

Minor Happenings: Whitney Revived In Lake County

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Wednesday, May 16 2007 7:00 PM -

Simply put, it's the most comprehensive Indians minor league coverage you will find anywhere. It's Minor Happenings, and it's a Thursday night regular piece here at The Cleveland Fan. In this week's column, Tony hits on the hot bats of infielders Matt Whitney, Jared Goedert, and Ryan Mulhern. He reports on the awakening of mega-prospect Trevor Crowe. And brings us up to speed on the latest national praise heaped on the promising Adam Miller.



"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 *(for games from May 10 through May 16)*

Matt Whitney (First baseman - Lake County)

.458 AVG (11-24), 6 R, 5 2B, 1 HR, 6 RBI, 3 BB



Pitching in Buffalo and Akron have dominated the Player of the Week awards of late, but this week we saw several good offensive performances from players up and down the Indians

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player development system. The most notable performance, though, came from first baseman Matt Whitney.

Whitney is now hitting .343 with a .998 OPS on the season, and has 8 HR and 30 RBI in 34 games for Lake County. Prior to the start of the season, it was expected that Whitney would only be in Lake County for a short time to get acclimated to the position change from third base to first base, and then move up to Kinston quickly.

He likely will be the first player in the hot hitting Lake County lineup to move up, and could be on the move very soon.

Honorable Mention:

Ryan Mulhern (1B - Buffalo): .440 AVG (11-25), 3 R, 4 2B, 2 HR, 6 RBI, 2 BB

Chuck Lofgren (LHP - Akron): 0-0, 1 start, 1.29 ERA, 7 IP, 0 H, 1 ER, 1 BB, 6 K

Max Ramirez (C - Kinston): .389 AVG (7-18), 3 2B, 6 RBI, 9 BBs

John Drennen (OF - Kinston): .286 AVG (8-28), 2B, 3B, 3 HR, 10 RBI, 2 BB

Frank Herrmann (RHP - Kinston): 1-0, 1 start, 8 IP, 4 H, 1 ER, 0 BB, 5 K

Previous Winners:

5/3 to 5/9: Chuck Lofgren (LHP - Akron)

4/26 to 5/2: Adam Miller (RHP - Buffalo)

4/19 to 4/25: Shawn Nottingham (LHP - Akron)

4/12 to 4/18: Jason Stanford (LHP - Buffalo)

4/5 to 4/11: Matt McBride (C - Lake County)

Director's Cuts

Indians Farm Director Ross Atkins was in Kinston this week, and offered his thoughts on the town and some players in the system:



On Kinston: A very small town with maybe one to two stop lights, which is much different than the atmosphere and activity centered around Lake County and Akron. From a development standpoint, it is a perfect place for players as the small town offers very few distractions and the playing field is excellent.

Also, the Kinston

front office works well with the Indians.

On David Huff: He looks great, and is progressing

well with each outing.

Atkins feels

that Huff is one of the guys in the system where you can dream a little bit because he is that good.

Huff has unbelievable confidence in his fastball, and probably the best fastball command in the entire system.

He is a very polished pitcher, is very aggressive, and repeats his delivery well.

On Ryan Mulhern: Atkins is very, very pleased with his performance to date at Buffalo, and in fact said he is somewhat surprised with how well he has played to start the season considering this is his first taste of Triple-A.

Mulhern had a similar start two years ago at Single-A Kinston, and appears to be well on his way to another big year like he had in 2005.

He has not yet exceeded his potential, but has come close to maximizing it.

Another Kouzmanoff In The Making?



Lake County third baseman Jared Goedert continues to put up gaudy numbers, and is starting to emerge as a legit hitting prospect. Goedert is hitting .372 with 14 HR and 35 RBI on the year, has piled up 32 walks to only 19 strikeouts in 35 games, and owns a .503 on-base percentage, .785 slugging percentage, and a 1.288 OPS.

Goedert ranks 1

st

in just about every important offensive category in the South Atlantic League, ranking 1

st

in runs, home runs, walks, on-base percentage, slugging percentage, and OPS.

He also ranks 2

nd

in RBIs and 3

rd

in batting average.

To date, he has also has reached base in 29 straight games by hit or walk.

