

Minor Happenings: J-Rod Red Hot In Kinston

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Wednesday, August 08 2007 7:00 PM -

Tony once again takes his weekly stroll through the Indians minor league system this week, this time touching on the sizzling Josh Rodriguez in Kinston, Stephen Head moving up to Akron, Indians prospect rankings, Ross Atkin's new assistant, injury updates galore, and more. It is Minor Happenings, the best source of Indians minor league information in print or on the web.

"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.

Be sure to check out my [Lake County Captains recap](#) of the visit I had back in July, and also an interview I did with outfielder [Nick Weglarz](#).

I also interviewed catcher Matt McBride, which should post soon (possibly this weekend).

Also, my recap of the visit to Winter Haven a few weeks ago to see the rookie-level GCL Indians will post sometime next week, probably Tuesday or Wednesday. Interviews with catcher Robbie Alcombrack, infielder Jason Smit, and pitcher Kyle Harper will follow shortly after that.

Last, I head to Buffalo this weekend to see the Indians Triple-A affiliate in action, and also plan to interview a few players. And, at the end of this month, I finish my minor league tour when I fly to Kinston for the weekend of the 25th/26th to check out Grainger Stadium and interview several players there.

Anyone who reads this that plans to be in attendance for any Kinston games that weekend, e-mail me and we will try to meet up.

TheClevelandFan.com Minor League Player Of The Week

(for games from August 2 through August 8)

Josh Rodriguez (Shortstop - Kinston)

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.400 AVG (10-25), 7 R, 1 2B, 1 3B, 5 HR, 17 RBI, 4 BB

Kinston shortstop Josh Rodriguez (J-Rod) put up one of the most impressive weeks I have ever seen at the minor league, or major league level for that matter. In just six games, he piled up five home runs and had 17 RBI.

Granted, a huge chunk of that total came in one game on Thursday August 2nd when he hit two home runs and had nine RBI, but in the other five

games he hit three home runs and racked up eight RBI which is pretty impressive as well.

Things have not always looked this good for J-Rod, as he struggled the first half of the season hitting only .233 with 6 HR, 33 RBI and a .728 OPS. But, the second half of the season has been a different story, as he is hitting .285 with 9 HR, 33 RBI, and an .846 OPS.

The reason for Rodriguez's success of late is tied to some adjustments he has made at the plate to avoid being so pull conscious by shortening his swing and using the entire field.

On the year, he is hitting .254 with 15 HR, 68 RBI, 16 stolen bases, and a .777 OPS in 107 games at Kinston.

Once projected as a first round pick, he came into the draft last year with health issues and he slid out of the first round. J-Rod was unable to play shortstop at Rice last year because of an elbow injury, and was limited to third base and designated hitter duty.

Like with Wes Hodges, though, it appears the Indians' gamble with taking J-Rod with their second round pick has paid off and they may have found another potential steal.

J-Rod has impressed with his defensive abilities so far this season so much so that many scouts put Rodriguez right up at the top with some of the better defensive shortstops in the Carolina League.

Currently, he projects as a quality defensive shortstop in the majors with plus arm strength and good lateral range to his left and right.

Honorable Mentions:

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Jason Cooper (OF - Buffalo): 407 AVG (11-27), 2 2B, 2 3B, 0 HR, 3 RBI, 1 BB, 2 SB

Chuck Lofgren (LHP - Akron): 1-0, 2.25 ERA, 12 IP, 9 H, 3 ER, 7 BB, 11 K

Jose Constanza (OF - Kinston): .522 AVG (12-23), 1 2B, 0 HR, 4 RBI, 1 BB, 6 SB

Josh Tomlin (RHP - Lake County): 2-0, 0.90 ERA, 10 IP, 8 H, 1 ER, 3 BB, 5 K

Mike Eisenberg (RHP - Mahoning Valley): 0-1, 1.50 ERA, 12 IP, 9 H, 2 ER, 2 BB, 4 K

Previous Winners:

7/20 to 8/1: Jeremy Sowers (LHP - Buffalo)

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)

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 was in Akron this week to check in on the Aeros, and offered up some thoughts on a few players in the Indians system.



On Cliff and Jeremy Sowers: Both have done exceptionally well with handling the transition to Buffalo. The biggest difference between the majors and Triple-A is you are going to get away with a few more mistakes at Triple-A.

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The outcome and results in Triple-A are not nearly as intense or important as they are at the major level where winning is everything.

