

Minor Happenings: Cabrera Getting Offensive

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Wednesday, May 23 2007 7:00 PM -

If you're looking for evidence that Tony's "Minor Happenings" column has really started to gain some mass appeal, look no further than "All Bets Are Off with Bruce Drennan" today around 4:40 PM on Sportstime Ohio ... where Tony will be a guest to discuss the column. Per usual, this week's version of the best Indians minor league column on the web is excellent as Tony takes his usual stroll through the Indians farm system.



"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 17 through May 23)*

Shawn Nottingham (LHP - Akron)

1-0, 2 starts, 1.32 ERA, 13.2 IP, 11 H, 2 ER, 4 BB, 9 K



Probably one of the most consistent pitchers in the Indians system to date that many people do not hear about is Akron left-hander Shawn Nottingham. Nottingham takes home the Player of the Week hardware for the second time this season, and is in the midst of a breakout season.

Nottingham's start to the season is starting to make the Ben Broussard deal that Indians General Manager Mark Shapiro pulled off with Seattle last year look like grand larceny.

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To think the Indians got Shin-Soo Choo and Nottingham for Broussard is stunning, and may turn out to be one of Shapiro's best trades.

In his two starts this past week, Nottingham put up outstanding efforts. Here are his pitching lines for both starts:

Thursday 5/17: 6.2 IP, 1 R, 5 H, 3 BB, 3 K

Tuesday 5/22: 7.0 IP, 1 R, 6 H, 1 BB, 6 K

During bullpen session between starts, Nottingham continues to fine tune his mechanics and has been working on repeating his delivery. Nottingham is a fundamentally sound pitcher with a fastball that sits in the low 90s, and he compliments it with a curveball and changeup.

On the year, in eight starts he is 4-2 with a 2.49 ERA and has allowed 39 hits and 22 walks while striking out 32 in 50.2 innings pitched. (By the way, that is my son pictured with Shawn.)

Honorable Mention:

Asdrubal Cabrera (SS - Akron): .389 AVG (7-18), 4 R, 2 2B, 2 HR, 6 RBI, 5 SB

J.D. Martin (RHP - Akron): 0-0, 1 start, 0.00 ERA, 7 IP, 3 H, 0 ER, 1 BB, 4 K

Michael Aubrey (1B - Kinston): .429 AVG (6-14), 6 R, 3 2B, 2 HR, 6 RBI

Ben Francisco (OF - Buffalo): .435 AVG (10-23), 4 R, 1 2B, 3 RBI, 2 SB

Previous Winners:

5/10 to 5/16: Matt Whitney (1B - Lake County)

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 is in Akron this week taking in the action, and offered these thoughts on some of the players in the Indians system:



On Chuck Lofgren- While he is not on pace to match his outstanding statistical season last year when he won 17 games and had a sub-3.00 ERA, he is showing all the signs he showed last year from a projection standpoint. He is an exciting power left-handed arm who is at an advanced level given his age and the fact he is in Double-A.

On Shawn Nottingham- He is having a breakthrough season, although if you look at his minor league career he has always been a consistent pitcher. He is "definitely making friends in the organization" with his play to date, especially at 21 years old and already being in Double-A. He has a good delivery, an average fastball, and a good feel for all four of his pitches.

On Michael Aubrey- Aubrey's season was delayed because of an unfortunate hamstring injury he suffered at the end of spring training.

They took it slow with him in his recovery and didn't push him, and when he was finally 100% running the bases in extended spring training games, they moved him to Kinston this past week.

They know he can hit, but it is a matter of him staying healthy.

Cabrera Getting Offensive

The Indians sent shortstop Asdrubal Cabrera down a level to Akron this year to work on his issues offensively, and to date he has been the rave down in Akron. Prior to coming to Cleveland in a trade last June for Eduardo Perez, Cabrera had been

rushed through the Seattle system, and in fact had skipped Double-A completely. Cabrera's glove work is unquestionably good, but it is his bat which needs the most attention, which is why the Indians started him this year in Akron.

Things could not have worked out better for Cabrera, as to date Cabrera is playing at an all-star level not only

defensively, but offensively as well. On the season, Cabrera is hitting .324 with six home runs and 20 RBIs, 12 stolen bases and has walked 21 times while striking out only 18 times in 139 at bats.

The home runs and stolen base production have been a surprise, as both are career highs and we are barely are only seven weeks into the season.