Goedert's performance to date immediately brings to mind the breakout season former Lake County

third baseman Kevin Kouzmanoff had in 2004 when he hit .330 with 16 HR and 87 RBI.

Like Goedert, prior to his breakout season in 2004 Kouzmanoff was not a highly touted prospect around baseball or followed by the fans.

Goedert also is very similar to Kouzmanoff defensively where he is not flashy but makes all the routine plays and has an above average arm.

The Indians consider Goedert to have the upside to be an average third baseman at the major league level, but if he continues his torrid hitting pace the outlook for his upside as a player may need to be adjusted. Goedert is not a big assuming player nor overly strong, but he has great raw power and the ability to hit the ball out to any part of the ballpark. His consistent swing and line drive stroke help generate most of his power.

Mulhern Cleaning Up From The Bottom

Buffalo first-basemen Ryan Mulhern is currently hitting .331 with 8 HR and 28 RBI to go along with a .374 on-base percentage and .636 slugging

percentage. He is leading the team in just about every noteworthy offensive category, and is ranked 7th in the league in hitting, 3rd in 2B, 3rd in HR, 1st in



RBI, 2nd in SLG, and 3rd in OPS. Those are some impressive numbers for any middle of the order hitter, but that is not the case for Mulhern as he has done this all from the 8th and 9th spot in the Buffalo batting order.

With this being Mulhern's first taste of Triple-A, the Indians want to start him off in the 8th and 9th spot in the order and ease him into a more significant

spot in the batting order as the season progresses.

By hitting Mulhern near the bottom of the batting order it allows him more time to study starting pitchers and prepare to face that pitcher.

Mulhern can see how the opposing pitcher attacks the hitters in the middle-of-the-order and what the pitcher does to them in certain counts and situations.

The Indians decided to go with this approach way back in spring training with Mulhern and outfielder Brad Snyder, and by doing this they felt it reduced the risk of them getting in over their heads.

Another Undrafted Success Story?

It is starting to look like the Indians may have hit gold again on an undrafted free agent. Akron outfielder Brian Barton went undrafted in the 2004 Draft as most teams thought he was more interested in a career in aerospace engineering, which is the degree he earned at Miami University.

.

Of course, a year and a half later, Barton is now starring at Akron and one of the Indians top five prospects.



Now, enter right-handed pitcher Frank Herrmann. Herrman, an economics major at Harvard, also went undrafted and is starting to make some noise in Kinston with his pitching. In his most recent start on

Monday, Herrmann allowed only one run on four hits in eight innings and did not walk a batter and struckout five.

To date, in seven starts Herrmann is 3-0 with a 2.72 ERA and has allowed 36 hits and 3 walks while striking out 25 in 39.2 innings pitches. Herrmann features a low-90s fastball with a hard curveball and changeup that has good movement. The key to Herrmann's success is his bulldog mentality and his intelligence in coming up with a

good gameplan to attack hitters.

He also is focused on pitching to contact and throwing strikes, saying "If they're going to beat me, they've got to string together two or three hits in an inning to score a run."

Smith Proving Indians Wrong

Buffalo right-hander Sean Smith continues to impress at Buffalo, and is making

Indians Farm Director Ross Atkins and his staff look bad after they decided to start him in the bullpen this year after a very



good season in the starting rotation at Akron last year when he went 11-7 with a 3.83 ERA. On the year, he is 3-1 with a 1.78 ERA and has allowed 25 hits and 15 walks while striking out 25 in

30.1 innings of work.

Last Thursday, Smith threw five shutout innings before struggling to get the third out in the sixth innings and allowing two runs, which snapped a 22.2 consecutive scoreless inning streak. He came back and started a new scoreless innings streak with his start on Tuesday night by throwing six innings of shutout ball.

He ended up winning the game on Tuesday, which was his third straight decision.

His ERA leads the team and ranks second in the International League.

Miller Named To Dream Rotation



As with the previous season, the
Cleveland debut
of Buff
also
fireballer Adam Miller.

Sports Illustrated
magazine named Miller
to their "Dream
Rotation" which is

an up-and-coming dream
five-man rotation
compiled by 11
high-ranking
major-league executives.