Triple-A is a place where they can be a little more development-based and focused on an actual limitation.

Working on those limitations and working on the adjustments over and over repetitively are more easily done in the minor league environment.

Lee's last outing was exceptional, which was a plan-based outing sent down from Carl Willis and followed through by pitching coordinators Scott Radinsky and Dave Miller at Buffalo.

On Brian Barton: His callup to Buffalo was for a couple reasons. There was a need in Buffalo, and also he had spent about a year at the Double-A level and performed exceptionally well.

He has done a lot of the things they have asked him to do, but some of the things he has to do to finish off his development are things that can only be created by facing a little better pitching at the next level.

On Jordan Brown: He has been very consistent over the last two years. He was the MVP last year in the Carolina League, and this year is having a very strong year in Akron leading the league in several offensive categories.

He is a very disciplined hitter and gets on-base at a very good clip.

He is one of the best players in the system at bat-to-ball ability and making hard, consistent contact.

Atkins New Assistant

There has been a change to the Indians minor league staff over the course of the last few weeks. Assistant Director of



Player Development Steve Frohwerk has been promoted to Manager of Community Relations, and Meka Asonye has taken over Frohwerk's role. As the assistant to Director of Player Development Ross Atkins, Meka is responsible with managing the day-to-day operations of the player development department, as well as coordinating instructional league, spring training, and the winter development program. Also, he provides statistical analysis of the Indians minor league prospects, and assists Atkins wherever possible.

Last year, Meka was an intern in the Baseball Operations Department where he performed

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trade analysis for transactions between Major League Baseball clubs and researched statistical models to evaluate defense, base running, and the financial landscape of Major League Baseball. Meka graduated with honors from Princeton University where he received his Bachelor of Arts degree with a major in Economics and a minor in Finance.

Akron Head-ing

Kinston first baseman/outfielder Stephen Head was promoted to Akron this past week. At Akron, he replaces outfielder Brian Barton on the roster and will continue to play primarily in right field, which is a position he just started learning to play in Kinston a few weeks ago.

Head is still adapting to the new position, but has done well so far making the

adjustment to the outfield. Considering first basemen Jordan Brown and Michael Aubrey are nicked up with leg injuries, Head will also see time at first base when both Brown and Aubrey get a night off in the field.

Head was the Indians second round pick in the 2005 Draft out of the University of Mississippi. He burst onto the scene that year when he hit .308 with 10 HR, 50 RBI and an .862 OPS in 57 combined games at Mahoning Valley and Kinston.

Head started the 2006 season by returning to Kinston, and hit only .235 with 14 HR, 73 RBI and a .696 OPS.

He is a smooth defender at first base, has above average power, and even with his struggles last year still had a healthy 54:73 walk to strikeout ratio in 477 at bats.

His numbers last year suffered mostly as a byproduct of his swing mechanics getting overhauled.

This season, before his callup, Head hit .251 with 13 HR, 61 RBI and a .763 OPS at Kinston in 102 games.

He was also ranked fourth in the Carolina League with 29 doubles.

Cabrera Gets The Call

The Indians called up top infield prospect Asbrubal Cabrera this week, and will take over the utility duties from the

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Injury Updates

I had a chance to talk to Ross Atkins and his staff this week to get some injury updates on several players in the system. Just a note, if you ever have a question on the health/status of a player, or anything else, feel free to e-mail me at tlastoria@theclevelandfan.com and I will try to get an answer for you ASAP.

Shin-Soo Choo (OF - Buffalo): He is still in Winter Haven and started throwing from his on Wednesday. The hope is he will be game ready in a week, and the target date for return is August 13th.



Adam Miller (RHP - Buffalo): He is currently with the major league training staff, and was throwing 100 feet on Tuesday. He also threw a bullpen session on Wednesday and he will be re-evaluated the next day.

The hope is that he will be game ready soon.

Brian Slocum (RHP - Buffalo): He started his initial throwing program June 23rd, and threw a bullpen session July 18th. He has been ready since August 6th, so he should be activated any day.

Brad Snyder (OF - Buffalo): He has a broken right thumb, and it is not known for sure how long he will be out (to be decided). He had surgery on July 31st, and is currently in Buffalo where he could start playing again soon.

