

## Minor Happenings: Archer Turns It Around

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Thursday, May 29 2008 7:00 PM -

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I'll put it right out there, I don't know how any man with two kids that watches this much live minor league baseball can keep a marriage going. But we all benefit from Tony's addiction. You will not find stuff like his anywhere else. In print or in cyberspace. I was out in Akron to see the Aeros over the Memorial Day weekend, and the trip provided all kinds of great nuggets for this week's "Minor Happenings". So enjoy this latest installment, which is a great read for both the obsessed and casual followers of the Indians farm clubs.



*"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 over the holiday weekend and had a chance to talk with a lot of different people, from players, to family members, and to scouts. Some of those conversations will be included in today's piece, and the players I talked to were a trio of right-handed relievers in Jeff Stevens, Randy Newsom, and Erik Stiller who I will have feature pieces on soon.

I was going to go to Buffalo today to see Adam Miller pitch as he was scheduled to start today prior to going on the disabled list, but with him out I decided not to go as there is no one worth seeing pitch tonight. In lieu of going to Buffalo, I will likely be conducting a phone interview with Jordan Brown sometime this weekend, so I will have that coming down the pipeline as well.

Since I am not going to Buffalo tonight, I decided to go to Lake County instead. I'll be there tonight to see Kelvin De La Cruz pitch again, but I'll spend more time focusing on some of the relievers and hitters and interviewing a handful of them for upcoming pieces.

And, I still have a piece on left-hander Ryan Miller that is near ready that got put on the backburner because of the busy holiday weekend.

The Ryan Miller piece should be up sometime this weekend, likely Sunday.

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If you missed it last weekend, I did a piece on [speedy outfielder Adam White](#)

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Also, one final reminder to mention that the MLB Draft commences this coming Thursday June 5<sup>th</sup>. Dennis Nosco will be all over the draft with a preview the day before it, a live two-day blog on [my site](#), and then a wrap on this site after the draft. Be sure to check it out, and if you missed it he did a [write-up this week on the draft](#)

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Also, Director of Amateur Scouting Brad Grant will be in studio on STO this Tuesday at 6pm on the *Indians Minor League Magazine* show to talk draft.

When it comes to the MLB Draft, SportsTime Ohio and The Cleveland Fan have you covered!

### Indians Minor League Player Of The Week

*(for week of May 22<sup>nd</sup> to May 28<sup>th</sup>)*

#### Chris Archer (Right-handed Pitcher - Lake County)

*0-0, 0.00 ERA, 2 starts, 11 IP, 0 R, 7 H, 2 BB, 10 K*

What a fantastic week for Lake County right-hander Chris Archer who just dominated the competition in the South Atlantic League.



There were many fans who questioned why the Indians have stuck with Archer for so long in the rotation at Lake County given his struggles with walking people before this week (39 walks in 33 innings pitched), but after his performance in two starts this week, I think everyone can now see what the Indians and scouts see in him that make him so highly regarded.

Last Thursday, Archer pitched six strong shutout innings giving up only three hits, striking out five and only walking one. Archer left the game after six innings with a 1-0 lead, but the bullpen was unable to hold the lead to get him the much deserved win. On Tuesday, Archer's follow up act was just as good as he threw five shutout innings and allowed just four hits, one walk and struck out five.

He did not factor into the decision as the game was scoreless until the eighth inning, and he

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was long gone before Lake County put up two runs in that inning to win the game 2-0.

Archer has a live arm and a devastating curveball that many in the organization consider as the best breaking ball in the system. With two plus pitches, good makeup, and still only 19-years old, the sky is the limit for Archer. He is a legit pitching

prospect in the organization to follow going forward, and his struggles and successes will be a lot of fun to watch in the coming years as he grows into his body and matures as a player.

More later on Archer below in an interview I had recently with Lake County pitching coach Ruben Niebla.

*Honorable Mentions:* Dustin Realini, 1B, Lake County (.440 AVG, HR, 7 RBI); Jared Goedert, 2B/3B, Kinston (.350 AVG, 2 HR, 8 RBI); Wes Hodges, 3B, Akron (.414 AVG, 0 HR, 5 RBI); Brad Snyder, OF, Buffalo (.471 AVG, 0 HR, 4 RBI); Hector Rondon, RHP, Kinston (1-0, 0.00 ERA, 7 IP, 0 R, 2 H, 1 BB, 8 K)

### *Previous Winners:*

5/15 to 5/21: David Huff (LHP - Akron)

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)

## Coaches Corner

A week back when I was in Lake County I had the chance to sit down with pitching coach Ruben Niebla and talk about several of the outstanding, promising arms he has had to work with this year there. Here is a rundown on what was said:

*On Kelvin De La Cruz:* "Confidence has never been an issue with Kelvin. I think he is coming into his own as a pitcher.

He is a

three-pitch mix guy and he loves to compete. He is probably the most polished of the starters on the staff as far as three pitches in the zone.

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He gets after it and does a pretty good job at attacking hitters.

