

## Minor Happenings: Lofgren Back In The Zone

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Thursday, May 08 2008 7:00 PM -

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You know the drill by now. Tony Lastoria spends each baseball season visiting all the Indians minor league affiliates, talking to players and coaches and watching ball games. He then cranks out Minor Happenings for us each week, by far the most comprehensive compilation of information on the Cleveland Indians farm system, and a huge asset to this website. This week, Tony hits on the great starts to the season for Jeremy Sowers and Chuck Lofgren and talks about the guy he sees as the Indians future third baseman.



*"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 am in the midst of a two week break from my visits to the affiliates, but will kick the visits back up the weekend of May 16/17 when I go to Lake County, the weekend of May 24/25 when I go to Akron, and then on Friday May 30 when I go to Buffalo. As always, I will conduct several interviews with players during those visits for articles to post on the site, and also talk to coaches and scouts to get some info on how players look.

Also, congrats to site owner Rich Swerbinsky on the birth of his second child (baby girl). Between quarterbacking the site while he was out and being under the weather with a nasty virus that is going around I was not able to post a couple articles on some players I talked to in my recent visit to Akron.

So, coming down the pipeline I have an article on Akron left-hander Chuck Lofgren that is ready to post and will be up on the site sometime over the weekend.

I also will have an article on Akron catcher Chris Gimenez which will post next weekend.

And, I have a special piece coming this Tuesday that talks about the release process in the minors.

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I interviewed three former Tribe prospects to give an inside look on the process of what happens, what it feels like, and where they go from here.

### Indians Minor League Player Of The Week

#### **Jeremy Sowers (Left-handed pitcher, Buffalo)**

*2-0, 0.64 ERA, 2 starts, 14 IP, 8 H, 1 R, 6 BB, 8 K*



Usually, I like to avoid non-prospects in this report, which is what Sowers is as he is no longer considered a rookie. That said, his dominating week of pitching justifies his mention here, and wins him the weekly award in a tightly contested race between left-handers throughout the system.

In addition to Sowers, left-handers Chuck Lofgren, David Huff, and Ryan Miller all had outstanding weeks.

In his last start on Tuesday, Sowers shut out the opposition over seven innings and allowed just three hits and two walks while striking out two. He pounded the zone all night as 70 of his 107 pitches went for strikes.

In his other start last Thursday, Sowers allowed just one run in seven innings.

On the year Sowers is now 2-2 with a 2.21 ERA in six starts for Buffalo, and four of his six starts have been quality starts.

One of his starts he only pitched 4.2 innings giving up one run but was removed early so as to be sure he would be ready for a spot start against the Yankees a few weeks ago.

*Honorable Mentions:* Ryan Miller, LHP, Lake County (1-0, 1.64 ERA, 2 starts); Chuck Lofgren, LHP, Akron (1-1, 1.38 ERA, 2 starts); David Huff, LHP, Akron (2-0, 1.93 ERA, 2 starts); Wes Hodges, 3B, Akron (.391 AVG, 1 HR, 10 RBI); Nick Weglarz, OF, Kinston (.375 AVG, 2 HR, 4 RBI)

#### *Previous Winners:*

4/24 to 4/30: Jose Constanza (OF - Akron)

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)

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### Director's Cuts

I missed an opportunity to get some quotes from Indians Farm Director Ross Atkins this week, but did catch him on SportsTime Ohio's new show "Minor League Magazine" which debuted this past Tuesday. From what I know, this will be a weekly show every Tuesday at 6:00pm, although I am not 100% on that. They will spend 30 minutes recapping the system, talking to Atkins, doing a player feature, and other things every week. The first show was very well done, and you should expect bigger and better things as it gets off the ground.

And before anyone asks, yes, there is a good chance I will have some part in the show, but not likely in-

studio. Anyway, here are the comments on the show Atkins made on several prospects in Lake County and Akron:

*On Dallas Cawiezell:* "He came to Lonnie Soloff and our strength and conditioning staff to do an extensive evaluation on strength and conditioning to find out what these guys are physically made of. They picked up the phone and said "how do you say his name, and who is this guy?" He is a specimen.

Some guys are just bigger and stronger and stand out in a uniform, but when you get in and evaluate this guy thoroughly he really is bigger than the rest.

We are hoping for durability and power, and thus far we have seen it."

*On Karexon Sanchez:* "Karexon plays third base but can actually play the middle. He plays a lot of second base and he can stand at shortstop.

He is extremely athletic, a good runner, has a plus arm, and his hands are coming.

Playing defense will be something he has to be good at, but the bat is there.

