

Written by {ga=consigliere}  
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Nick Weglarz is a very high ceiling power hitter in the Indians organization that has exploded onto the scene these last couple years. So much so that he has been asked to represent Canada in this summer's Olympic Games. Tony had a chance to talk with Nick yesterday about the experience, and hits on that as well as several other items from spring training in today's Winter Haven Notebook. Happy Easter everyone!



## **Weglarz Likely To Play in Olympic Games This Summer**

Outfielder Nick Weglarz was a late arrival to minor league camp this year, and made his spring debut this past Tuesday. His absence was not the result of an injury or for personal reasons, but because he was taking part in the Olympic qualifiers in Taiwan and Australia playing for Team Canada.

Weglarz is familiar with playing for his country, as when he was in high school he played with the Team Ontario baseball program for three years and often played in tournaments in Mexico, the Dominican Republic, and other places. Last summer, Team Canada's Greg Hamilton, who is the director and coach for their national teams, saw how Weglarz was doing in the minors and asked if he would like to play. Weglarz was more than happy to say yes and was excited for the opportunity to play for his country again.

Last October and November, Weglarz went over to Taiwan and Australia and played in the World Cup and did well in limited playing time. He was asked to come back and play this past spring in the Olympic qualifiers, and this time he was a starter and put in the middle of the lineup as one of the main run producers of Team Canada.

Weglarz responded by hitting .450 in the seven games played and lead all players with three home runs. One was a tape measure shot that literally was three rows from leaving the stadium. His performance helped guide the Canadian team to a 6-1 record and they earned a berth in the

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upcoming Olympic Games in Beijing later this summer from August 8<sup>th</sup>

to the 24<sup>th</sup>

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The entire experience in Australia and Taiwan this spring is something Weglarz will never forget. Particularly the crazy game with Chinese Taipei that saw a tightly contested game end up in a bench clearing shouting match and near brawl as well as the Canadian team being peppered with bottles and needing a four car police escort back to their hotel.

"The Chinese Taipei game was amazing," said Weglarz. "I won't play in a better game in my life."

To reset what happened in the game, it was 5-4 Chinese Taipei in the 8<sup>th</sup> inning with runners on first and second (Weglarz was on first) and two outs.

A base hit to right field brought what Canada thought was the tying run home, but a great throw from the Chinese Taipei right fielder cut the Canadian runner down at the plate.

After a big homeplate collision, when the Chinese Taipei catcher got up from being run over, he flipped the ball at the Canadian player who had just bowled him over.

At that point, players started getting into each others faces and shouting, and then things really got crazy when the right fielder came in and flung the ball into the Canadian dugout.

"I was running to third at the time and I didn't really see it," recalled Weglarz. "But I saw the guy flip it and our guy get mad.

And then their right fielder came in and chucks the ball into our dugout.

Our pitching coach saw it and ran onto the field and that is when both benches cleared and we got the brawling going."

Play was suspended for several minutes as the two teams chest bumped and shouted at each other on the field. Things got worse as the pro-Chinese Taipei crowd littered the field with debris.

Once order was restored, Canada came back and tied it in the ninth inning with a two out single, and then won it with a run in the tenth inning.

The win was a pivotal game for Canada, as had they lost they would have had a hard time winning an Olympic berth.

With the Olympic Games set for play in August this year, the question now is how Weglarz and the Indians work it out to allow him to play for Team Canada again. They have not talked about it yet, but Weglarz as well as teammate T.J. Burton should be allowed to participate.

If both are allowed to go as expected, they would roughly miss a month of their season as they would go early and play an exhibition series somewhere before going to Beijing from August 8<sup>th</sup>

to the 24<sup>th</sup>

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So, a good chunk of the end of the season could be eaten up, although both players would be

back by the end of August to finish their seasons with whatever affiliate they are assigned to at the time.

But that is an issue that will be addressed in July. For now, Weglarz is back in camp and ready to roll.

He arrived in Winter Haven at one o'clock in the morning on Monday, and got the day off on Monday before making his 2008 spring training debut on Tuesday. Now back in action and in camp, it is a big adjustment going from the raucous crowds in Taiwan to the quiet backfields of Chain of Lakes Park getting ready for the minor league baseball season.

"Spring training is a little more laid back and stuff," said Weglarz. "Going to the Olympic qualifiers and playing for your country in the Chinese Taipei game where we had something like 30,000 screaming fans, you play your best.

We had a four car police escort back and they were throwing bottles at us.

That kind of intensity you can't match anywhere.

I know it is tough, as you can't match that kind of intensity in a spring training game."

Now that he is settled in again, Weglarz is ready to get the season going.

"Right now I am a little tired from the jetlag," said Weglarz. "I feel good. I feel strong, stronger than I have ever been.

I'm trying to get my feet back underneath me here and play in a few games."

Weglarz is an impressive physical specimen. At 20 years of age, Weglarz would have towered over Jim Thome when he was the same age. The

Indians media guide lists Weglarz at 6'3" and 225 pounds, but he is actually about 245 pounds and all muscle.

Since last summer, he has bulked up and grown into his body more as he has gotten older and matured.

And talk of him gaining weight does not imply at all he has gotten fat.

That is not the case at all.

His weight gain is all muscle, and the scary thing is he will only continue to get bigger.

"I worked out hard basically," said Weglarz. "I did not do anything crazy or different, but I just worked hard and ran a lot too.

And I just put the weight on naturally I guess."

Right now, Weglarz will use the final week of spring training to get ready for another minor league season, which most likely will be in advanced Single-A Kinston. He has big time power and a very advanced eye at the plate for his age, but he still has things to work on this year.

