

Minor Happenings: Huff Showing His Stuff At Akron

Written by {ga=consigliere}
Friday, May 23 2008 7:00 PM -

It's time for yet another installment of The Happenings down on the farm for the Tribe. And while things may not be going well for the Indians these days, fear not Tribe fans, help is on the way. Lefty David Huff is off to a sensational start at Akron and has shot up the prospect charts nationally to where he is going to be someone teams want when the Indians talk trade in the coming months. Also in this week's edition Tony takes a look at Chris Gimenez's new approach at the plate, the fantastic Lake County starting rotation, Trevor Crowe and Jordan Brown back from the DL, and more!



'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.

This week I was in Lake County on Sunday and Tuesday, and got to see top left-handers Ryan Miller and Kelvin De La Cruz in action again. During my visit, I was able to talk to De La Cruz and Miller, and will be having feature pieces on them soon.

Also, I talked to speedy outfielder Adam White and will have a piece on him sometime in the near future.

I'll be in Akron on Saturday night, so if anyone that reads this will be in attendance feel free to say hi. I'll be the crazy guys bustling all about taking video and pictures of guys, as well as talking to several people connected with the team. Speaking of Akron, if you missed it, I did a feature piece on catcher [Chris Gimenez's transition to catcher](#) over the weekend.

[Chris](#)

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Indians Minor League Player Of The Week

(from May 15th through May 21st)

David Huff (Left-handed Pitcher, Akron)

2-0, 0.64 ERA, 14 IP, 1 R, 7 H, 1 BB, 8 K

Last Thursday, he was sensational in tossing a complete game seven inning three-hit shutout only throwing 68 pitches. In the start,



he only allowed one runner to reach second base and had one walk and two strikeouts. The game marked the first complete-game shutout of three hits or less for an Akron starter since right-hander Bear Bay tossed a nine inning two-hitter on June 9th, 2006.

He followed up that start with another outstanding effort last night going seven innings allowing just one run on four hits while walking no one and striking out six. In his last seven appearances, Huff has allowed just five earned runs in his last 45 innings (1.00 ERA), and on the season he is 4-1 with a 2.03 ERA in nine starts.

He leads the Eastern League in ERA (2.03), WHIP (0.83), and is third in strikeouts (49).

Huff was also named the Bank of America Eastern League Pitcher of the Week for the week ending May 18th.

With his dynamite start to his season, Akron left-hander David Huff has cemented his standing as one of the Indians top pitching prospects. In fact, if he keeps this up, by season's end he just may be THE top pitching prospect in the system. If not already.

When the Indians look to make a deal here in the next month or so for an impact bat to help rejuvenate an offense stuck in a season long slide you better believe that Huff will be at the top of every team's wish list.

Honorable Mentions: Carlton Smith, RHP, Kinston (1-1, 0.69 ERA, 13 IP, 1 R, 7 H, 0 BB, 7 K); Adam Miller, RHP, Buffalo (0-1, 1.64 ERA, 11 IP, 2 R, 4 H, 5 BB, 6 K); Ryan Morris, LHP, Lake County (0-0, 1.50 ERA, 12 IP, 2 R, 10 H, 6 BB, 10 K); Chris Gimenez, C, Akron (.412 AVG, 2 2B, HR, 4 RBI, 4 BB); Niuman Romero, IF, Kinston (.450 AVG, 2B, HR, 3 RBI)

Previous Winners:

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5/8 to 5/14: Steven Wright (RHP - Kinston)
5/1 to 5/7: Jeremy Sowers (LHP - Buffalo)
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)

Director's Cuts

Indians Farm Director Ross Atkins was once again in Buffalo this week to get a look at some of the players there, and offers up some comments on a few players there as well as in Akron:



On Shin-Soo Choo: "When I was there on [Tuesday], he looked like [Ichiro] Suzuki. I mean the guy was doing it all.

He hit a home run, he was filleting doubles into the gap on changeups, looked good defensively, stole a base, tagged up and went second to third on a backdoor sacrifice, and really was all-world.

If that is an indication of how the rest of his rehab is going to be, he might be speed that rehab process up in quite a hurry.

He looks very much like a big league player.

The fact he is back is a testament to our medical staff and our strength and conditioning staff.

He is sticking to the process of a plan and being patient with it and seeing it through.

He spent a lot of time in spring training, so he is fired up and as happy as I have ever seen him and can't wait to see him up in [Cleveland].

On Oneli Perez: "He has had incredible numbers everywhere except until this year in Triple-A. It looks like he has had some struggles. We saw him as he pitched against us in Buffalo, and he opened our eyes there.

It is a creative acquisition process as we have to put him on our roster and the White Sox have to take him off theirs.

It is another depth major league arm that we are very glad to have.

He has power-sink, a very impressive breaking ball that has a lot of depth to it, so those two combinations if we can get him to be consistently on the plate is a great combination to have.

