

Minor Happenings: Gimenez Showing Versatility In Kinston

Written by {ga=consigliere}
Friday, June 15 2007 7:00 PM -

The minor league season is nearing the halfway point as Single-A leagues have their All-Star Games this coming Tuesday, short-season leagues get started up on Tuesday, and the Double-A and Triple-A leagues get ready for the All-Star games in early July. Lastoria chimes in again with his weekly minor league recap, touching on the progress of Adam Miller's injured finger, the breakout of utility player Chris Gimenez, the rebounds of Aaron Laffey and Jim Ed Warden, and more. Also, look for Minor Happenings to return to its normal Thursday afternoon timeslot now that the Cavaliers season is over.



"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.

Just a quick note to mention that *Minor Happenings* returns to its normal day a timeslot next Thursday afternoon.

With the Cleveland Cavaliers playoff run over, routine is restored to the site.

Also, a quick shout out to the Cavaliers for a nice season.

Hopefully we can make the necessary changes in the offseason to be holding up that trophy after next season.

Anyway...

TheClevelandFan.com Minor League Player Of The Week
(for games from June 8 through June 14)

Chris Gimenez (Utility - Kinston)

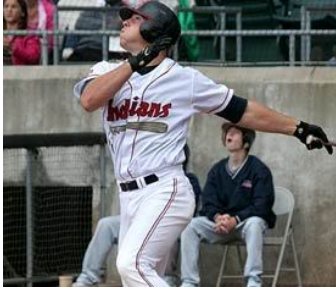
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.381 AVG (8-21), 9 R, 2 2B, 3 HR, 11 RBI, 4 BB

Kinston utility player Chris Gimenez was drafted in the 19th round out of the University of Nevada-Reno, and put up two disappointing seasons offensively in 2005 and 2006 at Lake County hitting a combined .244 with 24 home runs and 106 RBIs



in 203 games. This year, Gimenez is having a breakthrough season hitting .288 with 15 HR, 37 RBI, and a 1.027 OPS in 52 games.

It has certainly been a memorable season to date for Gimenez, as last Friday Gimenez hit two home runs and drove in a career high seven runs, and back on May 16th he hit three home runs in a game. Gimenez's success this year is the result of a lot of hard work in the cages with Kinston hitting coach Jon Nunnally, and focusing his approach on getting into good hitter's counts and learning to lay off pitches that are unhittable.

To date, he also has 27 walks to 29 strikeouts.

Gimenez's career and life almost took a turn for the worst around this time two years ago when he contracted a severe staph infection to his right leg. The staph infection was so bad, he was hospitalized and doctors could not control the infection and it was starting to spread to his right groin area.

The situation was so serious, doctors told him if the swelling didn't go down overnight, his leg would be amputated the next morning.

When the doctors returned the next morning, the swelling had neither increased or decreased,

so the doctors gave it a few more hours, and thankfully one of the medicines in his IV began to work and the infection started to subside.

Gimenez was literally minutes from losing his leg, ending his baseball career, and having his life severely altered.

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Last year, Gimenez was injured sliding into second base, this time tearing ligaments in his thumb when it was caught under the bag as he slid through the base. He ended up going on the disabled list for two months. Now completely healthy, Gimenez is finally starting to show his value.

Gimenez has more than made a name for himself in his utility role, as not only does he play catcher, but he also plays the outfield, third base and first base.

If he can continue to hit and show good power as he climbs the minor league ladder, he could be a very valuable bench option for the Indians or another major league team down the road because of that versatility.

Honorable Mentions:

Aaron Laffey (LHP - Buffalo): 1-0, 0.00 ERA, 6 IP, 2 H, 0 R, 1 BB, 6 K

Brian Barton (OF - Akron): .476 AVG (10-21), 4 R, 2 RBI, 4 BB, 1 SB

Stephen Head (1B - Kinston): .500 (13-26), 8 R, 2B, 2HR, 6 RBI, 1 BB

Wes Hodges (3B - Kinston): .478 AVG (11-23), 10 R, 2 2B, 1 HR, 4 RBI, 4 BB

Previous Winners:

6/1 to 6/7: Aaron Laffey (LHP - Buffalo)

5/24 to 5/31: Josh Rodriguez (SS - Kinston)

5/17 to 5/23: Shawn Nottingham (LHP - Akron)

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 shared some thoughts on some Tribe prospects this week:

On Aaron Laffey: Since being called up to Buffalo, Laffey has done much better than they expected him to do. The

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Miller Set To Return

Talk about bad timing. Had phenom right-handed starting pitcher Adam Miller not suffered a finger injury a few weeks back, it is very possible we could have seen the debut of Mr. Miller with the Indians instead of Jason Stanford this past Thursday. With two spots in the Indians rotation in huge question, Adam Miller almost certainly would have been given a

chance at filling one of the spots by now.