He has a couple of triples, a couple of doubles, and a couple of home runs already and an OPS over .900.

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At 20 years old in that league and coming out of Venezuela and thrown under those lights in that nice stadium [in Lake County] he is answering the call.

People talk about Robinson Cano when they look at him, now that is a special player and a lot of projection, but you can dream on a 20 year old with those tools.

So, we are excited about Karexon.&quot;

*On Mike Pontius:* &quot;I'll tell you what, this is scouting at its best. This guy came late round in the 40s and out of high school from Missouri.

He was a football player who decided his senior year he wanted to commit to playing baseball.

He has made an unbelievable transition.

He has legitimately gone from being a project to being an incredible prospect.

He is somebody who throws 95 MPH with a knee-buckling breaking ball, and has the intensity, focus and drive we are looking for.

He brings a little bit of that football mentality to the field, but he is one of those guys we are all pulling for.

Just a great scouting story, and a great development story.&quot;

*On Wes Hodges:* &quot;Wes is out of the 2006 Draft out of Georgia Tech. Coming into his first full season he went right to the Carolina League and pretty much was a standout there.

Now in the Eastern League he had six home runs in his first month of play.

He committed to an offseason strength and conditioning program where he took 15 pounds of weight off.

He is one of the guys where he is already becoming his own coach.

He understands the power of 162 games and what that means to his body and went into the offseason and did something about it.

He is off to a great start and we are projecting him to have an even better year this year at an even higher level.

That's rare as we usually expect guys to make one step and keep the same numbers.

What we are seeing from him, he is going to be even better.

We are excited about Wes.&quot;

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*On David Huff:* "I think he is a Tom Glavine [type]. He has exceptional feel for his fastball, he has feel for his secondary pitches, has amazing confidence, is a great athlete, and is extremely strong and durable. He is similar to Wes where in 2006 he was pitching at UCLA and now is pitching in the Eastern League.

That's significant.

[The Eastern League] is a good brand of baseball where you make a mistake they hit it and he is making very few of them.

He has 25 innings and 25 punchouts.

He is very young and has a great career ahead of him and he is inevitably going to be in the big leagues soon."

## Lofgren Back In The Zone

It is amazing what the flip of the page on a calendar can do for a baseball player. It is one of those superstitious things for players

who have a rough month that believe with the start of a new month things will get better. This has certainly been the case with Akron left-hander Chuck Lofgren as in two starts in May he is 1-1 with a 1.38 ERA, compared to his five starts in April where he was 0-2 with an 8.24 ERA.

Lofgren has been sensational his last two starts, and the turnaround can be credited to the hard work he put in after his April 25th start when he hit rock bottom by going 4.2 innings and giving up seven runs. After that poor outing, Lofgren went through some of his video archives and compared video from this season to that of his great 2006 season when he went 17-5 with a 2.32 ERA and found he has been rushing his delivery. Ever since then he has made a conscious effort to be much more deliberate with his move to the plate, and the results in his last two starts show the hard work has paid off.

The Indians also had made some mechanical adjustments in Lofgren's delivery during spring training to get him to locate his stuff down more in the zone in spring training. He had been

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slow to adapt to the changes, but finally seems to be grasping them.

There were some additional changes and Lofgren even chimed in with his thoughts on his slow start, which I will reveal in detail in an article on him sometime over the weekend.

## Hodges Is The Future At Third

Akron third baseman Wes Hodges is showing an electric bat early in the season. In 104 games last year at Kinston, Hodges

hit .288 with 15 HR, 71 RBI and an .840 OPS, and so far this year in 32 games (through Wednesday) at Akron this season he is hitting .289 with 7 HR, 30 RBI and an .866 OPS. His seven home runs are 2

nd

in the Eastern League and his 30 RBI put him at 3

rd

in the league, and he is on pace to hit over 30 HR and pile up over 100 RBI on the season.

Hodges' improved power numbers are attributed to him finally being 100% healthy as last year he was still recovering from a stress fracture in his foot he suffered at Georgia Tech before being drafted. He has also done a better job of understanding how pitchers are attacking him and is making good adjustments at bat to at bat.

Also, the Indians found that his hip flexors were tight, which hindered his ability to get down low on groundballs. So, this past offseason Hodges spent a lot of time working out and doing Yoga to slim down and become more flexible so he could improve defensively. As a result, Hodges looks like a new man where his lateral quickness has really improved, he is moving well, and his overall defense has improved significantly at third base.

## The Amazing Captains

The Lake County starting pitching rotation has been phenomenal so far this year. The ace of

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the staff has been left-hander Ryan Miller who has dominated South Atlantic League hitters.

