

2007 Kinston Indians Preview

Written by {ga=consigliere}
Thursday, April 05 2007 7:00 PM -

With the Indians Triple-A Buffalo and Double-A Akron affiliates previewed, the focus now shifts to the Single-A affiliates in the Indians farm system. First up, the Kinston Indians from the Single-A (advanced) Carolina League. Last year, it was a fun ride for Kinston fans as they saw their team finish the season with an impressive 85-54 record, and then go on to claim the Mills Cup in winning the Carolina League Championship. What does this year have in store, and what Indians prospects will be in Kinston? Check out Tony's latest for all the details.



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Last year, it was a fun ride for Kinston fans as they saw their team finish the season with an impressive 85-54 record, and then go on to claim the Mills Cup in winning the Carolina League Championship. Kinston's postseason run was impressive, as they went 5-0 in the playoffs and outscored their opponents 29-13. The appearance in the Carolina League Finals was their third straight, and the title was their second in the last three years (they won in 2004).

This year, several players from that championship team return, and some new names have been added to the mix. Right-hander Kevin Dixon is the only returning starting pitcher, as several new faces such as 2006 top draft pick lefty David Huff and international signing (Taiwan) Sung-Wei Tseng anchor the rotation. Outfielders John Drennen and Jose Constanza along with first baseman Steven Head return to anchor a solid starting lineup. Newcomers Wes Hodges at third base, Max Ramirez at catcher, and Josh Rodriguez at shortstop will add to the offensive firepower.

In all, Kinston boasts eight players ranked in [TheClevelandFan.com Top 35 Prospect List](#) compiled last November. From a talent standpoint, Kinston looks poised to make a run at a fourth straight Mills Cup Final, and have their sights set on defending and repeating as league champions.

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Minor League Affiliates

— Buffalo Bisons (AAA)

— Akron Aeros (AA)

Kinston Indians (High A)

Lake County Captains (Low A)

Mahoning Valley Scrappers (Short Season A)

GCL Indians (Rookie)

Kinston Indians Coaching Staff

Manager: Mike Sarbaugh

2nd season as Kinston manager, 18th season in Indians organization

Hitting Coach: Jon Nunnally

1st season as Kinston hitting coach, 1st season in Indians organization

Pitching Coach: Tony Arnold

1st season as Kinston pitching coach, 15th season in Indians organization

Starting Lineup & Rotation

1. Jose Constanza LF

2. Josh Rodriguez SS

3. John Drennen CF

4. Max Ramirez C

5. Stephen Head 1B

6. Wes Hodges 3B

7. Jerad Head DH

8. Brian Finegan 2B

9. Mike Butia RF

#1 Starter: David Huff

#2 Starter: Kevin Dixon

#3 Starter: Ryan Edell

#4 Starter: Sung-Wei Tseng

#5 Starter: Frank Hermann

Players to Watch

John Drennen - Outfield

Age: 20 Height: 6'0" Weight: 190 Bats: Left Throws: Left

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Last year, Drennen combined to hit .295/.384/.425 with 6 HRs, 38 RBIs and 8 stolen bases in 98 games as Lake County and Kinston. Drennen's numbers dipped at Kinston as he was overmatched and wore down some, but earlier at Lake County he was very good as he hit .321/.409/.471 with 6 HRs and 30 RBIs. The Indians love Drennen's advanced bat and polished approach to hitting, and he has a compact build with good power, and also creates a nice smooth bat path with his swing. Although he is somewhat undersized, he packs a lot of punch in his swing and has good pop and a dynamite bat. Right now, he is more a gap hitter, but as he matures he is expected to develop more power. At the plate, he has a good inside out swing and he uses the entire field, especially against lefties. He has good instincts as a runner, but only has slightly above average speed. His biggest weakness is his defense, as his arm is below average and his range in the outfield is limited, which will eventually play him out of center field. The Indians are loaded in the organization with good outfield prospects at levels above him, so he could be in Kinston most or all of the year. For a more detailed scouting report on Drennen, click [here](#) .

Jose Constanza - Outfield

Age: 23 Height: 5'9" Weight: 150 Bats: Switch Throws: Left



Constanza had a breakout season in 2006, hitting .309/.410/.410 with 2 HRs, 36 RBIs and 39 stolen bases in 120 games combined at Lake County and Kinston. Constanza has outstanding bat control and bat-to-ball ability, and very good baseball instincts. He put himself on the radar screen back in the Dominican Summer League (DSL) in 2004 when he hit .444 and lead the league in just about every offensive category except home runs. The Indians were so impressed with Constanza's showing in the DSL in 2004, that they started him in Lake County in 2005, which is unheard of for players in the Indians academy in the Dominican Republic to start with a

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full-season squad in their stateside debut. The last player to do so was Jhonny Peralta. Constanza projects as a left fielder because of his speed and defense and limited pop in his bat, and may eventually break in with the Indians as a 4th outfielder down the road. Like Drenne, because of the crowded outfield situation in Akron and Buffalo he will most likely remain in Kinston most of the year.

Josh Rodriguez - Shortstop/Second Base

Age: 22 Height: 6'0" Weight: 175 Bats: Right Throws: Right



The Indians took Rodriguez with their second of four picks in the second round of the 2006 Draft. In preseason college draft prospect rankings, Rodriguez was considered the top shortstop available. Like Wes Hodges, however, Rodriguez's draft stock plummeted somewhat when an elbow injury limited him to designated hitter duty at Rice University early in 2006 and he was eventually moved to third base. Once signed, the Indians assigned him to Mahoning Valley where he hit .268/.337/.465 with 4 HRs and 24 RBIs in 45 games. Rodriguez is a patient hitter with gap power. While Rodriguez lacks speed he does have an excellent throwing arm, and is versatile enough to play third base, shortstop or second-base. With the need in the system for quality, impact middle infielders, Rodriguez is one to keep an eye on going forward.

Stephen Head - First Base

Age: 23 Height: 6'3" Weight: 220 Bats: Left Throws: Left

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