Cabrera's high average and increased extra base hit production is a result of his hard work with his offensive approach, and the stolen bases are a result of him having deceptive speed and being an intelligent baserunner.

More impressive, is his batting average (AVG), on-base percentage (OBP), slugging percentage (SLG), and OPS this year compared to his career numbers coming into the season:

2007: .324 AVG, .411 OBP, .532 SLG, and .943 OPS

Career: .273 AVG, .334 OBP, .402 SLG, and .736 OPS

When compared to his career numbers, he clearly is playing at a high level offensively as his OPS is over 200

points above career levels. It remains to be seen if he finally may be developing some plate discipline and a better approach at the plate, or if this is just a hot start and that he will eventually cool.

We'll see, but he is someone to pay special attention to going forward.

One thing is certain, he could figure into the Indians starting shortstop mix as soon as next year if he keeps this up (Peralta would move to third base).

Indians Settle For Projection In Return For Davis

The Jason Davis trade to the Seattle Mariners was finally completed earlier this week. The Indians had traded Davis to Seattle for a player to be named later, and after a few days the Indians eventually settled on right-handed pitcher Gregorio Rosario. Rosario is an 18-year old pitcher who has pitched in the Dominican Summer League (DSL) the last two years, and



~~Goedert Callup Looming?~~ Goedert Callup Looming?



Lake County third-baseman Jared Goedert may be on the verge of a callup to Kinston. Indians General Manager Mark Shapiro was recently quoted that he acknowledges that they need to get Goedert to advanced Single-A Kinston "so he can be challenged."

Farm Director Ross Atkins was also at Classic Park to take in a Lake County double-header this past Saturday, and may have wanted to get a firsthand look at Goedert.

Atkins appearance in Lake County on Saturday also marked the debut of Goedert playing at second base, and since then has only started at second base when playing the field. With the highly touted Wes Hodges at third base in Kinston blocking Goedert, the Indians appear to be experimenting with Goedert at second base to see if he can handle it before moving him up.

The position change is a creative way to get Goedert up to Kinston without having to sacrifice playing time at third base for Hodges or unnecessarily push him up to Akron too soon.

Plus, Goedert is limited at third base, and a position change to the right side of the infield was probably inevitable anyway.

Shapiro, Atkins and the rest of the organization are excited by what they have seen from Goedert to date. Shapiro mentioned that they are not at all surprised by the offensive outburst

from Goedert in that they "liked his offensive potential when they drafted him, but no one ever saw this coming."

Atkins also says his great start in Lake County is a springboard off of a "great spring training in Florida this year" and that "everyone in the organization is excited about him."

Of note, Goedert's on-base streak ended on Sunday when he was held without a hit or walk for the first time in 33 games. In fact, Goedert is starting to cool off and he has hit his first rough patch of the season as in his last ten games he is hitting .243 with two home runs and six RBI.

On the year, he is hitting .347 with 15 HR, 40 RBI and a 1.187 OPS in 42 games.

Miller Injured, But Good To Go

Fans were left to hold their collective

breaths earlier in the week when the prized jewel of the Indians system Adam Miller was scratched from a scheduled start last Thursday. It turns out that Miller had a bone bruise to the top joint of the middle

finger on his throwing hand, which was found a few days earlier when he complained of some discomfort in the finger in a regular bullpen session between starts.

As a precaution, the Indians shut him down for a few days, and after a good bullpen session earlier in the week he will make his next scheduled start today (Thursday). It is believed the injury is a result of all the torque he puts on his middle finger when he pitches, so this could be something to monitor going forward.

On the year, in seven starts Miller is 4-1 with a 2.45 ERA, and has allowed 37 hits and 14 walks while striking out 39 in 44 innings pitched.

Aubrey Not Done Yet

First baseman Michael Aubrey returned to action this week, and maybe the call into the coroner on his career can be put on hold for now. Aubrey has played three games since his return, and is hitting 6-for-14 with two home runs and six RBI.

The



question has never been about Aubrey's ability to hit or field, it is all about his health. This is of no surprise because

when Aubrey plays, he performs.

In 238 career minor league games, he has hit .318 with a .403 OBP and .520 SLG with 37 HRs and 193 RBIs.

Since being drafted in the 1st round of the 2003 Draft out of Tulane University, staying on the field to put up those numbers has been his problem. Aubrey has endured many long spells on the disabled list with leg and back issues and those 238 games played have come over 3 ½ seasons (roughly 460 possible games).

