

## Minor Happenings: Brantley The Next To Be Called?

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Thursday, June 18 2009 7:00 PM -

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Lots to talk about and share this week, which means Minor Happenings will be broken up into two parts this week. We'll run part I today and part II this weekend. Last week's Happenings was all MLB Draft related. Also, Tony spoke to a lot of people in the Tribe farm system this week ... so we have a ton of great content. In this installment, Tony spends some time talking about Michael Brantley, who was acquired in the C.C. Sabathia trade last year ... and could be here in Cleveland very soon.



*"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.*

Lots to talk about and share this week, which means *Minor Happenings* will be broken up into two parts this week. Due to the attention being put squarely on the draft in last week's edition there is some catching up to do this week, plus I had a chance to talk with a lot of people recently about a lot of things (as you will see below).

Anyway, be sure to check out the piece posted on [High-A Kinston right-hander Paolo Espino](#) earlier in the week.

If you want to take a trip down memory lane, take a look at

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[the "Ghost of Prospects Past" piece on Mark Lewis](#)  
that Andrew Clayman wrote as well.

Last night, Paul Cousineau and I had the pleasure of talking to 2009 Indians 6<sup>th</sup> round draft pick 1B Ben Carlson as well as the esteemed Kevin Goldstein from Baseball Prospectus on our weekly radio show

[Smoke Signals](#)

We talked with Carlson for about 15 minutes, and talked about a litany of Indians prospects with Goldstein for over 30 minutes.

[Check it out](#)

!

Also, I was in Lake County and Akron this past week and talked to the likes of Mike McGuire, Chris Jones, Nick Weglarz, Jerad Head, John Drennen, and Vinnie Pestano at length, so look out for feature pieces on them in the coming weeks. I'll be in Mahoning Valley on Wednesday night, so hope to bump into some of you Scrapper fans there!

Last, a Player of the Week announcement was not made last week, so we have some catching up to do this week with making a selection for the week of June 4-10 and one for the week of June 11-17 (which will be posted tomorrow).

Onto the Happenings...

### **Indians Minor League Player Of The Week** *(for games from June 4 through June 10)*

**Michael Brantley (Outfielder - Columbus)**  
*.500 AVG (10-for-20), 7 R, 2 2B, 0 3B, 1 HR, 3 RBI, 3 BB, 3 K, 3 SB*

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Triple-A Columbus outfielder Michael Brantley is the youngest player on the team in Columbus this year and just celebrated his 22nd birthday on May 15th, but even though he is the youngest player on the team and one of the youngest players in all the International League he plays the game and handles himself like a 28-year old veteran. As a club official told me back in spring



training, &quot;Michael Brantley has been incredibly professional and we are blown away by the talent level...he has been unbelievable.&quot; His outstanding makeup and maturity is a big reason why his early season struggles with performance and injury did not affect him and end up snowballing into a year long slump.

Still only 21 years old when the season started, his age and inexperience showed early in the season as he got off to a slow start in Columbus adjusting to the new level in Triple-A. He also battled through a hamstring injury he suffered in the first week of the season which lingered for most of the month before he took almost a week off to get past it.

Those two factors combined were a big reason why in 17 games in April he only hit .217 (15-for-69) with 0 HR, 5 RBI and a .574 OPS.

He came back with a solid May hitting .261 (30-for-115) with 2 HR, 9 RBI, and a .726 OPS in 30 games played, and in 16 games so far in June he is hitting .348 (23-for-66) with 1 HR, 8 RBI and an .822 OPS.

His strong performance the past seven weeks has raised his batting average 72 points from .200 to .272 and his OPS by 165 points from .544 to .709 from where they were at on April 27th.

He already has three home runs on the season, which is one shy of his career high and we are not even half way through the season.

Also, his 20 stolen bases rank him 2nd in the International League and he has been caught only twice good for a 90.9% success rate.

His maturity and ability to handle tough situations well is something that could play into the equation where he fills the every day center field role in Cleveland sooner rather than later. The team is in sort of a holding pattern with star center fielder Grady Sizemore on the disabled list with a sore elbow, and in the meantime they have gotten by with playing outfielders Trevor

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Crowe and Ben Francisco out in center field on a temporary basis while they await Sizemore's hopeful return.

Sizemore is reportedly close to returning to the team as he will start swinging the bat this weekend, and if he has no setbacks he could be back in a week or two.