Instead, Miller is sitting on the Buffalo disabled list working his way back into the starting rotation. Miller has taken the setback well, and actually has shown some signs of maturity when he injured the finger. When he came down with the injury, the Indians had him skip a start, but when warming up before his start on May 24th

he still experienced pain in the finger.

Instead of trying to pitch through it like a lot of kids do, he told the Buffalo coaching staff and now is on the road to recovery.

This was good to see, as two years ago he threw through elbow problems and ending up straining some ligaments and missing a few months of the 2005 season, which set him back almost a whole year in his development.

Right now, Miller is still rehabbing the finger injury to his throwing hand. Miller has been flat-ground throwing at distances between 75-100 feet the past week, and

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threw a bullpen session on Wednesday.

He is scheduled to throw simulated games this coming week on June 21 and 22, and if all goes well should get back into the Buffalo rotation by month's end.

Tough Break For Huff

After experiencing soreness on the back of his elbow, Kinston left-handed starting pitcher David Huff was shutdown last week and placed on the disabled list. He flew to Cleveland for an MRI on Monday, and it was discovered that he has a

strained ligament in his throwing elbow. Huff will be out of action for six weeks, and in the meantime will rehab at the Indians spring training complex in Winter Haven, Florida.

The Indians feel the injury may have lingered for most of the season as the elbow had been bothering Huff for some time, and they feel they may have caught the injury before it could get worse. Huff's spot in the rotation has been temporarily filled by left-hander Dan Cevette, and a more permanent solution will be determined over the weekend since the first half wraps up tomorrow (Sunday).

Huff was the Indians top draft pick in 2006, a first round supplemental pick drafted out of UCLA.

On the year, in 11 starts Huff is 4-2 with a 2.72 ERA and has allowed 57 hits and 15 walks while striking out 46 in 59.2 innings pitched.

Holding His Own At Buffalo

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Whitney Walkoff

Since the callup of infielder Jared Goedert to Kinston, the Lake County offense has really struggled. With most of the lineup mired in a slump, Lake County first baseman Matt Whitney continues to be a spark. Last Friday, Whitney provided

Captains fans with fireworks in dramatic fashion by hitting a two-out two-run walkoff home run in the ninth inning to win the game 5-4 for Lake County.

This is Whitney's third stint in Lake County, having played there in 2004 and 2005 as well, but at third base. Whitney is a former first round pick out of high school in the 2002 Draft, and after showing so much promise in the summer of 2002 after being signed, a serious leg injury sidelined him for all of the 2003 season and he spent the last three years coming back from it. Whitney lost some of his mobility, so was moved to first base, and it appears the move has settled him down and his offense has flourished.

Whitney was rewarded by being named the starter at first base for the Northern Division team in the South Atlantic League All-Star Game to be played June 19 in Rome, Georgia.

The Single-A All-Star games on June 19th, and the short-season leagues for the Mahoning Valley and GCL squads starting up on June 19

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as well, there will be a lot of roster movement in Kinston and Lake County, particularly in Lake County.

With the conclusion of the All-Star game, Whitney could very well be moved to Kinston.

Congrats To Kinston

The first half comes to a close on Sunday in the Carolina League, but the advanced Single-A Kinston Indians clinched the



first half Southern Division title outright on Wednesday. Kinston (44-23) capped off a great first half of the season, and they now have secured an automatic berth in the Carolina League playoffs this September.

This will be the seventh straight year Kinston has made the playoffs, which is the longest streak ever for a team in the 62-year history of the Carolina League.

This is also the fourth straight year that Kinston wrapped up a playoff berth by winning the first half title.

By earning the playoff berth, they will now be able to defend their 2006 Carolina League title this September.

Kinston Utility Infielder "Cruz"ing

Kinston utility infielder Chris De La Cruz has been swinging a hot bat of late, and has moved into a starting role since infielder Brian Finegan was sidelined.

De La Cruz is a versatile 25-year-old Dominican Republic native who can play anywhere in the infield and has decent speed.

He had a streak of five straight multi-hit games snapped on Tuesday, and an 11-game hitting streak snapped on Wednesday.