I also believe he was the Pitcher of the Year in the Dominican Winter League this year.

So hopefully we can tap into that and get him back onto the major league radar."

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On Chris Gimenez: "Chris is one of our favorite guys in the organization. He is just extremely committed, is a natural leader, he has no problem taking charge in a clubhouse or game, and is extremely strong and durable. He can handle injuries and blow at catcher. Last year he played a day after having a significant injury to his wrist that typically in our system is a two week shutdown and he was ready to go the next day to catch. The toughness, the durability, and the skill with the bat is the most important. He probably is our most productive minor league bat in the system this year, so that is very exciting and a nice bright spot in our system. It is obviously a huge challenge [converting to catcher]. He has answered the call. I think the final thing for him will be consistently throwing to second base. We are making sure that he can keep control of a running game."

Gimenez's New Approach

Akron catcher Chris Gimenez has not only been working hard on adapting to catching full time, but he has also been working hard on improving his approach at the plate. One of the big positive changes for him so far this season is his much improved plate

discipline where he has 26 walks and 23 strikeouts in 97 at bats, where coming into the season for his career he had only 170 walks to 310 strikeouts in 1355 at bats.

This year, Gimenez has focused on being more selective at the plate. By being more selective, he realizes that it will help him get into better hitter's counts and improve his on-base percentage with more walks.

It took awhile for Gimenez to become comfortable with the approach as he was very nervous at first, but now he has settled in and his confidence continues to grow after every at bat.

"In spring training, one day I said to myself 'I wanna make this pitch be right there and if it is not I am not even going to attempt to swing at it,'" said Gimenez in a recent interview I had with him at Canal Park. "I just kept doing that, and once we started playing games I really starting doing it. I can't tell you how many better hitters'

counts I have gotten into. The best thing about it is other teams see it and scout it and know 'hey, we are going to have to pitch this guy

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in the zone to get him out.'

The strikeout rate has increased some for Gimenez, but this is something which probably will drop to career levels as he continues to get more acquainted with his new approach. He credits a lot of his newfound success to former teammates Michael Aubrey and Jordan Brown who helped him realize you can fall behind 0-1 and still put up a productive at bat.

'I've always been a guy who strikes out 80-90 times, and I bet you a good 75% of them were just because I was getting myself out,' said Gimenez. 'Swinging at a 0-0 slider that starts at the edge of the plate and breaks off and swinging at it and getting myself down 0-1 as opposed to 'who cares' if it is not right where I want it I am comfortable hitting 0-1. And that is something that when I was a little younger I would get nervous because I would think I was already in the hole at 0-1 and I don't want to go 0-2 and that is the worst thing you can think about.

And being around older guys like Michael Aubrey and also Jordan Brown has helped me a ton because they have great strike zone discipline.

All it is, is you are making them throw it where you want to hit it.

Last year I was getting slided to death, especially last year when I got up here they kind of figured me out.

I did not make the adjustment, and I told myself this year I was not going to let that happen.

The thing is I am so comfortable now being able to take 2-0.

For me that was like I didn't care where you were throwing it I was swinging.

As soon as I started coming up with that mentality, even on 3-1, I will spit on a pitch that is maybe borderline that normally I might swing at and take 3-2 or ball four.'

The Fantastic Four

Lake County has been the only team in the entire Indians organization, including the major league team, that has played consistently well all year. While there have been some good performances offensively, the backbone of the team has been its exceptional starting rotation led by left-handers Kelvin De La Cruz, Ryan Morris, and Ryan Miller as well as right-hander Chris

Archer. The three lefties have experienced the most success while Archer has struggled with his command, but nonetheless the Indians are very excited about all four starters and all four of them have very high ceilings.

Miller has been the ace of the staff going 7-0 with a 1.02 ERA in eight starts this season, and has been backed up by strong starts from other members in the rotation with De La

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Cruz (3-2, 1.77 ERA), Morris (5-0, 2.22 ERA), and Archer (1-6, 5.18 ERA). The Indians are very pleased with Miller's outstanding start to his season. The key to Miller's success has been his ability to throw strikes, and while he seems ready for a promotion, the Indians want to see him put together another few starts where he shows better command of his fastball around the zone.

He has electric stuff, but he has gotten a lot of hitters out on pitches that were not even close to the zone and it is something he needs to hone in on because as he moves up the minor league ladder hitters will start to lay off those pitches.

Morris is a more of a pitch-to-contact pitcher and as a 20-year old has held up well in the league (more on him later). The same goes for De La Cruz who is just 19-years old who the Indians feel may have the highest ceiling of any pitcher in the system.

His 6-5 frame, youth, and durability makes him very projectable, and his stuff and build has many calling him "Lefty Carmona"; after former Lake County great and current Indians ace Fausto Carmona.