"I need to cut down on the strikeouts a little bit," said Weglarz. "Defensively, I can always get better.

That's one thing I have to focus on.

I'd say solidifying my approach at the plate by being consistent day in and day out.

My eye with the strike zone is pretty good, so just keep that up and take good approaches every

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at bat.&quot;

The Indians also want to see him make some strides defensively in the outfield this year, particularly in his route running to balls.

&quot;Getting good reads off the bat in batting practice,&quot; said Weglarz when explaining how he can improve his defense. &quot;When a guy is taking batting practice, you see where the ball is in the strike zone and if you are really good at it you can almost anticipate where the ball is going to be as he is swinging. So in batting practice, you go and watch and try to get reads off the bat and take a couple steps hard and if you can catch it you go get it. It is just repetition, that's how you get good at it.&quot;

When Weglarz was drafted in the third round of the 2005 Draft out of high school, he was drafted as a first baseman. However, since being drafted he has not played first base, but if Weglarz continues to get bigger it may make more sense down the road to move him back to first base. It is a position change Weglarz does not want to see happen.

&quot;If I can play outfield, I'd love to stay there,&quot; said Weglarz. &quot;But if I start gaining too much weight I'll have to get on a weight loss program to trim down a bit (joking).&quot;

With the left field situation currently unsolved for the Indians, they would love to see Weglarz stay in the outfield as well.

## **Notebook**

- Yesterday, the Indians accepted back infielder Matt Whitney from the Washington Nationals. Whitney was a Rule V pick by the Nationals in the December draft held in Nashville, TN. Whitney led the Indians organization with 32 homers and 113 RBI last season between Class A Lake County and Kinston. He will report to minor league camp today.

- Infielder Jason Smit is still bothered by a sore throwing arm, but expects to be back in action later next week. Smit is now 18 years old, and is starting to fill out his frame more. He looks a lot bigger than he did last year and has added roughly 10-15 pounds of good weight.

- First baseman Chris Nash is working his way back into action. He has been sidelined for the past five to six days with a sore shoulder from a new throwing motion the Indians implemented. He was back on the field yesterday but limited to just taking grounders in batting practice. I actually talked to him on Friday and will have an article up on him tomorrow. He is a nice young kid, soft spoken, and well mannered. He is also big and talented as well, and he had several Division 1 scholarship opportunities to play tight end in football. A cool thing I also learned is how he is ambidextrous where he can throw a baseball just as good right-handed as left-handed!

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- Left-handed pitcher Kelvin De La Cruz is a highly regarded pitching prospect, but he is also a pretty good athlete as well. Over the past few days I have watched the Lake County team take batting practice, and while most of the pitchers are spread out and stand around shagging fly balls, De La Cruz has been active and running down balls in the gaps and looking like a natural outfielder. You wouldn't expect that type of movement from a

6'5" 187 pound pitcher.

- Yesterday I commented on what looks like will be the Buffalo and Akron starting rotation. From what I have seen in camp, it looks like first base is set to go like this:

Jordan Brown and Ryan Mulhern in Triple-A Buffalo, Matt Whitney and Michael Aubrey in Double-A Akron, Todd Martin and Beau Mills in advanced Single-A Kinston, and Chris Nash and Dustin Realini at Single-A Lake County.

With two first basemen at each level, when one plays first base the other will likely be the designated hitter.

Mills will play a lot of third base, and Realini may also get some time there too.

First base may be the deepest position in the system outside of left-handed pitching.

- Random thoughts: Third baseman Jeff Hehr, who looks like he will be the starting third baseman in Lake County, has had a good camp. He has looked good defensively at third base where he moves well and does a very good job coming in on balls. The question will be with his bat, but keep an eye out for him. He could be someone like a Goedert last year who comes out of nowhere to have a good season (not to Goedert's degree, but still good). Also, Doug Pickens has looked solid behind the plate and with the injury to Matt McBride, he could be the starting catcher in Kinston when the season starts. Brian Juhl could also figure into that mix, but I have not seen him play at all in camp. I did see him board the team bus yesterday, so he is around. I'll try to watch Juhl some today if possible.

- Today is a camp day, which means there are no games scheduled today and all the minor leaguers will be on site for practice, drills, and some intrasquad games so the pitchers can get their work in. This morning could also signal the first big cut of the spring. With less than a week before camp breaks and the teams disperse, about 15-25 players will likely be let go.

Several players that know they are on the bubble are on edge, and either today or tomorrow seems like the most likely time for the first big cut to be announced to the players.

- Next Saturday 3/29 is the final day of camp. The minor league teams play early that day at 10am, and then right after the game will pack up and leave for their destination city.

Most if not all of the players should know by that morning where they are being assigned.

- One of the more interesting facets of life for a minor leaguer I have learned this week is how they deal with getting their cars from Winter Haven to whatever affiliate they play for. You see, organization rules mandate that when teams break for Lake County, Kinston, and Akron that the team travels together by plane (Lake County and Akron) or bus (Kinston).

Buffalo players can travel separately.

What this means is the non-Buffalo players have to make arrangements to transport their vehicle

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(if they even have one) to the affiliate they are going to.

And, because they normally do not know until the last second where they are going, usually they have to rely on their parents to help them out in getting their vehicle to where it needs to go.

Today will be my final full day at the complex watching the minor leaguers, and then on Monday I will likely spend half the day there to get one final look before shoving off back to northeast Ohio and to the snow again. Tomorrow's update will be the last from Winter Haven, and after I return home I plan to have some sort of wrapup piece and include a big photo gallery.