He has an understanding on how to attack them and sticks to his strengths well.

I think with De La what I have seen is that more than anything at times he tends to lose his focus, and then when he has runners in scoring position he gets his focus back and executes his pitches.

For example, I have seen him pitch out of more situations than any of the other guys with runners in scoring position and less than two outs.

When he is able to maintain his focus throughout the game I think he is going to be a pitcher to reckon with.&quot;

*On Mike Pontius:* &quot;If he was not on your radar last year, you messed it up (laughs). Mike came up here for the final third of the season last year.

We saw the stuff.

We knew why he was inconsistent and he was able to apply instruction.

So, coming into spring training this year we were able to see he had already made adjustments to get the ball in the zone, throw the ball downhill, and tighten up that breaking ball for strikes.

When he came here at the beginning of the season he just took off with it.

The thing about Mike is he is able to apply instruction and that is a quality you can't overlook.

Also the fact that he throws in the mid-90s and has a plus breaking ball.

It has some depth and bite to it.

He is special.

He is someone I think could definitely help us in the near future at a higher level.&quot;

*On Ryan Miller:* &quot;Bottom line, he has good stuff. He can spin a breaking ball, has good feel for a changeup, and he has good deception to his fastball which is a good combination to have. Some of the things he is working on is polishing those strengths of his and getting more consistent in the strike zone.&quot;

*On Chris Archer:* &quot;I think we are solidifying his delivery right now more than anything. Archer has gone through some adversity during some of his games.

That is only going to make him better because when he starts getting consistent in the strike zone - and we are confident he will - he has electric stuff through the zone.

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It is just a matter of being patient and waiting for it to come.&quot;

*On Ryan Morris:* &quot;He is a strike thrower and sinks the ball well. He pitches to the bottom of the zone, which is a formula for a lot of groundballs.

Our infield I think is leading the league in fielding percentage and that is just a good combination for him as it allows him to throw a lot of groundballs and let the defense play behind him.&quot;

*On Joey Mahalic:* &quot;I think what I am trying to do with him is making sure that he stays on top of the ball with consistency. He has a tendency to get under pitches and when he does his ball sails from side to side.

He has a nice loose arm with good arm strength and able to sink the ball at 88-89 MPH.

But when he stays on top of his pitches he is able to sink it with a downhill angle and get a lot of groundballs.

That is what he has done.&quot;

### Another Scout's Take

When I was in Akron over the weekend, I had a chance to talk to several baseball people outside of the Indians organization. One in particular was a scout for an American League club who I had the chance to speak to for about 15 minutes and run down a

laundry list of players in the system. This was not nearly as in-depth of a conversation as I had with [the scout in Akron a month back where we talked for over an hour](#), but still it was an interesting conversation to say the least. (Note, these opinions are those of the scout and not necessarily mine).

The AL scout said there is not a lot of major league quality guys at Akron as the team is mainly depth guys or players who are complimentary players to a big league club. His job is to look for starters and guys that are an improvement over what they have in their system.

He likes some of the arms and a few bats, but aside from that thinks many of the players there are forgettable.

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We talked about outfielder Trevor Crowe, and he pointedly said "he just doesn't see it....where is he going to play?". He was not big at all on Crowe and doesn't see a consistent bat to be an everyday player and would not recommend his club trade for him or pick him up. On third baseman Wes Hodges he said that while his bat is impressive, he does not see him sticking at third base.

He does not feel like he is good defensively at third and believes he ends up at first base eventually.

He said he really likes shortstop Josh Rodriguez in that he moves well at short and has a promising bat.

Also, he really, really likes catcher Chris Gimenez's bat.

On the pitching front, left-handed starter David Huff and right-handed reliever Jeff Stevens are two guys he would love to have in his organization and are guys he thinks have a lot of value.

We also talked about some of the Indians players, namely third baseman Andy Marte and outfielder Ben Francisco. He is yet another scout I have talked to who claims to love Francisco much more than what he termed as the "over-hyped" outfielder Franklin Gutierrez.

He said it is not even close and that "yeah, Gutierrez has more tools.

But, those tools have not changed one bit since he was in Double-A in 2004.

Francisco on the other hand needs some work on defense, but aside from that has improved every year.

It is no contest.

I'd take Francisco on my team any day over Gutierrez".

He also said that Andy Marte has fallen off the prospect map and that if he were to be put on waivers his club would likely pass.

Just too many holes in his game, and defensively he is not very good.

He also mentioned that right-handed starter Paul Byrd has more trade value than people think.

Many teams would love to have the reliable Byrd to fill a #4-#5 spot in the rotation for the stretch run, and believes the Indians could get a good promising bat or bullpen arm in return for him.

## Miller Injured Again

The big news of the week was right-hander Adam Miller going on the disabled list because of a broken callous on the middle finger of his right hand, and then having what very well might be season ending surgery to correct this serious issue. It was a crazy week, as the injury seemingly came out of nowhere as in six starts on the season Miller was looking strong and had a 1.88 ERA. It was a

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