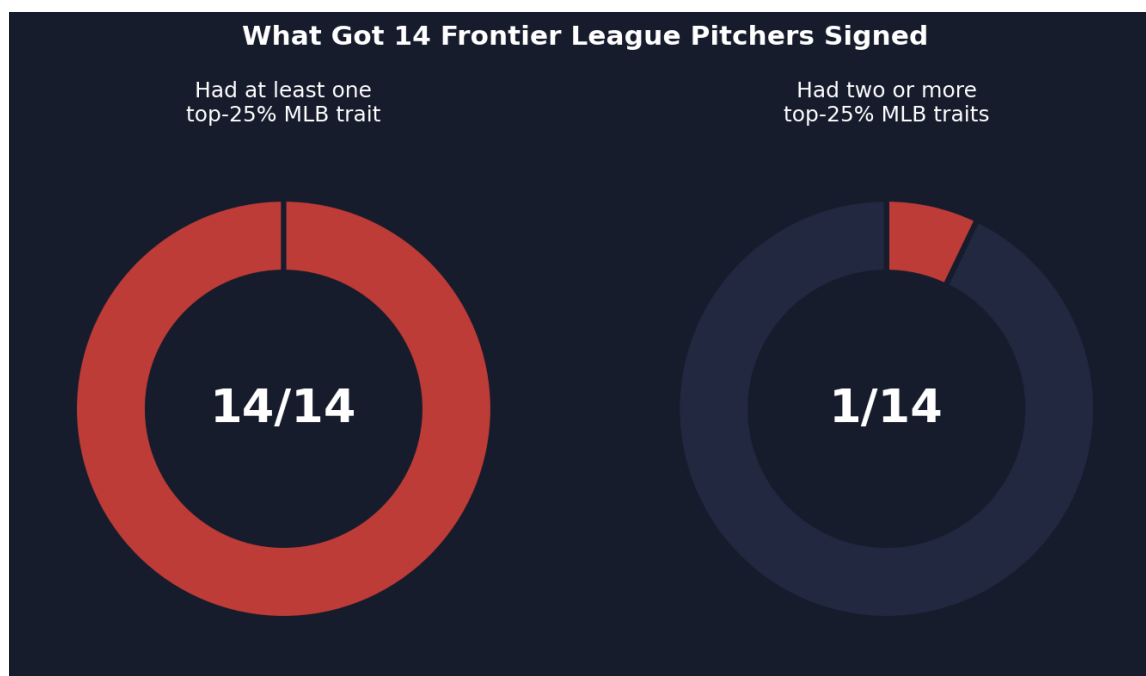


Figure 1. Share of 14 signed Frontier League pitchers with at least one, and with two or more, top-25% MLB traits.

Every single one of the 14 had at least one trait that graded in that top-25% range — elite carry on the fastball, an outlier breaking ball, a depth changeup, or velocity most guys never touch. Only one of the 14 had two such

traits at once. Nobody in the group was a complete, unhittable package, and almost nobody was actually sitting 95+.

What This Means for Player Development

The takeaway isn't that getting outs doesn't matter — it's still the price of admission, and every pitcher in this group had to keep runs off the board to stay on a roster long enough to get seen. But once that baseline is there, the data suggests the wrong thing to chase is a more well-rounded arsenal. Spending a full offseason trying to bring a below-average pitch up to “average” doesn't seem to be what gets an indy ball pitcher signed.

What the data suggests instead: find the one trait — a fastball shape, a breaking ball, a changeup, a velocity number — that has a real chance of grading as a true outlier against actual major league benchmarks, and build your offseason around pushing that one thing to an elite level. That's a very different developmental priority than “fix my weaknesses,” and it's the one this sample actually supports.

Getting outs consistently opens the door — but what actually gets you signed is having one real, data-confirmed weapon, not the number you convinced yourself you needed.