Prospects with one
season or less of major
league service time were
eligible for the list, and
Miller was 4th in the
rotation which also

included
Boston
's Daisuke Matsuzaka,
Philadelphia
's Cole Hamels, New
York Yankees' Phillip
Hughes, and
San Francisco
's Tim Lincecum.

Of note, Miller is the only
one in that dream

rotation who has yet to appear in the majors.

On the season, Miller is 4-1 with a 2.45 ERA at Buffalo and has allowed 37 hits and 14 walks while striking out 39 in 44.9 innings pitched.

Call Him Mr. No-No

Akron left-hander Chuck Lofgren provided the Mother's Day crowd with quite a treat this past Sunday, as he threw seven no-hit innings before leaving because of a high pitch count. For all his work, though, he finished with a no decision. Lofgren only faced 22 batters in his

seven innings of

work, which is only one over the minimum. That one player proved to be costly, as that player reached on a leadoff walk in the fourth inning and moved around the bases on a balk, sacrifice bunt, and scored on a sacrifice fly.

Lofgren left after seven innings with the score tied 1-1, and finished the game with the following line: 7 IP, 1ER, 0 H, 1 BB, and 6 Ks. This is the second straight start Lofgren has took a no-hitter into the 6th innings, as on his May 8th

start he took a no-hitter into the sixth inning before giving up a hit with one out.

This just in, this kid is pretty good.

On the year, in seven starts Lofgren is now 3-2 with a 2.88 ERA and has allowed 28 hits and 15

walks while striking out
42 in 40.2 innings
pitched.

Ramirez Rakes in Kinston

Kinston catcher Max
Ramirez is putting
together a good

season that has pretty much gone under the



radar. To date, Ramirez has put up very good numbers in Kinston, hitting .306 with 5 HR, 22 RBI, and a

.959 OPS in the
pitching dominated
Carolina League.

Even more
impressive is his
high walk-rate and
very good on-base
percentage, as he
has walked 29 times

and struck out 26
times in 32 games
and has a .450
on-base percentage.

Ramirez also ranks

7

th

in batting average, 9

th

in home runs, 6

th

in RBI, 1

st

in walks, and is 2

nd

in OPS in the

Carolina League.

Ramirez has been

Mr. Clutch at Kinston
n ,
hitting .481 with
runners in scoring
position (RISP).

In fact, Ramirez
has shown a much
better ability to hit

with runners on
base (.442) than
runners not on
base (.215).

His patience at the
plate and ability to
identify pitches are
what make him

such a dangerous
clutch hitter.

He is not fooled
easily, and doesn't
chase bad pitches
that put him into
bad counts and as
a result pitchers
end up having to

come right after
him.

Lara Ineffective

Buffalo

left-handed

reliever Juan Lara

has had a rough

go of it early in the season. Lara had a good



start to the season where in his first five appearances he had the following

line: 1.42 ERA, 6.1
IP, 8 H, 1 ER, 3
BB, 7 K. Since
then, however, in
his next 11
appearances he
has the following
line: 11.
17 ERA, 9.2 IP, 13

H, 12 ER, 9 BB, 7
K.

On the year,
opponents are
hitting .309 off of
Lara, lefties are
hitting .346 off of
him, and he has a
2.06 WHIP.

Not a good way to start the season, especially for what many perceive as the #1 left-handed relief pitching option the Indians will turn to if a

need arises.

Laffey Stays Consistent



Akron left-hander
Aaron Laffey

continues to
perform well in the
starting rotation.

Last Thursday,
Laffey had another
solid start going
seven innings and
allowed only two

runs on seven hits
and no walks
while striking out
seven.

Unfortunately, a
big error late in the
game opened the
flood gates for

three unearned runs, and it ended up costing him a win and giving him his first loss on the season.

On the year, in six starts Laffey is 4-1

with a 2.31 ERA
and has allowed
29 hits and 7
walks while
striking out 24 in
35.0 innings
pitched. Laffey
had been
scheduled to start

for Akron
on Wednesday
night, but was
skipped since he
was called up to
Buffalo
to make a spot
start today.

Lewis Adjusting Well To Bullpen Role

Akron
right-handed

reliever Jensen
Lewis is
adapting to life
in the bullpen.