To date, in six starts Miller is 5-0 with a 1.09 ERA and in 33 innings has allowed 21 hits and 13 walks while striking out 36.

If he puts up another two to three starts like he has already, he could be packing his bags for Kinston.

Miller's 89-91 MPH fastball has shown more life this year, and his slider is quickly developing into a swing-and-miss pitch at the next level.

Left-hander Kelvin De La Cruz is an up-and-coming prospect and at age 19 he is more than holding his own in the league. To date, in six starts he is 1-2 with a 2.12 ERA and in 29.2 innings has allowed 25 hits and 11 walks while striking out 28.

De La Cruz has a real good feel for his 92-93 MPH fastball, and his changeup has the makings of a plus pitch.

He has the size, intelligence and the pitches to grow a lot in the coming years.

Left-hander Ryan Morris is off to a spectacular start as well, going 4-0 with a 2.84 ERA in six starts. In 31.2 innings Morris has only surrendered 24 hits and 7 walks while striking out 16. Morris is a fierce competitor on the mound, and his makeup is off the charts. He features a four-seam fastball that consistently clocks in at 87-91 MPH, and has natural sink.

This year Morris has done a good job keeping the ball down and using his changeup to setup his fastball.

The rest of the rotation is rounded out with right-hander Santo Frias who is 1-0 with a 4.58 ERA in four starts, and right-hander Chris Archer who is 1-4 with a 2.96 ERA in six starts. Frias hurt his arm near the end of the season last year and did not throw in the offseason, and is finally returning to form.

His fastball sits around 90-92 and his slider has the makings of a very good major league pitch.

Archer has held opposing hitters to a .117 average, but he has struggled with his control as he has walked 29 batters in 24.1 innings.

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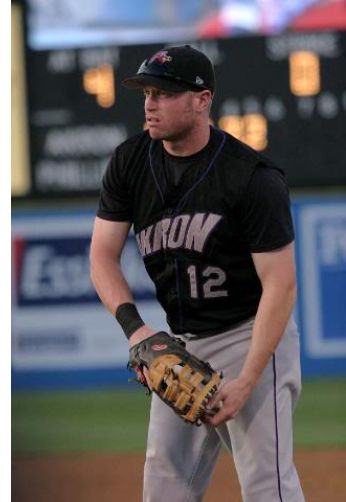
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Archer has a live arm and electric stuff, but his location and command is a work in progress.

### Brown Out

First baseman Jordan Brown hit the disabled list last Friday with patella tendonitis in his left knee. The injury is not considered to be serious and more a nagging thing where the Indians felt best to rest it. Brown will likely be out another week or two. To date,



Brown is hitting .271 with 0 HR, 10 RBI and a .719 OPS in 96 at bats at Buffalo, and his 11 doubles lead the International League.

Brown is a notorious slow starter, as in his MVP season in 2006 at Kinston he hit .232 with 0 HR, and 9 RBI in his first 28 games before finishing up at .290 with 15 HR and 87 RBI. This year he has adjusted well to his first taste of Triple-A, but he has been a little inconsistent as he has piled up many multi-hit games but just as many 0-fers as well.

Brown has felt comfortable at the plate, so hopefully when he returns 100% from the knee injury he can get in a groove and into one of his hot streaks.

Brown's intelligence at the plate has shown itself early at Buffalo as he is starting to pickup trends from other teams on how they are attacking him. Brown studies the game charts after every game and has found that some teams are pitching him backwards by throwing him off-speed stuff in full counts. He is also quickly realizing that Triple-A pitchers usually can throw three or four pitches for strikes at anytime, so he has had to tighten up the mental approach even more to keep his patient approach at the plate and wait for a pitch to drive when he is in a hitter's count.

### Go-Go A No-Go

Akron outfielder Ryan "Go-Go" Goleski had two outstanding seasons in 2004 (.295, 28 HR, 104 RBI) and 2006 (.306, 27 HR, 106 RBI), but ever since his wrist injury in the 2006 offseason and being taken in the Rule 5 Draft that same offseason his career has



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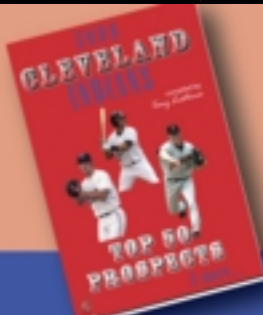
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~~Major League Baseball (MLB) is the only professional sports league in the United States that has a "reserve" list of players who are not currently on a team's roster but are eligible to be called up to the active roster at any time.~~



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