Archer's numbers have not been overly impressive, and he has struggled with his command (39 walks in 33 innings), but he is the classic example that it is not all about the stats in the minor leagues. It is about projection, and Archer has a ton of it. The Indians love his live arm and feel he may have the best breaking ball in the system. When he is on, his stuff is unhittable.

Archer is only 19 years old and he is a work in progress and the Indians staff is working with him diligently to become more consistent throwing strikes.

The Indians really believe that once Archer grows into his 6'3" 180 pound frame, he is going to take off and things will start to fall into place for him.

Three Players, Two Spots

First baseman Jordan Brown was activated from the disabled list and returned to the Buffalo lineup on Monday. Brown had been on the disabled list since May 1st and missed almost three weeks with patellar tendonitis to his left knee, and the injury was to the



same knee he had arthroscopic surgery on in the offseason.

The pain started in a game on April 27th, and after that game he ended up sitting out the next two games to rest it before returning to the lineup on May 1st. But, after two at bats the knee was still bothering him and getting worse, so he was taken out of the game early and put on the disabled list.

Brown was 2-for-20 before going on the disabled list, and the Indians decided to not push it and gave Brown a lot of

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time off to rest the knee in order to help ensure the injury would no flare up and jeopardize the rest of the season.

Since his return, in two games Brown is 4-for-7 and on the season is hitting .291 with 0 HR, 10 RBI, and a .746 OPS.

With Brown's return to the lineup as well as first baseman Michael Aubrey's likely return when outfielder Shin-Soo Choo is activated in Cleveland, it presents an interesting quandary in Buffalo at first base. With Brown needing to play everyday, and also Ryan Mulhern and Aubrey both hot at the plate of late, getting three first baseman ample playing time is going to be tough, even with one of them filling in nightly at designated hitter. Brown and

Mulhern have experience in the outfield, so it is possible they could get a few starts here and there out there, especially once Choo is called up.

However, Brown is still recovering from his knee injury, so Mulhern would be the likely option to play out there if needed.

In any case, if Aubrey does return to Buffalo, there could be some roster movement looming as it does not seem possible all three could get enough playing time to stay sharp.

Mulhern could very well be the odd man out.

Crowe-ing Once More

On Saturday, Akron outfielder Trevor Crowe was activated from the disabled list and infielder Chris de la Cruz was sent to Kinston. Crowe had been sidelined since April 6th with a strained back, and missed a total of 35 games. In four games since his return,



Crowe is 3-for-15 and in six games overall on the season is hitting .182 with 0 HR, 1 RBI and a .697 OPS.

Crowe's season stopped just as soon as it started as he succumbed to pain in his back just two games into the season. The back had bothered him throughout spring training, but he thought it was just typical aches and pains players go through during the spring as they get their bodies ready for another long and grueling season. Things took a turn for the

worse when he started having sharp pains shoot down the back of his legs.

The Indians ended up shutting him down, and had him rehab in Cleveland for two and a half weeks and then sent him out to extended spring training the last week of April to continue his

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rehab and play in some games to get back up to game shape.

Crowe may not be in Akron for long regardless of how he performs. With roster movement on the horizon in June, Crowe may finally get his first taste of Triple-A now that Ben Francisco is gone. Francisco's return to the Buffalo outfield at the end of spring training pushed Crowe back to Akron, and once Shin-Soo Choo is done with his rehab assignment in Buffalo do not be surprised if Crowe is moved up to Buffalo at that time (provided he is healthy).

Morris Locked In At Lake County

Lake County left-hander Ryan Morris continues to put up quality starts and notch wins. Fellow left-hander Ryan Miller has put up

some incredible stats early on and sort of overshadowed Morris, but Morris has almost matched Miller pitch for pitch early in the season. On the season Morris is 5-0 with a 2.22 ERA and .211 batting average against, and Lake County is 9-0 in games he starts. Last year at in 14 starts in the Gulf Coast league and at Lake County, Morris went 3-2 with a 3.90 ERA and was certainly on the top prospect radar (he was 31st in my listing), but this season has been a breakout campaign for him so far.

Morris is a 20-year-old North Carolina native who the Indians picked up in the 4th round of the 2006 Draft. He goes about things a little differently than Miller, as he is more a pitch to contact pitcher because he does not have an overpowering fastball. He is what many would call a crafty lefty who relies on hitting his spots and getting off to roll over on balls and put them in play.

Morris likes to use his fastball to get ahead in the count and then work the corners with his changeup and curveball, and so far he has had success with this approach. He is a competitor on the mound, creates very good deception in his delivery and does a good job pitching away to left-handed batters and especially right-handed batters.

Goedert Is Silent, But Deadly

Kinston infielder Jared Goedert is extremely quiet by nature and keeps a low profile. Last year, Goedert burst onto the scene when he hit .364 with 16 HR and 51 RBI at Lake County in just 46 games in April and May.

The power outburst came as a surprise to

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