Prior to this
season, Lewis

had been a
starting pitcher
and went 8-8
with a 3.96
ERA in 28
starts last year.

Jensen was
picked in the
3rd round of
the 2005 Draft
out of Vanderbi
It Univers
ity , and

to date at

Akron

he is 1-0 with a

2.74 ERA and

has allowed 21

hits and 9

walks while

striking out 29
in 23 innings
pitched.

While he threw
in the 90-92
MPH range as

a starter, many scouts felt he could add more velocity as he matured or was shifted to the bullpen. Lewis

also had
experience in
the bullpen in
his days at
Vanderbilt, and
the Indians
liked his

athleticism.

To date, that
logic has come
to fruition as
his MPH are up
a few ticks on

the fastball,
and his 11.35
strikeout per
nine innings
rate is
impressive.

In his last ten games, he is 1-0 with a 1.00 ERA.

Finally
Something

To Crowe About

After a season
long slump,
could Akron
outfielder

Trevor Crowe
finally be on
his way to
breaking out of
it?

I
t remains to be

seen, but with
every hot
streak there
is always a
start and a
turning point,
and maybe his

game winning
walkoff hit on
Saturday was
the kickstart
he needed.

Before coming

through with
the
game-winning
hit in extra
innings on
Saturday,
Crowe had

been in
0-for-12 in the
series and
0-for-5 in the
game. After
being given a
day off on

Sunday and
Monday, he
roared back on
Tuesday night
by getting
three hits,
including his

first home run
of the season.

To date,
Crowe is
hitting .180
with 1 HR and

14 RBI, and
has a .274
on-base
percentage
and .259
slugging
percentage.

Crowe's
biggest
problem has
been staving
off thoughts of
the big

leagues, as he
has put
enormous
pressure on
himself to
perform this
year.

Denham Providing Spark For Captains

Jason

Denham has

been a nice
surprise in Lak
e C
ounty

▪

After

outfielder

Lucas

Montero went

down with a

broken thumb

a few weeks

back, Denham

was activated
from extended
spring training
and has
impressed in
his short time
with the club.

To date, in 21
games he is
hitting .325
with 2 HR, 10
RBI, and 3

stolen bases.

He also has
walked 17
times and only
struckout 13
times.

Denham, a
21-year old
from Californi
a , plays
center field
and is hitting
at the top of

the Lak
e C
ounty
lineup as his
patience at
the plate and
speed makes

him an ideal
leadoff hitter.

Denham has
spent the last
three seasons
in the Indians

short-season leagues in Burlington , Mahoning Valley and the GCL

and last year
hit .302 with 0
HR, 14 RBI,
with 6 stolen
bases in 53
games at
Mahoning

Valley

■

Denham is
also the
younger
brother of Dan

Denham,
whom is a
former first
round draft
pick of the
Indians who
was traded to

Oakland
over a week
ago.

**Transaction
Recap**

- Left-hander
Dan Cevette
was activated
from extended
spring training
to make an
emergency

spot start in A
kron
last week
because of
back-to-back
doubleheader

s, and then a
few days later
was sent to
Kinston
when
right-handed

reliever Chris
Niesel was
placed on the
disabled list
with a
shoulder

injury.

- On Friday,
left-hander
Kyle Collins
was moved

down from Ak
ron
to
Kinston
and
right-handed

sum-mariner

Randy

Newsom was

moved up

from

Kinston

to

Akron

▪

- Akron

right-handed

reliever Jake
Dittler was
promoted to
Buffalo
on Monday,
and

right-handed
reliever T.J.
Burton was
called up
from
Kinston

to take his
spot in the
Akron
bullpen.

- When Kinst

on
middle
infielder Brian
Finegan went
on the
disabled

listed with a
broken thumb
last week,
middle
infielder
Niuman

Romero was
called up
from
extended
spring
training to

Kinston

to take his

place.

- Lake Count

y

infielder

Andrew Lytle

retired last

week after

two plus

seasons in

the
organization,
and was
replaced on
the roster by
outfielder

Cristo Arnal
who was
activated
from
extended
spring

training.

