

Minor Happenings: Sowers Turns His Season Around

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Wednesday, August 01 2007 7:00 PM -

Back from a well deserved week of vacation, Tony Lastoria checks right back into his Thursday night slot in the lineup with his "Minor Happenings" column, the best source of info on the Indians farm system in existence. T updates us on the strong comeback from the exiled Jeremy Sowers, previews the arrival in Cleveland of Aaron Laffey, provides Adam Miller and Trevor Crowe updates, and gives us his complete thoughts on dealing Max Ramirez for Kenny Lofton.



"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, from private sources connected to the Indians organization, as well as from club officials from the team itself.

For those that may have missed them, a few player interviews were posted last week while I was out. If you get a chance, check out the articles on Mahoning Valley right-handed pitcher

[Mike Eisenberg](#)

, Lake County third baseman

[Beau Mills](#)

, and Akron outfielder

[Brian Barton](#)

Coming soon, I'll have articles from interviews I conducted with Lake County's Matt McBride and Nick Weglarz, and also players I spoke to last week in Winter Haven such as Jason Smit, Kyle Harper, and Robbie Alcombrack.

As for *Minor Happenings*, due to the week layoff, there is a lot of material to try and catch up on. So, it will post in two parts this week. Part one, today, will cover some of the more involved and important stuff that happened the last two weeks, and the entries will be a bit longer than normal.

Part two will post tomorrow and have the rest of the news as well as some comments from Ross Atkins and the Player of the Month for July.

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TheClevelandFan.com Minor League Player Of The Week

(for games from July 20 through August 1)

Jeremy Sowers - (Left-handed pitcher, Buffalo)

1-0, 0.91 ERA, 3 starts, 19.2 IP, 18 H, 2 R, 5 BB, 16 K

The resuscitation of left-hander Jeremy Sowers continues in Buffalo, and he is starting to show signs of life. Sowers was



optioned to Buffalo back in June after going 1-6 with a 6.93 ERA in 12 starts in Cleveland, and in his first six appearances in Buffalo his struggles continued as he went 0-4 with a 5.82 ERA in six starts. But, in Sowers last three starts he appears to have turned the corner, and the highlight was a complete game 6-hitter he threw on July 20th where he allowed no earned runs while walking three and striking out eight.

Sowers is working hard to become more consistent from start to start and also get his confidence back, and that work is starting to pay off. Restoring his confidence and getting him to be more aggressive is the key to what the organization feels will go a long way at getting him back to being the crafty young left-hander who should be a stalwart in the Indians rotation for years to come.

Honorable Mention:

Jim Deters (RHP - Kinston): 1-0, 0.53 ERA, 3 starts, 15 IP, 7 H, 1 ER, 2 BB, 12 K

Armando Camacaro (C - Kinston): .333 AVG (9-27), 6 R, 4 2B, 4 HR, 11 RBI, 2 BB

Beau Mills (3B - Lake County): .318 AVG (14-44), 11 R, 4 2B, 1 3B, 2 HR, 14 RBI, 6 BB

Cirilo Cumberbatch (OF - Lake County): .371 AVG (13-35), 9 R, 1 3B, 4 HR, 11 RBI, 7 BB, 2 SB

Todd Martin (1B - Mahoning Valley): .394 AVG (13-33), 5 R, 2 2B, 1 HR, 6 RBI, 3 BB

Previous Winners:

7/12 to 7/19: Todd Martin (1B - Mahoning Valley)

7/5 to 7/11: Todd Martin (1B - Mahoning Valley)

6/28 to 7/4: Rodney Choy Foo (IF - Akron)

6/21 to 6/27: Reid Santos (LHP - Akron)

6/15 to 6/20: John Van Every (Outfielder - Buffalo)

6/8 to 6/14: Chris Gimenez (Utility - Kinston)

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

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

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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)

Breaking Down The Ramirez-Lofton Trade

The Indians completed a deal with the Texas Rangers last Friday, sending highly touted catcher Max Ramirez to the Rangers and in return received outfielder Kenny Lofton. The Indians paid a steep price in giving up on the offensively talented Ramirez for Lofton, who essentially will be a two or three month rental, although it is not out of the realm of possibility having Lofton here gives us an inside track to resign him this offseason (if the Indians even want to).

Ramirez is an outstanding hitting prospect. He is an excellent hitter and has an advanced approach at the plate, but his main problem is he truly is a man without a position since he is a liability defensively. He is a converted catcher and has



for the most part been awful behind the plate, which will probably necessitate a move to first base (or possibly back to third base) in the Texas system. Long term, he probably will be a first baseman/designated hitter in the majors and be a solid contributor offensively.

He was clearly one of the Indians best hitting prospects, and would have been ranked as a Top 10 Indians prospect next year, so his loss will certainly be felt.

He played in the Futures Game this past July, and was hitting .303 with 12 HR, 62 RBI, and a .924 OPS in Kinston at the time of the trade.

