

Minor Happenings: Young Lefty Miller Impresses In April

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Thursday, May 01 2008 7:00 PM -

Tony was out in Akron to visit players and see the team play on Tuesday, and this week's "Minor Happenings" has all kinds of juicy nuggets from that trip this week. T also had a chance to speak with Chuck Lofgren and Chris Gimenez at length while he was there, and you'll see features on those two top prospects run on our front page as well over the next week. Well, at this point, this column needs no big intro. It's the most comprehensive coverage of the Indians farm system you'll find anywhere. It's "Minor Happenings";.



"Minor Happenings" covers the important developments and news in the Indians farm system. While most of the information in this report is from my own research and through interviews I have conducted with organizational personnel, some information in this report is collected and summarized from the various news outlets that cover each team.

I was in Akron on Tuesday to see the Indians Double-A affiliate in action. I was able to talk to the coaches and some players, so the Happenings this week will be heavy with Akron material.

Also, I will be doing player features over the coming week on Chuck Lofgren and Chris Gimenez as I had a chance to talk to them at length while I was there.

Also, I did a feature piece on Lake County starting pitcher [Chris Archer](#) last weekend, and also on outfielder [Matt Brown](#) this past Tuesday.

Oh, and don't forget to check out my blog at [The Cleveland Indians Minor League Insider](#).

I update it everyday with news and provide quick recaps from the night before, as well as other things.

Indians Minor League Player Of The Month

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(for April)

Ryan Miller (Left-handed Pitcher - Lake County)

4-0, 0.82 ERA, 4 starts, 22 IP, 14 H, 8 BB, 23 K, .196 BAA, 2.44 G/F

Lake County left-hander Ryan Miller is in his first full season, and like many others on the Lake County staff is having a breakout



season. Miller did not allow an earned run in his first three starts, and saw that streak come to an end in his fourth and final start of the month last Thursday where he allowed two runs in six innings. It was certainly a sensational month, and he was pushed by fellow lefty and Lake County teammate Ryan Morris for top billing this month.

The Indians selected Miller in the 36th round of the 2006 Draft out of Blinn College (TX), and was a draft-and-follow player who the Indians ended up signing in May of last year. He will not blow you away as his fastball only sits around 87-91 MPH, but he has a deep mix of pitches in that he also throws a curveball, slider, and changeup.

His curveball is his best secondary pitch and shows good break and command.

Lake County manager Aaron Holbert likes what he has seen so far out of Miller, and feels as long as Miller can continue to throw strikes with his fastball it will help set up and make his curveball and changeup more effective. "We saw great things out of him in spring training and fortunately for us he has carried it over," said Holbert.

"It is just a matter of him continuing to throw his fastball for strikes and then get to his secondary and third pitches his curveball and changeup.

He is doing a tremendous job."

Honorable Mentions:

Ryan Morris (LHP - Lake County): 4-0, 5 starts, 1.67 ERA, 27 IP, 17 H, 5 BB, 14 K, .175 BAA

Mike Pontius (RHP - Lake County): 0-0, 8 games, 0.00 ERA, 19 IP, 7 H, 4 BB, 26 K, .111 BAA

Matt Brown (OF - Lake County): .326 AVG, 11 R, 7 2B, 2 HR, 21 RBI, 1 SB, 6 BB, .835 OPS

Wes Hodges (3B - Akron): .280 AVG, 16 R, 4 2B, 1 3B, 6 HR, 20 RBI, 2 SB, 7 BB, .865 OPS

Aaron Laffey (LHP - Buffalo): 3-1, 5 starts, 2.77 ERA, 26 IP, 24 H, 6 BB, 20 K, .238 BAA

Karexon Sanchez (IF - Lake County): .322 AVG, 4 2B, 2 3B, 2 HR, 16 RBI, 8 BB, 5 SB, .856 OPS

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Steven Wright (RHP - Kinston): 0-2, 4 starts, 2.45 ERA, 22 IP, 14 H, 4 BB, 21 K, .177 BAA

Indians Minor League Player Of The Week

(for games from April 24th through April 30th)

Jose Constanza (Outfielder - Akron)

.444 (12-for-27), 3 R, 3 2B, 1 3B, 0 HR, 4 RBI, 1 BB, 2 K, 3 SB

Akron outfielder Jose Constanza had a rough start to the season, but he has heated up in a big way the last week. The scrappy little outfielder from the Dominican Republic began the season in an 0-for-19 slump and was hitting just .089 (4-for-45) at one point.



However, in his last ten games Constanza is hitting .439, and on the season has bumped the average to .258.

Constanza had a string of four consecutive multi-hit games that ended on Sunday, and he is currently riding a modest eight game hitting streak. Constanza may be one of the most exciting players in the Indians system to watch as he makes things happen on the bases, and he can do a variety of things with the bat where he can drop a bunt down or lash a base hit to any part of the field with some authority.

