

Sabathia pronounces himself fit for Opening Day

by Andy Call

WINTER HAVEN, Fla. - C.C. Sabathia threw a 52-pitch bullpen session Friday morning, then pronounced himself fit for Opening Day in Chicago.

"It was just a normal bullpen," Sabathia said. "Especially given my history down here the last couple years, I dodged a bullet. I'm just anxious to get the season going."

Sabathia, who had referred to "the Winter Haven curse" on Wednesday, missed a week with strep throat in 2002, 2003 and 2004. He strained a muscle in his ribcage before his first spring-training game in 2005 and wasn't activated until April 17. Last year, Sabathia strained a muscle in his ribcage during the third inning on Opening Day and didn't return until May 2.

"I can't wait until we move," Sabathia said of the team's scheduled 2009 shift to Goodyear, Ariz., for spring training. "That, and it's closer to my house."

Sabathia was struck on the left forearm Wednesday by a line drive off the bat of Toronto's Reed Johnson. There was still a dark bruise on the outside of his wrist Friday, but Sabathia was able to play catch from 60, 90 and 120 feet as well as complete his normal bullpen session.

The big left-hander said he will play catch and ice the arm again Saturday and Sunday.

"Once I had my arm X-rayed (Wednesday), I kind of knew I would be OK," Sabathia said. "Once you get it in your head that it's not broken, you feel better about it."

Sabathia, who had thrown 90 pitches in his most recent start, said he will be on a pitch count of 105 to 110 pitches in Chicago.

Indians Manager Eric Wedge, pitching coach Carl Willis, bullpen coach Luis Isaac and head trainer Lonnie Soloff watched as Sabathia threw off the home bullpen mound at the Chain of Lakes complex stadium. At one point, Willis told a joke that had the entire group laughing. Wedge, apparently satisfied with what he had seen, left after about 30 pitches to talk with Toronto Manager John Gibbons as the Blue Jays arrived for Friday afternoon's game.

"C.C. felt pretty confident he'd be OK," Wedge said, "but he knows we're looking out for his best interests."

Wedge was understandably relieved at the encouraging news on his No. 1 starter. The Indians already are without their No. 3 starter, Cliff Lee, who will be sidelined until late April because of a strained abdominal muscle. Fausto Carmona is scheduled to replace Lee in the rotation until then.

"We've had some tough luck, but we're through it now," Wedge said. "We'll get on a plane to Memphis and see what happens there."

Sabathia, 26, will be making his fourth Opening Day start in five years. He will be the only pitcher in the big leagues under age 27 to have done so. "Everybody's anxious and ready to get out of here," Sabathia said. "It starts on Monday."

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