De La Cruz is ranked second in the league in hitting, and on the year he is hitting

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.316 with 1 HR, 21 RBI, and a .755 OPS.

In his last ten games is hitting .395.

Warden Working His Way Back

Akron right-handed reliever Jim Ed Warden has had a rough go of it to start the season, and was recently demoted from Buffalo to Akron. Warden is a sidearm pitcher, and he had a fantastic season last year at Akron going 5-2 with 11 saves and a 2.90 ERA.

His great season and unique arm slot ended up making him attractive in the Rule V Draft this past offseason, and he was selected by Philadelphia.

After failing to make the Philadelphia opening day roster out of spring

training, by rule Philadelphia sent Warden back to the Indians.

Since his return, however, he has not been the same pitcher as at Buffalo this year Warden was 1-1 with a 7.38 ERA in 16 appearances. He throws a low 90s fastball with good movement, but he has been overthrowing which has resulted in a lot of his pitches ending up higher in the strike zone and flattening out.

Akron pitching coach Greg Hibbard took Warden aside upon his arrival from Buffalo, and had him work in a bullpen session just throwing fastballs and throwing through the catcher without monitoring balls and strikes.

The simple approach was designed to help Warden concentrate more on his effort when throwing rather than making pitches and commanding the strike zone.

The results have been positive, as since being moved to Akron, Warden is 0-0 with a 1.08 ERA in six games.

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Carolina Stars



Kinston had four players selected to take part in the California/Carolina League All-Star Game on June 19 in Stockton, California. The players selected were catcher Max Ramirez, utility player Chris Gimenez, left-handed starting pitcher David Huff, and right-handed starting pitcher Frank Herrmann.

With David Huff now on the disabled list, Kinston right-handed reliever Jim Deters was selected to take Huff's place on the All-Star team.

Kinston manager Mike Sarbaugh will manage the Carolina League club.

The advanced Single-A All-Star games pits the two advanced leagues in the Carolina and California Leagues against one another.

Short-Season Startup

Short season leagues in the NY-Penn League (Mahoning Valley Scrappers) and the Gulf Coast League (GCL Indians) kickoff this coming Tuesday, June 19th. The makeup of the rosters are still in question, but the Mahoning Valley roster should be

mostly made up of recent college draft picks from the 2006 and 2007 drafts, and the GCL Indians roster mostly made up of high school players taken in the 2006 and 2007 drafts as well as Latin players. 2007 first round pick Beau Mills is signed, and will report to Mahoning Valley for a cup of coffee before he likely is moved to Lake County for most of the year.

Rehab Roundup

Indians right-handed starting pitcher Jake Westbrook continued his rehab assignment this past week, making two starts,



one in Akron and one in Lake County. The numbers have been horrific, but the most important thing is that Westbrook is getting his work in and appears to be healthy and has not suffered any setbacks.

Westbrook has been sidelined since May 3 with a left abdominal strain, and is now up to around a 70 pitch count and throwing all his pitches.

Westbrook will get one more rehab start on Monday and is scheduled to throw 90 pitches, and if all goes well he likely will be activated from the disabled list next week.

In three rehab starts, Westbrook is 0-3 with a 12.46 ERA and has allowed 18 hits and 4 walks while striking out 8 in 8.2 innings pitched.

Right-handed reliever Cliff Politte has started his minor league rehab in Akron, making his debut last Friday. Politte is recovering from rotator cuff surgery, and is someone who could figure into the bullpen mix in Cleveland

at some point this season. He is scheduled to pitch in Akron for two weeks, and then the Indians will reassess his situation at that time with a possible move to Buffalo.

In three appearances so far at Akron, he has pitched a total of 2.2 innings, allowed two hits, three walks and an earned run, and struckout five.

The Indians signed Politte to a minor league contract in February as a low risk gamble, but if he can regain his

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2005 form with the Chicago White Sox when he went 7-1 with a 2.00 ERA in 68 games, the Indians may have a good option to turn to in July for the bullpen.

While not injured physically, left-hander Jeremy Sowers is in Buffalo to get himself straightened out and rehab himself mentally. He made his first start for Buffalo on Thursday night, and pitched well going seven innings and allowing three runs on eight hits and one walk while striking out one.

Award Winners

Buffalo third baseman Andy Marte was named International League Batter of the Week this past week. For the week, Marte went 12-for-26 (.462) at the plate and hit safely in all eight games played. He also had three doubles, four home runs, 11 RBIs and had a 1.038 slugging percentage.