While he does not really project as anything more than a fourth outfielder, he may be a perfect player in that role for the Indians down the road.

Honorable Mentions: Steven Wright (RHP - Kinston), Roman Pena (OF - Lake County), Mike Pontius (RHP - Lake County)

Previous Winners:

4/17 to 4/23: Hector Rondon (RHP - Kinston)

4/10 to 4/16: Wes Hodges (3B - Akron)

4/3 to 4/9: Kelvin De La Cruz (LHP - Lake County)

Director's Cuts

Indians Farm Director Ross Atkins chimed in on some of the players down at advanced

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Single-A Kinston this week:

On Beau Mills: "Beau is off to an okay start. He had a great spring training, and coming into the Carolina League was off to a hot start and settled down a little bit but just recently hit two home runs and a double a few nights ago.

We are asking a lot of him and

asking him to play two positions in the event he can play two in the future. He is playing third and first, and he will probably start to play a little more at third base and work that more into an everyday position.

Beau is an incredible talent with a ton of power.

He plays the game at a great speed with a great intensity level.

he reminds us a lot of Grady Sizemore, not his profile per se, but just how he plays the game, how tough he is mentally and physically, and how strong he is."

On Nick Weglarz: "Just to tell you how important I think batting average is, I basically don't even look at it. If a guy is getting on base it means he is putting himself in position to score. Especially when they compliment that on-base ability with power numbers.

So a guy who gets on base and then has what they call isolated power - which is just doubles, triples and home runs and is the millennium's version of slugging percentage -

when a guy does both of those things there is not a better compliment for a professional baseball player.

A guy with discipline and power, and Weglarz shows both of those things.

Yeah, that is a ridiculous on-base percentage when you are hitting .260 with a .454 on-base percentage.

Basically what that means to us is they are not pitching to him, and he is staying patient and not leaving the zone and waiting for his pitch.

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He has already driven the ball and is showing the power is still there, and that is a very good sign for a young professional hitter.

On Steven Wright and Hector Rondon: "Steven Wright has been great. He was there in Kinston last year for the second half and had some hiccups and an initiation to the Carolina League. It is a good league as you see only eight teams and that's all, so guys start to pick up on tendencies and have a couple of years under their belt.

The approaches are a little bit more professional.

And Wright is off to a great start there.

If you look at [both Rondon and Wright], if you look at just the stats they control like groundballs, home runs, strikes and walks they are tops in the organization and very high in baseball.

If you look at just their ERA and win-loss record it is not impressive.

But if you look at the things they control, they both are off to a great start."

Tough Huff

After a rough first few starts, Akron left-hander David Huff has found his groove. On the season he is 0-1 with a 2.84 ERA, and in 25.1 innings has allowed 17 hits and nine walks while striking out 25. "I feel great," said Huff in Akron this past week.

"My elbow, shoulder and body feels good.

My mechanics have been good."

Huff only made 11 starts at Single-A Kinston last year before being sidelined the rest of the season with a strained ligament in his throwing elbow. He went out to the Arizona Fall League

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to get work in and impressed, and now is learning to make the adjustment to Double-A.

"There are a lot better guys here, and a lot of these guys are a phone call away," said Huff. "I think the biggest adjustment is being more consistent around the strike zone.

Throwing all my pitches for strikes, and not getting away with pitches over the middle as these guys crush it if you make a mistake.

That was a big adjustment, so I just have to really focus on every pitch."

While he does not overpower hitters, he has unbelievable confidence in his fastball, and commands it well working it to both sides of the plate and to the corners on all four quadrants. He has the best fastball command in the entire system, and is a very polished pitcher. He is aggressive and attacks hitters, and he has a great, athletic delivery which deceives hitters and he repeats it well. He is a pitcher you like to watch pitch because he is smart and knows how to pitch by moving the ball around in and out, and he constantly makes adjustments to hitters in game.

"I just read swings," said Huff. "You see a guy take a swing and foul it off and I am like 'okay, he fouled it off this way so I am going to attack him this way.'

It has really been helping me out reading swings. It is also nice being the second starter because Chuck throws before me and he is very similar to what I do and seeing how guys react to his ball and what he throws.

I am always in constant contact with the catchers and asking them 'hey, what was that last pitch that Chuck threw' and I just go off of that.

I make a little scouting report note and attack them the next day."

Manager's Minute

On Tuesday, I had the chance to attend the game at Akron and sit down and talk to Akron manager Mike Sarbaugh. He touched on being back at Akron for the first time in a few years since he was a coach there for four years and was a player back in the Canton-Akron days.

He also talked about some of the players on the roster.

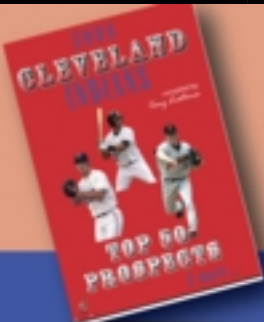
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