Last year, for the second straight year, he was lost early in the season when he injured himself sliding into second base

and suffered a surface fracture on his right knee joint.

His days as an impact prospect are all but over, which is unfortunate, but if he can find a way to stay healthy he may still be able to salvage his once promising career. When healthy, Aubrey is a superior defender and good hitter with gap power. But, the man has been a china doll since being drafted by the Indians, and this year might be Aubrey's last chance in the organization.

The Wright Stuff

So far this season, the starting pitching has been pretty bad at

Single-A Lake County, but the one bright spot has probably been right-hander Steven Wright. Wright, a 2006 2nd round pick out of the University of Hawaii, has clearly been the best

of the starters going 3-4 with a 4.73 ERA in nine starts. Last Thursday he allowed two runs in six innings, striking out five and walking one,. and then on Tuesday he only pitched four innings and gave up two runs on two hits and two walks, but struckout ten.

Even though he was a 2006 draft pick, Wright is actually making his professional debut this season since he did not play last season because of a bout with mono that sidelined him most of the summer. At the University of Hawaii last year, Wright went 11-2 with a 2.30 ERA, and in 109.2 innings only allowed 19 walks while striking out 123.

He also was tabbed the WAC Pitcher of the Year in 2006, and also received the Russ Ford Award as the Cape Cod Baseball League's best relief pitcher in 2005.

Wright has very good makeup and a fastball that hovers in the low 90s, but the best pitch in his arsenal is a slider that grades as a plus pitch.

He'll be a starter early in his professional career, but as he climbs up the minor league ladder many feel he will eventually end up in the bullpen.

Not-So-Good Welcome To Triple-A

Well then. Indians left-handed pitching prospect Aaron Laffey

got a good dose of Triple-A hitting this week. Laffey was called up last Thursday when Adam Miller was scratched from his scheduled start, and in

his Triple-A debut he actually pitched okay going six innings and allowing four runs on eight hits a walk and struckout three.

But, on Tuesday night he was bombed and had the following line: 2.2 IP, 10 R, 12 H, 3 BB, and 0 K. Ouch. The third inning

was such a nightmare, he probably envisioned Freddy Krueger at the plate while he was giving up nine runs in the inning.

Laffey had pitched well at Akron prior to the callup, as in six starts he was 4-1 with a 2.31 ERA and his control was good in that he only allowed seven walks in 35 innings pitched.

But, in his two starts with Buffalo he has had trouble with his command and he has paid dearly for it.

Some of it obviously could be nerves, so we shall see if he can settle in over his next start or two.

That is, if he sticks, since he likely will go back to Akron once Adam Miller and/or Brian Slocum rejoin the rotation.

Newsom Gets Noticed

Akron right-hander Randy Newsom is another player the Indians received in a trade

last year, and was the
"player to be named
later" the Indians
obtained from the Red Sox to
complete the Coco Crisp deal.

In an odd twist of fate,
Newsom had

been messing around on the
mound at the end of spring
training in 2005 throwing
submarine style, and Red Sox

officials saw it and approached him about actually going with the approach. The Indians were piqued by this unique arm slot, and since arriving in the organization he has turned some heads.

Newsome was the Mills Cup Finals MVP last year for Kinston's championship team, and in three games pitched 5.1 innings without allowing a

run and yielded only one hit and one walk while striking out five. In 39 total regular season appearances last year in the minors he went 4-3 with two saves and a 3.24 ERA.

This year, in 16 combined appearances at Kinston and Akron, Newsom is 1-1 with one save and a 2.16 ERA out of the bullpen, and has given up 15 hits, 2 walks and struckout 12 in 16.2 innings

pitched.

Smith On Cruise Control

Buffalo right-handed pitcher Sean Smith put in another very good outing on Sunday, going 5.1 innings and allowing one run



on six hits and a walk while striking out seven. The outing improved his record to 4-1 and his ERA of 1.77 is

ranked second in the International League (IL).

The start by Smith just adds more fuel to the fire why Smith was not in the starting rotation to start the year.

Smith opened the season in the Buffalo bullpen because there were supposedly no open spots in the Buffalo rotation (Hello, Jeff Harris??

Come on.).

Smith finally got his opportunity when Brian Slocum went on the disabled list and Rafael Perez was called up for a short stint in Cleveland.

