

Minor Happenings: Crowe Off To A Slow Start

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Wednesday, April 25 2007 7:00 PM -

If you are a diehard Tribe fan, it just doesn't get any better than *Minor Happenings*, Tony Lastoria's frighteningly in depth weekly column pertaining to the Indians minor league system. Tony hits on a number of topics and players this week, keeping us all abreast of how the Indians of tomorrow are faring down on the farm.



Minor Happenings covers the important developments and news in the Indians farm system. Information in this report is collected from the various news outlets that cover each team, some national news, and in some cases from private sources connected to the Indians organization.

TheClevelandFan.com Minor League Player Of The Week

(week of April 19-25)

Shawn Nottingham (Left-handed Pitcher - Akron)

2-0, 1.35 ERA, 13.1 innings pitched, 2 runs, 6 hits, 7 walks, 9 strikeouts



After a rough first start where he went 4.1 innings and gave up four runs on seven hits, Akron left-hander Shawn Nottingham has been outstanding in his last two starts going 13.1 innings and allowing only two runs on six hits. On the year, Nottingham is 2-1 with a 3.06 ERA and .213 batting average against.

The Indians acquired Nottingham as the player to be named later in the Ben Broussard trade last year, and Nottingham is a local kid who was drafted by Seattle out of Jackson High School in Canton, Ohio. With his recent homecoming and Cleveland ties, Nottingham is a good story in which I should actually have an exclusive feature piece on him soon.

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Honorable Mentions

John Van Every (OF - Akron): .412 avg (7 for 17), 1 2B, 2 3Bs, 1 HR, 11 RBIs, 6 BBs

Franklin Gutierrez (OF - Buffalo): .474 (9 for 19), 2 2Bs, 0 3Bs, 0 HRs, 3 RBIs, 1 SB

David Huff (LHP - Kinston): 6 IP, 1 H, 1 ER, 1 BB, 4 K

Director's Cuts

Here are some updates on several Tribe prospects throughout the player development system from Indians Farm Director Ross Atkins:



On the Buffalo outfield: The Buffalo outfielders are in a rotation where they all get playing time at each of the three outfield positions. Each player gets more playing time at outfield positions where they have more limitations, and they see less time at positions deemed their strongest. The minor leagues allow teams the ability to play players in this way for development purposes.

On closers: The Indians do not go with closers in the minors per se, as the pitcher who gets the lions share of 9th inning opportunities is not necessarily a pitcher being groomed for such a role.

On Brad Snyder: The Indians are not overly concerned with Snyder, although there is always some concern when a player does not play up to par. Currently, Snyder is being asked to make adjustments at the plate, like standing over the ball more and getting his head out over the plate and he has adapted well to the new approach. Snyder's athleticism is a big strength. Yes, the strikeouts are a negative, but the organization is not disappointed with his season last year as they will take a .270/18/70 season from just about anyone. They are working on improving his strikeout rate, and feel the eye issues from the past have hindered him somewhat. When he overcomes his eye issues and settles into the adjustments made to his swing they feel the strikeout rate should decrease.

On Adam Miller: Miller is making a fine adjustment to pitching at the Triple-A level. He has become more confident with his secondary pitches in that he is throwing 2-0 changeups and 3-1 sliders. He is hitting 97 MPH consistently with his fastball, and his offspeed stuff is around 88-89 MPH. He needs to continue to develop a feel for pitching to go with his power approach.

On Jason Stanford: The Indians feel Stanford has had an encouraging start to the season. While he does not overpower anyone, he has a good feel for pitching. Stanford is a competitor,

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and has a good four pitch mix. Stanford appears to be back to the form that won him Buffalo Pitcher of the Year honors in 2003, as his arm is more lively, he has good command with his secondary pitches, and most importantly he is healthy. If he stays healthy he will definitely be on the Indians radar.