In 27 games, Marte is now hitting .264 with 7 HR, 20 RBI and an .884 OPS at Buffalo.

Akron left-handed starter Reid Santos was named the Eastern League Pitcher of the Week this past week. Santos, 24, went 1-0 in two starts, putting up a 0.90 ERA allowing one run on six hits and two walks while striking out five in ten innings pitched. Santos was just recently moved into the starting rotation as he has now made three starts, and on the season he is 3-1 with a 1.60 ERA.

Transactions Log

Akron catcher Javi Herrera was traded to the Washington Nationals. What the Indians received in return is not known at this time, but this is probably a cash deal of some sort.

Herrera was hitting .167 (9-for-54) with 0 HR and 6 RBI for Akron, and prior to this season in four years in the Indians system from 2003-2006 hit .243 with 21 HR and 148 RBI in 342 games.

Herrera was a second round pick in the 2003 Draft out of the University of Tennessee.

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Catcher Armando Camacaro was activated from the disabled list to fill the void left by Herrera's departure.

Infielder Jared Goedert has been slow to get it going since being called up to Kinston, and now will be sidelined for awhile with an injury. On Wednesday, the Indians placed Goedert on the disabled list with a sore shoulder.

Infielder Cristo Arnal was summoned from extended spring training to take Goedert's spot on the Kinston roster.

First baseman Michael Aubrey was moved up from Kinston to Akron. In 13 games at Kinston, Aubrey hit .400 with 5 HR and 11 RBI.

Long-time Akron outfielder John Van Every was promoted to Buffalo to make room for Aubrey.

Affiliate Notebook



Buffalo Notes: Outfielder Ben Francisco's 19-game hitting streak came to an end last Friday. ... Former utility player Bill Selby and former general manager Don Colpoys were elected to the Buffalo Baseball Hall of Fame last week.

Selby ranks first in hits (378), doubles (90), RBIs (245) and runs (217), and is second in games played (370) and third in home runs (60) in Buffalo's history in the modern era. ... Right-hander Sean Smith had a perfect game going through 6.2 innings on Monday night, then couldn't get anyone out the next third of an inning allowing four runs on five hits and a walk.

... Left-handed veteran Eric Dubose was signed recently, and made a strong debut this week pitching five innings and allowing only five hits and one run. ... With Jensen Lewis being called up to Buffalo, backup catcher Dave Wallace was sent to Akron.

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Akron Notes:

Left-hander Chuck Lofgren made a spot start for Buffalo last Friday, going five innings and allowing six runs on seven hits and three walks while striking out seven. In his return start at Akron on Thursday, Lofgren pitched six shutout innings and allowed only four hits and three walks while striking out four.... When outfielder John Van Every was called up to Buffalo, he left Akron in the midst of a modest 14-game hitting streak, and on the year was hitting .344 with 14 doubles, 5 triples, 4 home runs and 34 RBI. ... Catcher Armando Camacaro was activated and added to the Akron roster after Herrera was traded, and in his first game went 3-for-4 at the plate with a double, home run and five RBI. ... Infielder Rodney Choy Foo was activated from the Akron disabled list, and infielder Shaun Larkin went back on it with a right calf strain.



Kinston Notes: On Friday night, Kinston put up season highs in runs (21), hits (23), doubles (6), and home runs (6) in a 21-6 win. Eight Kinston players had at least two hits, and five players had three hits.

The Indians hit back-to-back home runs twice in the game, and sent nine men to the plate four different innings in the game.

A fun night at the ballpark for Kinston fans, that's for sure. ... Right-hander Sung-Wei Tseng finally earned his first win of the year on Thursday.

While he has a 1-5 record, he has a 3.80 ERA and had only received 20 runs of run support in 12 prior starts. ... Left-hander Ryan Edell continues to put up a solid season, and is now 7-2 on the year with a 3.30 ERA. ... Kinston utility player Jerad Head has a badly sprained ankle that he injured during batting practice on Tuesday when he stepped on the lip of the infield and rolled his ankle.

He is out indefinitely. ... With David Huff going on the disabled list, right-hander Nick Pesco was added to the roster.



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Lake County Notes: Outfielder Roman Pena's streak of 29 straight games of reaching base came to an end last Saturday. ... Outfielder Lucas Montero was activated from the disabled list. ... Catcher Matt McBride is hitting .284 with 4 HR, 33 RBI and has an .801 OPS.