- The Indians

traded Buffal

o

infielder Jake

Gautreaux to
the New York
Mets for a
player to be
named later.
Gautreaux, 27,

has been on
the disabled
list all
season.

- Lake Count

y

left-handed

reliever Matt

Meyer was

moved up to

Kinston

on Tuesday,
and as of this
writing there
is no word on
who will be
taking his

roster spot in
the
Lake
County
pitching staff.

Affiliate Notebook

*Buffalo
Notes:*

Buffalo

left-hander

Rafael Perez

put forth

another solid

outing on

Monday, and
went
7.2 innings
and only
gave up 2
runs on 8
hits while

walking 2
and striking
out 7. On
the season,
in six starts
he is 3-1 and

has a 3.22

ERA. ...

Catcher Mike

Rose leads

the

International

League in
throw-out
percentage
among
catchers,
having

thrown out
63% percent
of attempted
base-stealer
s. ...
Left-hander

Tony Sipp is
still
rehabbing
his elbow
strain, and is
expected

back in four
to six weeks.

...

Right-hander
Cliff Politte is
rehabbing in

Cleveland
and will
throw off the
mound soon,
and is
expected

back in four
to six weeks.

... Buff

alo

is one of only
two teams

who have yet
to be shut
out this
season, with
Richmond
being the

other team.

...

Buffalo
has shutout
their
opponent

five times
this year.

Akron Notes:

With

right-hander

Bubbie

Buzachero

being called

up to Akron

to fill the void

left
behind when
Eddie Mujica
was called
up to
Cleveland,
Akron filled

the need at
the closer's
role by
naming Reid
Santos to the
job. ...

Shortstop
Asdrubal
Cabrera is
day-to-day
(headache)
after a nasty

collision in
the outfield
with Trevor
Crowe. ... Ak
ron
suffered their

first loss
when leading
after seven
innings last
Thursday.
Prior to the

game on
Thursday,
Akron
was 17-0,
but blew a
4-1 lead in

the 8th
inning by
giving up 4
runs and
losing 5-4.

Kinston

Notes:

Sun-Wei

Tseng is

starting to

feature his

split-finger
fastball for
the first time.

Early in
the year,

Tseng threw
his bread

and butter
pitch maybe
once or twice
an outing,
but now is
mixing it in

9-12 times
an outing. ...
Kinston
utility player
Chris
Gimenez hit

three home
runs and had
six RBI in
Wednesday's
game. ...
Kinston

outfielder

Joe

Constanza

had been out

since May

4th with a

strained
groin, and
returned on
May 13th. ...
Kinston
lost their first

series of the
season late
last week
when they
dropped
three of four

to

Frederick

.

Parting

Shots

Former
Indians
farmhand
right-handed
Francisco
Cruceta has

been
suspended
for 50 games
for testing
positive for a
performance-

enhancing substance in violation of the Minor League Drug Prevention

and
Treatment
Program. Th
e Indians
designated
him for

assignment
in August
2005, and he
led the
Pacific Coast
League in

strikeouts
last year with
185, which
was 50 more
than 2nd
ranked Rich

Hill who had
135
strikeouts.

The Indians
practice of

stuffing a pie
into the face
of the game
hero during
post-game
TV

interviews
seems to
have carried
its way down
to the
minors. Duri

ng a
televised
on-field
interview
before last
Thursday's

game,

Akron

left-hander

Chuck

Lofgren was

the

unsuspecting
recipient of
a pie in the
face.

Also, in

Buffalo, after
Ben
Francisco hit
a game
winning
grand slam

last
Wednesday
night he
earned a
shaving
cream pie

from Jason
Stanford
during a
post-game
interview.

In this week's Baseball America Hot Sheet, Chuck

Lofgren is #5
and Jared
Goedert
comes in at
#20. ...
Former Tribe

catcher Tim
Laker is set
to make his
managerial
debut when
short-season

Single-A
Mahoning
Valley starts
play in June.

Feel free to

e-mail me at
tlastoria@s
werbsblurbs.
com
with any
suggestions

*of things you
would like
added,
changed or
removed in
this report.* □

*Also, if you
have a
specific
prospect you
would like
me to touch*

*on in future
reports, feel
free to let
me know.*