On Asdrubal Cabrera: Cabrera is having the best start of anyone in the player development system this month, and is showing he can handle the Double-A level. He has made adjustments at the plate and in the field requested of him by becoming more efficient moving to his left in the field, and much stronger and confident with his approach hitting from the left side of the plate. Atkins feels it is better for Cabrera to get 500-600 at bats in Akron instead of being a utility player in Buffalo (note: Cabrera is staying in Akron for awhile unless some players are released in Buffalo or move up to Cleveland).

On Trevor Crowe: While his numbers show otherwise, his at bats have been great and he continues to get on-base drawing walks. He has just run into some tough luck at the plate. He is pressing some, but he also is working on some adjustments from coach instruction and is adapting well.

On Brian Barton: Barton possesses a rare combination of speed on the bases with the power to hit the ball out of the ballpark. He is an extremely intelligent player and has great composure. He is currently working on ironing out some things defensively in the outfield.

On Michael Aubrey: Aubrey has been participating in games in extended spring training, and recently put up a 4-for-4 day at the plate. He looks good and could be on the move in the coming weeks to one of the Indians minor league affiliates.

On Rodney Choy Foo: Choy Foo is a great hitter with a compact approach. He is not as gifted as the Trevor Crowe's of the world, but he works hard.

On Joe Inglett: He looks great and is 100% healthy.

Captains Corners

Going into the season, there were some question marks with the Lake County pitching staff and the lineup looked like it would be the team's strength. To date, this has held true. But, two players in the lineup that have surprised early as not much was expected of them are first baseman Matt Whitney and third baseman Jared Goedert.



Whitney has been with the organization for a few years now, and is in the process of a position

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shift to first base, so he started the year in Lake County to get accustomed to the position. Apparently, the shift from third base to first base has helped him concentrate more on his offense as to date he is hitting .313 with four home runs, 15 RBIs, and a .908 OPS in 16 games for the Captains. He is still striking out at an alarming rate, 18 strikeouts in 64 at bats, but he has otherwise been very productive in the early going.



Goedert is a player who may be having a breakthrough season. The Indians originally drafted him out of high school in the 36th round of the 2003 Draft, but he chose to go to college and the Indians took him again when he was eligible in the 9th round of the 2006 Draft out of Kansas State University. In short-season Mahoning Valley last year, Goedert did not show anything that excited scouts or fans in that he hit only .269 with three home runs, 27 RBIs, and a .710 OPS in 238 at bats. This year, however, people are starting to take notice. To date, Goedert is hitting .316 with six home runs and 13 RBIs in 17 games with the Captains. But, even more impressive is his walk-rate which has gone off the charts. Last year, he walked 19 times in 238 official at bats, but this year already has walked 18 times in just 57 official at bats. He has a whopping .480 on-base% and 1.164 OPS to start the season.

Heading In The Right Direction

Someone to keep an eye on who may be in for a rebound year is Kinston first basemen Stephen Head. Head is making a return trip to Kinston after what on the surface looked like a disappointing campaign last year there when he hit .235 with 14 homers and 73 RBIs in



130 games. But, the home run and RBI production was okay, and his plate discipline was very good in that he walked 54 times and only struckout 73 times in 477 at bats. The real reason his batting average suffered is mostly as a byproduct of his swing mechanics getting overhauled. With the new revamped approach to hitting, Head was slow to adapt to the adjustments and at times was overly aggressive by trying to do too much too soon.

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Head is off to a solid start this year, hitting .254 with one home run and seven RBIs in the pitcher friendly Carolina League. Also, much like former K-Tribe outfielder Ryan Goleski, Head could be on the verge of a big rebound season. In 2005, Goleski struggled and hit .212 with 17 home runs and 67 RBIs in Kinston, and then returned last year. After a cold April start, Goleski was sensational in May and ended up being called up to Akron after only 38 games. In those 38 games at Kinston, he hit .331 with 10 home runs and 43 RBIs.