David Huff (LHP - Kinston): He started his initial throwing program of long toss from 105 feet and will start throwing 120 feet next week. Everything has gone well so far, and he should throw in the bullpen in the next week or so and at that point the Indians will make a decision on what to do with him.

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JD Martin (RHP - Akron): He has already thrown a bullpen in Winter Haven, and did not complain of any pain in his elbow. He is scheduled to throw a simulation game in a week, and the plan is to have him game ready by August 27th.

Joe Ness (RHP - Akron): He has a right calf strain, and is working through some issues and figuring some things out. He should not be out long.

Branyan And Elarton Re-unite In Buffalo

The Indians re-signed infielder/outfielder Russell Branyan to a Triple-A contract this week and assigned him to Buffalo. Now before people start raking Indians General Manager Mark Shapiro over the coals for yet more bargain bin shopping,



this move was not made for the Cleveland Indians, but instead to help out Buffalo. With shortstop Asdrubal Cabrera being called up to Cleveland, and utility player Hector Luna being designated for assignment in the past week, Buffalo is shorthanded with infielders.

Also, Branyan will help add a little punch to the Buffalo lineup which has been a bit stagnant of late.

After Branyan was traded away in 2002 in the Ben Broussard deal, he was brought back for his second tour of duty in an April 2004 trade with Atlanta for Scott Sturkie. The Indians ended up trading him to Milwaukee later that year in July, and now he is back again.

This is now Branyan's third tour of duty with the franchise, and he may be hoping a return to Cleveland will help jumpstart his career so he can latch onto another team this year or next.

Branyan has 76 career home runs in Buffalo, which is only three home runs short of the Buffalo home run record.

Jeff Manto holds the Buffalo home runs record with 79.

Branyan is also third on the all-time RBI list at Buffalo with 202.

Also, on Friday, right-hander Scott Elarton was signed to a minor league contract and will pitch out of the Buffalo bullpen. This signing is more an offer of goodwill from the Indians to Elarton,

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as he will not pitch for the Indians this year unless a ridiculous amount of injuries to the pitching staff occur in the next month. Both Branyan and Elarton played in Buffalo together briefly in 2004.

De La Cruz Up, Gimenez Down

Infielder Chris De La Cruz was promoted to Akron and utility player Chris Gimenez was sent down to Kinston this week. De



La Cruz has had a fine season as a scrappy utility player at Kinston, hitting .318 with 1 HR, 26 RBI and a .781 OPS. Gimenez had a very nice start in Akron, but cooled considerably the past few weeks. With Asdrubal Cabrera being moved out of Akron, and catcher Wyatt Torgas healthy and the team loaded up with first baseman and outfielders, there was not much room for Gimenez to get playing time. Also, Akron has a greater need for middle infield help, which is something De La Cruz can help with whereas Gimenez could not.

Perdomo Brings The Heat

Right-handed flame-throwing reliever Luis Perdomo is in the midst of a very good season at Lake County. The Lake County



pitching staff started the season very young as most of the staff consisted of 19 and 20 year olds, and there was a heavy mix of Latin American pitchers pushed to Lake County. While a lot of the pitchers struggled in the first half of the season, many have turned things around in the second half.

One of those players is Perdomo.

The 23-year-old native of the Dominican Republic is 2-5 with a 3.38 ERA on the season with 8 saves in 12 opportunities.

His biggest weapon is a plus fastball that consistently clocks around 95-96 MPH, and he has used that pitch to mow down 66 batters in 53.1 innings pitched.

Baseball America Best Tools Ratings

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Baseball America released their annual Best Tools ratings this past week, which profiles the players with the best tools in each league from the major leagues to the low-level Single-A leagues. The selections are made by surveying league managers. Here are the Indians minor leaguers who were rated with the best tools in their league:

International League (Buffalo)

Most Exciting Player: Ben Francisco

Eastern League (Akron)

Best Batting Prospect: Jordan Brown

Best Strike Zone Judgment: Jordan Brown

Best Defensive Catcher: Wyatt Toregas

Best Defensive Shortstop: Asdrubal Cabrera

Best Manager Prospect: Tim Bogar

Carolina League (Kinston)

Best Power Prospect: Wes Hodges

Best Defensive Third Baseman: Wes Hodges

Best Managerial Prospect: Mike Sarbaugh

South Atlantic League (Lake County)

Best Defensive Third Baseman: Jared Goedert

Baseball America Top 10 Prospects By Position

In addition to their Best Tools ratings, *Baseball America* also released their Top 10 players in the minors at each position. Here are the Indians that were ranked, and where they rank overall in the minors:

Catcher: Matt McBride, Lake County (5th)

First Base: Jordan Brown, Akron (5th)

Third Base: Wes Hodges, Kinston (7th)

Shortstop: Asdrubal Cabrera, Akron (3rd)

Center Field: Brian Barton, Akron (9th)

Right-handed Pitcher: Adam Miller, Buffalo (9th)

Left-handed Pitcher: Chuck Lofgren (4th)

Live Scoring 411

[Last week](#) I mentioned how "live" scoring is done on the MiLB.com website for Double-A and below. A day or so after that article posted, Minor League Baseball (MiLB) e-mailed me to note that the majority of callers from Double-A and under ballparks are not the official scorers, and that they stress to teams that they want the official scorers to watch the game



and have someone else call. MiLB also did confirm that the Gameday feature used for Triple-A is being considered for Double-A next season, but nothing has been decided at this time.

Also, one of the stat-stringers for Triple-A Gameday contacted me to let me know how the Gameday system is run. Triple-A uses a clone of the MLB Gameday system, where the data is entered on a real-time basis by a "stat stringer" at the ballpark and viewers of Gameday on the Internet get updates within seconds of the action happening...pitch by pitch...play by play.

Triple-A has been using Gameday for two years (2006 and 2007), and in 2005 they did the call in method for a year when the minor leagues were in transition from Howe Sportsdata. Before 2005, the official scorer used a computer application to record play by play (not pitch by pitch) and transmitted a game file at the end of the game.

The Peeled Potato Incident

Unbeknownst to a lot of Indians fans, this month marks the 20th anniversary of the "Peeled Potato Incident" that involved former Tribe farmhand Dave Bresnahan in August of 1987. I had actually never heard of this crazy stunt before fellow

colleague [Steve Buffum](#) mentioned it in one of his B-List's earlier in the year, and after asking him what he was talking about he forwarded the link to the story. Here is the story, taken verbatim from

[The Baseball Reliquary Inc](#)

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In August of 1987, Bresnahan, then a 25-year-old second-string catcher with the Williamsport (Pennsylvania) Bills of the Class-AA Eastern League, decided to liven up a meaningless late-season home game. Before the game, Bresnahan peeled and sculpted a potato in the shape of a baseball. Behind the plate in the fifth inning, with the potato concealed in his mitt and a runner on third base, he threw the potato wildly past his third baseman, hoping the runner would think he made an errant pick-off throw. The play worked to perfection. The runner at third trotted home, and Bresnahan tagged him out with the baseball. An umpire retrieved the potato and awarded the runner home for Bresnahan's deception. The following day, Bresnahan was fined by his manager and then released by the Bills' parent club, the Cleveland Indians, for what they perceived as an affront to the integrity of the game.

Although his four-year professional baseball career was over, Bresnahan, much like Rupert Pupkin in Martin Scorsese's film, The King of Comedy, became an overnight celebrity. He received numerous interview requests from around the world, and Bob Verdi of the Chicago Tribune named him the "1987 Sports Person of the Year." In 1988, the Williamsport club held a "Dave Bresnahan Day" and retired his uniform number 59. Bresnahan told the more than 4,000 fans in attendance, "Lou Gehrig had to play in 2,130 consecutive games and hit .340 for his number to be retired, and all I had to do was bat .140 and throw a potato." Today, Bresnahan is a successful stockbroker living in Tempe, Arizona.

All-Stars And Awards

On Wednesday, the New York-Penn League announced the players selected to participate in the 2007 All-Star Game to be held at Dutchess Stadium in Hudson Valley, NY on August 14th. Six scrappers were selected, and are as follows: Right-

handed reliever Kyle Landis, left-handed reliever Garrett Rieck, left-handed starter Heath Taylor, first baseman Todd Martin, catcher Alex Castillo and infielder Jansy Infante.

Also, Buffalo outfielder Jason Cooper was named the International League Player of the Week for the period of July 30th to August 5th. During that stretch of days, Cooper had nine extra base hits and hit .500 (14-for-28) with 2 HR and 7 RBI.

He also drew five walks and had a .576 OPS to go along with a 1.071 slugging percentage.

On the season, Cooper is hitting .267 with 8 HR, 41 RBI and an .849 OPS in 81 games.

Affiliate Notebook

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