So, was trading Ramirez for Lofton worth it? Short-term, yes, as Lofton brings something this team sorely needed in the lineup: speed. With a bunch of base-cloggers up and down the lineup, the addition of Lofton will help the overall team speed, and also add a left-handed hitter with great ability to get on base and make consistent contact at the plate.

Long-term, though, we'll be hearing fans on talk shows and message boards two to three years from now complain how we gave Ramirez away when he is hitting well with the Rangers and Lofton is long gone.

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Bottom line, I'm fine with trading Ramirez. At the moment he is a catcher, and down the road a first baseman/designated hitter.

The Indians have two long term solutions already at catcher in the majors in Victor Martinez and Kelly Shoppach, and some quality depth in the farm system with Wyatt Toregas in Akron, Matt McBride in Lake County, and Robbie Alcombrack in the GCL.

And at first base, the Indians have long term solutions there as well with the Ryan Garko-Travis Hafner-Victor Martinez combo in the majors, and then Ryan Mulhern in Buffalo, Michael Aubrey and Jordan Brown in Akron, Matt Whitney in Kinston, and Todd Martin in Mahoning Valley.

Heck, Beau Mills may also end up at first base permanently down the road.

So, knowing that, Ramirez was a good tradable asset. In a few years when Ramirez produces with Texas, I just hope when people whine and complain on the airwaves and message boards that we never should have traded him they realize Ramirez likely would never get a chance here with Victor, Hafner, Shoppach and Garko here for many more years, as well as several quality players in the system at first base and catcher.

My only problem with the Ramirez trade is maybe we did not get enough for him.

Lofton is a three month rental, so I would have hoped we used a chip like him for a player assured to help us and also be here awhile.

But, in the end, I can live with the trade.

Waiting On Laffey

Boy, you go out of town for a week and a half, and all hell breaks loose.

The Aaron Laffey saga which went down last week is truly one of the most bizarre stories of the year in the Indians system, if not the past couple years. I was on vacation, so I actually missed all the chaos, speculation, and so on that went on for a few days when rumors were running rampant he was being called up.

I even received 20 or so e-mails asking about what was going on with Laffey and the Indians.

To recap, on Sunday 7/22 Laffey left his start early after only 2.1 innings and 48 pitches thrown.

Laffey was not hurt, and

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he was pitching well, but was still removed from the game which came as a surprise to Laffey as well as those in attendance and following the game on-line. Buffalo manager Torey Lovullo received instructions from the Indians shortly before the game that Laffey was to be put on a 50-pitch count. The interesting thing about this, is going into the game Laffey knew absolutely nothing of his reduced pitch count. Laffey had averaged 98 pitches per start his previous nine starts, but the sudden shift to a 50-pitch count caught even Laffey by surprise.

The fact he did not even know about it suggests it was a last minute decision handed down to Lovullo.

Laffey prepared for the start like any other, and had the mindset he would pitch deep into the game as usual. Lovullo did note that Laffey was scheduled to be on his normal pitch count the night before, but the game was flooded out as the infield was under water. So something changed overnight with the Indians where they contacted Buffalo shortly before the game and mandated the pitch count change.

What makes this even more bizarre, is after the game the Indians flatly denied any move was imminent or considered. Meanwhile, in Buffalo, you had the radio announcers, manager, clubhouse personnel, players and so on saying another thing that Laffey was called up to Cleveland. Laffey had cleared out his locker, and players were high-fiving him as he walked off the mound.

The Indians even tried to pull the wool over people's eyes by saying Laffey was limited to 50 pitches because he had warmed up the night before, which was not correct as Laffey did not warmup prior to the game Saturday night. When called out on this explanation, the Indians backtracked and said Laffey was kept on a short pitch count because he was going to start on three days rest his next time out to get him back to his regular turn in the rotation. The Buffalo staff would not make mention of a callup unless they were informed of such a decision, so for whatever reason the Indians were trying to do some serious backtracking as they probably were on the verge of calling him up but had a last minute change of heart.

Anyway, in the wake of this saga, Laffey now definitely looks to be on the verge of a callup. The Indians need to fill the void in the rotation left when Cliff Lee was optioned out to Buffalo, and with that spot coming up this Saturday, it seems all but certain it indeed will be Laffey who gets the call.

Laffey has won seven straight decisions, and is 11-4 with a 2.99 ERA in 20 combined starts at Akron and Buffalo this year.

Miller Shutdown

Indians top prospect Buffalo right-hander Adam Miller has been shutdown for two weeks because of inflammation in his pitching elbow. Miller initially felt soreness in the elbow in his July 14th start when he gave up five runs in 2.2 innings, and in his followup start on July 19th he

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was touched up for eight runs on 11 hits in four inning and after the game came up to Buffalo manager Torey Lovullo and again complained of elbow discomfort.

Clearly, something was wrong as Miller had struggled in his last four appearances allowing 21 runs in 11 innings (10.50 ERA).

Shortly after that July 19th start, Miller was sent to Cleveland to have his elbow examined and that is when the elbow was diagnosed with inflammation.