Smith Makes Most Of Opportunity

Buffalo right-handed pitcher Sean Smith made a spot start for the Bisons in a double-header last week. In his first career Triple-A start, Smith was very good in going five innings and allowed no runs on four hits while walking three and striking out four. It was a



big day for Smith, who impressed and made the most of the opportunity given to him. Last year, Smith put up his best season in the minors where in 29 combined starts in Kinston and Akron he went 11-7 with a 3.83 ERA while walking 54 and striking out 117 batters in 169 innings pitched.

It is sort of a mystery why Smith is not starting in Buffalo, especially with Fausto Carmona presently in Cleveland. Right now, Smith is being used in long relief and in the bullpen while Quad-A pitcher Jeff Harris takes a rotation spot. While it does not appear as if Smith will get a chance to crack the Buffalo rotation anytime soon, especially with Carmona likely returning sometime next week, at some point this season Smith should get a shot in the rotation on a consistent basis. His start last week can only help that time come sooner.

Roommate Connection

Lake County Captains pitchers Michael Eisenberg and Steven Wright are roommates on the road, and have shared the same ups and downs this season. In Eisenberg's first two starts, he gave up eight earned runs and 11 hits in six innings pitched and took the loss in



both games. In Wright's first three starts, he gave up 11 earned runs and 14 hits in 8.2 innings pitched.

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But, in Eisenberg's most recent start on Sunday, he rebounded to throw five innings and give up only one run on five hits, and on Tuesday night Wright went six innings and did not allow a run and only surrendered two hits while not walking a batter and striking out eight. Both pitchers have been working on the side to make some adjustments, but I'm sure being able to get constructive feedback from a roommate who was struggling just as much may have helped as well.

Compensation, Or Merely Coincidence?



The Indians traded right-handed pitchers Travis Foley and Dan Denham to the Oakland Athletics in two separate deals this past week. The deals were for future considerations and for cash, but one has to wonder if this is compensation agreed upon in some sort of behind closed doors deal between the Indians and Athletics for the [Ryan Goleski injury snafu](#) from last December. Reportedly, the Indians "unknowingly" did not file a report that Goleski had surgery on his injured wrist, and he was later taken #1 overall in the Rule 5 Draft by the Athletics.

Nothing To Crowe About

Akron outfielder, and top rated position player prospect Trevor Crowe has gotten off to a very slow start this year. To date, Crowe is hitting .153 (9 for 59) with no home runs, four RBIs, two stolen bases, and a .462 OPS in his first 14 games. While Farm Director



Ross Atkin's comments above downplayed the start somewhat and put a positive spin on things, Crowe's struggles in Akron to date are a cause for some concern.

Indians officials and scouts feel the problem is mostly mental and not physical as he may be trying to make an early impression since he knows he is being fast-tracked to be the eventual leadoff man in Cleveland. As Atkins noted, Crowe is working counts (10 walks), but his biggest problem right now is that he has made a lot of bad swings at breaking balls early in the count, and his focus is too much on numbers and hitting home runs rather than putting the ball in play consistently, getting on-base, stealing some bases, and playing good defense. The Indians want him to get back to the leadoff approach that they raved about last year and start bunting the ball more, hitting the ball the other way, and taking what opposing pitchers are giving to him

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and not trying to do too much.

The Buffalo Pen

Not only is the Cleveland bullpen pitching well early in the year, but the Buffalo bullpen has been rock solid as well. This is very important as it should provide the Indians with good depth if injuries crop up, some currency to use in trades, and also some help needed for the stretch run as arms flame out.



Most notably, Eddie Mujica is once again off to another fantastic start. Many may remember that he started the season last year pitching over 40 shutout innings before giving up his first run in combined time at Akron, Buffalo, and Cleveland. And, just like last year, he is off to another great start at Buffalo this year. In seven appearances out of the bullpen, he is 0-0 with five saves and has not yielded a run in eight innings pitched. He has only allowed three hits, not walked a batter, and struckout ten batters. Yeah, he's good.