Gutierrez Streak Halted

Buffalo outfielder Franklin

Gutierrez returned to Buffalo this past Saturday, and picked up right where he left off. When he



was called up to Cleveland a few weeks ago, he left behind a 16-game hitting streak that would be waiting for him upon his return to Buffalo. Gutierrez extended the streak to 19 games on

Monday, a game which featured him hitting a game-winning walk off home run in the ninth inning, but the streak was halted on Tuesday when he went hitless in five at bats.

Gutierrez has had a very good year in Buffalo, and is hitting .340 with three home runs and 13 RBI on

the year in 23 games.

Award Winners

Right-hander Sean Smith was named the International League Pitcher of the Week after going 2-0 with a 0.79 ERA in two starts. In 11.1 innings pitched he allowed 9 runs, 3 walks

and had 11 strikeouts.

Kinston catcher/utility player Chris Gimenez was named the Carolina League Player of the Week after he went 6-for-15 with 4 home runs, 10 RBI and put up a 1.267 slugging percentage in five games.

On the season, Gimenez is hitting .269 with nine home runs, 21 RBI, and a .930 OPS in 108 at bats.

Standings Overview

Through Wednesday 5/23, here are the records for the Indians four minor league affiliates with their

standing in their league
division in parentheses:

Buffalo: 26-16 (1st)

Akron: 26-18 (1st)

Kinston: 26-16 (1st)

Lake County: 20-25 (5th)

Minor Rumblings

With the Lake County

pitching staff struggling, some people have wondered when/if some changes will be made to the staff there. Here are some rumors from extended spring training:

Right-hander Joanniel Montero had been

called up from extended spring training to make a spot start in Lake County this week, but after he was impressive in the start going 5.2 innings of shutout ball and only allowing three hits, it appears he will be kept on the roster and

right-hander Mike Eisenberg may be sent to Winter Haven. At press time, this move is not official, but is expected to be announced sometime today.

Right-hander Erik Stiller is expected to be

activated from extended spring training and be called up to Kinston. Also, left-hander William Delage is still in extended spring training, but the rumor is that he is having elbow problems.

Reportedly, the severity of the injury is unknown at this time.

Affiliate Notebook



Buffalo Notes- Jason Stanford pitched seven innings in his last start and did not

allow a run while
allowing XX hits. ...
Buffalo infielder Hector
Luna committed three
errors in Saturday's
game, and now has
committed 12 errors
on the year. ... Buffalo
was shutout for the
first time on Saturday
night. ... Buffalo

catcher Mike Rose was placed on the disabled list with a hamstring strain, and catcher Yamid Haad was activated from extended spring training. ... Outfielder Ben Francisco is hitting .348 with 3 HR, 13 RBI, 10 stolen

bases, and has a .902 OPS in 138 at bats. ... Outfielder Brad Snyder is hitting .280 with 3 HR, 17 RBI, 7 stolen bases, and has a .833 OPS in 107 at bats.



Akron Notes- After consecutive starts

where he took a no-hitter into the sixth inning, left-hander Chuck Lofgren was roughed up on Friday in giving up six runs on 11 hits and five walks in just 3.2 innings pitched. Yuck. ... Five members of the

Indians front office
were in attendance for
Akron's game at Canal
Park on Wednesday
night, possibly to get a
firsthand look at
Lofgren who started
the game. ... Outfielder
Trevor Crowe
continues his Joe
Charboneau-esque

slide and is now hitting .170 with one home run, 15 RBI, and has a .520 OPS in 159 at bats (41 games).

He is currently in a 2-for-23 slide and was finally removed from the leadoff spot in the order and moved to

the bottom third of the lineup to try and spark him. ... Right-hander Nick Pesco was added to the roster from Buffalo. ... Outfielder Brian Barton is hitting .276 with 4 HR, 23 RBI, 7 stolen bases, and has an .818 OPS in 145 at bats.



Parting Shots

Buffalo right-handed reliever Brian Sikorksi was sold to the Yakult Swallows of the Japanese Central League. The Indians have had a working

relationship with the Yakult Swallows the past several years, and Sikorski had pitched in Japan for four and half years prior to last season.

Sikorski had an 0-1 record and 3.52 ERA

with two saves at Buffalo.

Akron infielder Shaun Larkin has been on the disabled list all season, but has been a coach in training with the Aeros this year. The Indians

approached Larkin about serving in a player/coach role, where he is handling first base coaching duties, sitting in on in-game decisions made by Aeros manager Tim Bogar and his staff, hitting

fun goes to infielders
in practice, and
throwing batting
practice.