While Miller has stated he expects to pitch again this season and no official decision has been made yet, the Indians likely will go the safe route and shut Miller down for the rest of Buffalo's season. Since he will have to go on a return to throw program after the shutdown, he probably would not be ready to rejoin the Buffalo rotation until the last week of August which would give him at most two to three starts before the season finishes up. So, the Indians likely will choose to call it a day and give him extra rest before putting him back on the mound in the Instructional League in October.

The full extent of Miller's injury may not be known until Miller tries throwing again. The Indians had shelved left-hander Tony Sipp at the start of the season when he experienced discomfort with his elbow, and later the injury was diagnosed as an ulnar collateral ligament injury.

But, when he started throwing again a month ago, the pain remained and he ultimately had to have Tommy John surgery and is now out the rest of 2007 and likely most of 2008.

Miller's injury is not considered to be anywhere near as severe, but until he gets the all clear, you have to prepare for the worst and cross your fingers.

Miller's current elbow injury is different from the one he suffered in 2005 and not in the same area, nor is it considered to be related to the finger injury (strained ligament) he suffered from a few months back. The elbow issue also did not crop up as a result of compensating for the finger injury, as his velocity was back to where it used to be in the high 90s and his mechanics did not change.

Miller says he has already noticed a difference with the elbow since he has been shutdown and getting treatment on it, but it remains to be seen how it feels once he gets out and starts throwing.

The "Scare" Crowe Is Back

On a recent visit to Akron, I took a casual glance at the bats in the bat rack in the Aeros dugout.

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Of course touching the bats is not allowed, but looking is not touching.

While glancing over the top of the handles on the bats I caught several markings and words so players can easily identify their bat.

One of the bats was marked as "Scarecrow";.

I never got a chance to sit down and talk to Akron outfielder Trevor Crowe if indeed "Scarecrow" is a nickname he uses, but



it sure seems fitting. And, for the first two and a half months of the season he looked like a scared Crowe at the plate. Crowe's struggles the first few months of the season was the first time he ever experienced such adversity, as he never encountered such a tough stretch as a high school and college player, or even in his first two years in the Indians system. Crowe was so lost at the plate, the Indians sent several different hitting instructors to Akron to work with him, but the results did not change.

The problem was psychological for Crowe, and he finally got things going at the end of June when he started a hitting streak that ended at 14-games in mid-July. During the streak, Crowe hit .367 (22-for-60) and saw his batting average jump well over .200.

The .200 mark seemed to be a psychological barrier for Crowe as he hovered somewhere around .170 to .195 for almost the entire year, but never could get over it.

Once he finally was able to get over .200, he seemed to relax and now is hitting .242 with 4 HR, 38 RBI, 19 stolen bases and a .658 OPS.

Crowe seems to be back to his old self after he finished off an outstanding month of July where he hit .330 (34-for-103) with 3 HR and 13 RBI. He also put up a .430 on-base percentage (OBP) and .915 OPS for the month. Prior to his big July, Crowe had slowly showed signs of improvement month to month as his batting average/OPS from April to July has increased every month: April (.177/.531), May (.200/.577), June (.250/.574), and July (.330/.915).

While he had almost a 100 point jump in OBP due mostly to his batting average jumping significantly, the 300 point jump in his OPS is largely due to his ten extra base hits in July compared to the eleven total he had the first three months.

Crowe has been slowed down the past week with a wrist injury and missed a few games, but was back in the lineup on Wednesday night and went 1-for-4 with a walk. Crowe's big month of

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July was sorely needed, and now appears to be settling in again and may have saved his status as a highly ranked prospect in the system, although he has lost some luster.

Live Scoring 101

I've been to four of the six Indians affiliates so far on my minor league road trip. Two of the stops in [Akron](#) and [Mahoning Valley](#) have already been recapped on the site, and the other two stops at Lake County and Winter Haven (GCL Indians) will post soon.

I make my final stops in Kinston and Buffalo later this month.

One of the interesting things I have learned on my trips, and something a lot of fans may not know, is there is no one at the minor league games at Double-A or below entering game data live online.

For those that religiously follow the minor leagues and sometimes go on MiLB.com to view live game data, this may come as a surprise how MiLB.com actually gets their "live" game information. Every half inning, the official scorer at the game calls into MiLB and explains what happened the previous half inning, and MiLB.com staffers make their box score and game log/summary out of that information. There is not one MiLB.com staffer in attendance at these games. In the rookie-level GCL, there are no live updates, as instead the official scorer faxes his scoresheet into MiLB.com right after the game and the information is then entered all at once.

All In The Family

Just a quick note in closing, that one of the coolest things with writing this weekly column is the contact I have directly not only with some players via e-mail, but their families as well. It seems every week a new family member for a certain player e-mails me.

I've now talked to a family member for a dozen or so players in the Indians system, with most of those people being the father of the player.

There is nothing like the experience of getting a chance to talk on a personal level with a father or relative, and see how excited and proud they are of the player.

Considering the minor league coverage on a team level around the league is virtually

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non-existent (which is where my idea of *Minor Happenings* was born), it is nice to see that this weekly column not only helps some of the casual minor league observers follow what is going on, but some of the family members of the players as well.