But, if he has a setback and the soreness lingers he is expected to have surgery on the elbow which will sideline him for at least six weeks.

If this happens, expect Brantley to get a call to Cleveland to fill the huge void in center field and at the top of the lineup.

While he still has some issues to work through with his route running, he would still be a much better fit out there defensively over Crowe and Francisco.

He would also be a welcomed addition to the lineup and provide some excellent speed and on-base ability which has been sorely lacking since Sizemore went on the disabled list.

Last year while in the Milwaukee Brewers system playing with Double-A Huntsville in the Southern League he was tabbed as having the best strike zone judgment and considered the best base-runner by Baseball America. He works hard and battles at the plate, almost never giving away an at bat. He is tough to strikeout and makes consistent contact (28 BB, 32 K, 250 AB), and his power is still emerging.

He will never be a 12+ home run a year guy, but he is expected to put up power numbers similar to former Tribe fan favorite Kenny Lofton who averaged nine home runs a year and 42 extra base hits a year in the ten seasons during the prime of his career from 1992 to 2001.

The only thing that may hold Brantley back from making a debut in Cleveland this year is he is still not a finished product in the outfield as he is still working to improve his jumps, reading the ball off the bat, and getting better with his situational throws. Nonetheless, if Sizemore is out for awhile, expect to see Brantley in Cleveland sometime soon.

### Honorable Mentions:

John Drennen (OF - Akron): .360 AVG (9-for-25), 5 R, 3 2B, 1 3B, 1 HR, 10 RBI, 1 BB, 4 K  
Chuck Lofgren (LHP - Columbus): 1-0, 1 game, 0.00 ERA, 7.0 IP, 5 H, 0 ER, 0 BB, 3 K  
Eric Berger (LHP - Kinston): 1-1, 2 games, 2.38 ERA, 11.1 IP, 8 H, 3 ER, 7 BB, 5 K

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### Previous Winners:

05/28 to 06/03: Donnie Webb (OF - Lake County)  
05/21 to 05/27: Jordan Brown (1B/OF - Columbus)  
05/14 to 05/20: Paolo Espino (RHP - Kinston)  
05/07 to 05/13: Lonnie Chisenhall (3B - Kinston)  
04/30 to 05/06: Nick Weglarz (OF - Akron)  
04/23 to 04/29: Matt McBride (1B - Kinston)  
04/16 to 04/22: Eric Berger (LHP - Kinston)  
04/08 to 04/15: Kelvin De La Cruz (LHP - Kinston)

### Director's Cuts

Indians Farm Director Ross Atkins shared some thoughts this week on some of the players at Double-A Akron:

*On Carlos Santana:* "He has been great. When you look at those numbers what jumps out at you is the 10 home runs, but he has actually had a spell the last two or three weeks where he has been human. It is a lot like Victor where he has come back down to Earth a little bit, as he was playing in another league for most of the first half.

I think even more noteworthy are the

strides he has made as a defender and game-caller. The questions he is asking and the passion he has for wanting to be a good defender have all been very good signs, and he has made some encouraging strides so far."

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*On Beau Mills:* "Beau has been a lot better. As we talked about a lot, guys at some point in their career will face challenges and obstacles they have to find ways to get over as the talent starts to bottleneck. Beau is very talented, but has had to make some subtle adjustments as pitchers learn how to attack him.

He has gotten much quieter in his approach, and he looks much more comfortable over the last three weeks than he has looked all year.

He is still driving the ball with authority, still the guy you want up in a key situation, and still one of the better players in that league.

Beau is having a good year."

*On Hector Rondon:* "Actually, I think with his first major league spring training it was a big increase with when his workload started and where he normally is at this time of the year.

So I think his shoulder was a little bit fatigued, and we figured it would be a good time to give him a blow and just skip a start.

He came right back out [on Sunday] and was nice and easy and hitting 94 MPH and looked like the Hector Rondon we saw before the fatigue.

He is right where he needs to be."

## Coaches Corner: Tony Arnold

As mentioned above, I was in Low-A Lake County over the weekend. While there I had the chance to sit down with Captains Pitching Coach Tony Arnold and talk about a few of the pitchers on his staff:

*On Mike McGuire:* "He has done a really good job. He was predominantly a starter in college and has come in to a priority



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