Not to be overlooked, the rest of the Buffalo bullpen has performed well early on. Here is how the other four major components of the pen have done so far:

Jim Ed Warden: 1-0, 2.35 ERA, 5 games, 7.2 IP, 6 Ks, 0.91 WHIP

Juan Lara: 0-1, 4.91 ERA, 6 games, 7.1 IP, 7 Ks, 2.05 WHIP

Mike Koplove: 0-0, 0.00 ERA, 7 games, 6.1 IP, 8 Ks, 1.11 WHIP

Brian Sikorski: 0-0, 0.00 ERA, 5 games, 5 IP, 6 Ks, 0.80 WHIP

Akron Rundown

The Indians Double-A affiliate Akron is off to a 9-7 start, which puts them in second place one game out of first in the Southern Division of the Eastern League. Akron is 1st out of twelve

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in pitching with a 3.79 team ERA.

On the hitting front, outfielder Brian Barton is off to a good start hitting .269 with two home runs, eight RBIs, four stolen bases, and a .906 OPS in 14 games. Infielder Rodney Choy Foo continues to mash Eastern League pitching as he is hitting .396 with three home runs, 13 RBIs, and a 1.181 OPS in 14 games. Shortstop Asdrubal Cabrera had a 13-game hitting streak

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snapped on Monday night, and is hitting .333 with no home runs, four RBIs, and a .826 OPS in 14 games.

The Akron pitching continues to be very good overall. In addition to Nottingham above, earlier in the week Akron left-hander Aaron Laffey allowed one run on four hits in six innings to win his second game of the season. Right-hander J.D. Martin and left-hander Scott Lewis ran into some trouble in their last starts and were knocked around. Martin gave up seven runs and nine hits in 2.2 innings in his last start, and Lewis was touched up for four runs and seven hits in three innings in his last start. Lewis is still being handled with kid gloves, as he is still recovering from Tommy John surgery a few years ago and bicep tendinitis which plagued him the past few seasons. He is up to a 70 pitch count now, and by the end of May the Indians hope they can get it up to 90.

Here are some notable up-to-date statistics for some other notable prospects:



John Van Every (OF): .313 avg (10 for 32), 1 HR, 12 RBIs, .395 OBP, .594 SLG
Wyatt Toregas (C): .303 avg (10 for 33), 2 HRs, 8 RBIs, .385 OBP, .485 SLG
Jordan Brown (1B): .291 (16 for 55), 2 HRs, 6 RBIs, .391 OBP, .455 SLG
Ryan Goleski (OF): .229 avg (11 for 48), 0 HRs, 3 RBIs, .362 OBP, .229 SLG
Chuck Lofgren (LHP): 2-1, 3.60 ERA, 3 games, 15 IP, 20 Ks, 1.27 WHIP
Eddie Buzachero (RHP): 1-0, 2 saves, 0.00 ERA, 6 games, 6.1 IP, 7 Ks, 0.79 WHIP

K-Tribe Roundup

The Indians advanced Class-A affiliate Kinston is off to a 9-7 start, good for second place and a half game out of first in the Southern Division of the Carolina League. Kinston is 6th out of eight teams in hitting with a .234 team batting average, and are 2

nd
in pitching with a 2.82 team ERA.

On the pitching front, right-handed starter Frank Herrmann is off to a good start as in three starts he is 1-0 with a 1.59 ERA and .217 batting average against. Herrmann is someone to keep an eye on as he is a non-drafted free agent who signed with the Indians in 2005. Right-handed reliever Jeff Stevens continues to impress early in Kinston, as in six games he now is 2-0 with a 0.00 ERA, and in 14 innings pitched has yielded only three hits, three walks, and has struckout 18 batters. Offensively, third baseman Wes Hodges returned to action and had a nice game this week where he went 2-for-2 with a triple and had five RBIs.

Here are some notable up-to-date statistics for some other notable prospects:

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