

Minor Happenings: Akron Can Provide Some Relief

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Saturday, July 04 2009 7:00 PM -

Tony checks back in today with Part Two of this week's Minor Happenings. In it, he immediately provides the breaking news that top pitching prospect Hector Rondon has been promoted to Columbus. Also of note he provides the details on what has been an impressive collection of relievers in Akron, a scouting report on recently acquired Chris Perez, All Star announcements, some recent draft signings, all the latest transactions, 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 is part two of this week's Minor Happenings which was broken up into two installments. For part one, [click here](#).

Before getting into this piece, a last minute bit of breaking news as Double-A Akron right-hander Hector Rondon has been promoted to Triple-A Columbus. This is a well deserved promotion for Rondon who was 7-5 with a 2.75 ERA for the Aeros. His ERA was the fifth-best in the Eastern League, he was in a four-way tie for fourth in the league in victories, and he was tied for fifth in the league with 73 strikeouts in just 72.0 innings. He was holding Double-A opponents to a .227 batting average. Recently

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signed left-hander Bobby Livingston is expected to take his spot in the rotation.

I will be in Akron this week to see them in action before hitting up Mahoning Valley and Lake County the following week. I will finally get out and see Kinston two different times at the end of this month when I see them in Kinston and then a week later in Myrtle Beach.

Also, I have a bunch of player pieces I have to get out, so expect a few of those over the course of this week....provided the Indians don't make a ton of trades or noteworthy moves and all kinds of stuff goes on like it has the previous few weeks!

Onto the *Happenings*...

Indians Minor League Player Of The Month

(for June)

Nick Weglarz (Outfielder - Akron)

.294 AVG (25-for-85), 20 R, 7 2B, 2 3B, 5 HR, 21 RBI, 22 BB, 18 K, .450/.600/1.050

Things are finally coming naturally to Double-A Akron outfielder Nick Weglarz. The big Canadian admits he got a little ahead of himself early in the season trying to do too much at the plate, and it showed as he opened the season in a 5-for-56 tailspin for

the month of April. He was way off his game as he was striking at a high rate with 19 strikeouts in 56 at bats and he showed no power with one extra base hit.

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Since then things have changes dramatically. Weglarz finally took a step back, relaxed, and has been on an absolute tear every since the start of May.

Since May 1st the "255 pounder has been the hulking menace at the plate he is supposed to be hitting a solid .298 (56-for-188), but it his other numbers which have been impressive.

He has scored 36 runs and has 49 RBI.

He had a 10:19 walk to strikeout ratio in April, but since then he has a 37:37 ratio.

He has 14 doubles, two triples, and 11 home runs good for a .569 slugging percentage.

His on-base percentage since then is .422 and he has a .991 OPS.

It's been a great two month run for Weglarz, and he is starting to show the ability at the plate with the plate discipline and power that had people salivating after he hit 24 home runs and had 83 walks as a 19-year at Lake County in 2007.

On the season, Weglarz is now hitting .250 (61-for-244) with 12 HR, 55 RBI, and a .851 OPS in 76 games. He ranks 7th in the Eastern League in home runs (12), 3rd in RBI (55), and 2nd in walks (47). He was also honored last week as the Eastern League Player of the Week for the week ending June 28th, his second weekly award of the season.

For the week he hit .450 (9-for-20) with six walks, two doubles, five runs scored and league-leading totals of four home runs and 12 RBI.

Honorable Mentions:

Matt LaPorta (OF/1B - COL): .304 AVG (31-102), 15 R, 6 2B, 0 3B, 4 HR, 19 RBI, 8 BB, 18 K, .849 OPS

Erik Stiller (RHP - AKR): 4-0, 8 G, 0.69 ERA, 13.0 IP, 6 H, 1 R, 6 BB, 12 K, 0.92 WHIP, .140 BAA

Carlton Smith (RHP - AKR): 2-0, 8 G, 1.37 ERA, 19.2 IP, 13 H, 3 R, 6 BB, 13 K, 0.97 WHIP, .188 BAA

Ryan Edell (LHP - AKR): 1-0, 5 G, 3.07 ERA, 29.1 IP, 27 H, 10 R, 9 BB, 31 K, 1.23 WHIP, .250 BAA

Eric Berger (LHP - KIN): 3-2, 5 G, 2.15 ERA, 29.1 IP, 23 H, 7 R, 14 BB, 17 K, 1.26 WHIP, .225 BAA

Russell Young (LHP - KIN): 1-0, 4 G, 2.19 ERA, 24.2 IP, 22 H, 6 R, 4 BB, 15 K, 1.05 WHIP,

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.234 BAA

Delvi Cid (OF - LC): .333 AVG (29-87), 16 R, 4 2B, 0 3B, 0 HR, 12 RBI, 6 BB, 23 K, 12 SB, .762 OPS

T.J. House (LHP - LC): 1-2, 4 G, 1.59 ERA, 22.2 IP, 18 H, 4 R, 5 BB, 21 K, 1.01 WHIP, .214 BAA

Chris Jones (LHP - LC): 2-1, 4 G, 1.56 ERA, 17.1 IP, 15 H, 3 R, 9 BB, 13 K, 1.38 WHIP, .242 BAA

Alexander Perez (RHP - LC): 2-1, 5 G, 2.08 ERA, 30.1 IP, 19 H, 7 R, 7 BB, 32 K, 0.86 WHIP, .174 BAA

Previous Winners:

May: Jordan Brown (1B/OF - Columbus)

April: Matt McBride (1B/OF - Kinston)

How Do You Spell Relief? **A-K-R-O-N**

While the Indians continue to look for relief options on the major league waiver wire and at the Triple-A level, maybe they should take a quick peek down at the Double-A level and what some of their relievers are doing of late. Here are the June numbers for some of the noteworthy performances in the Akron bullpen:



Matt Meyer (LHP): 1.13 ERA, 8.0 IP, 3 H, 7 BB, 6K, .120 BAA

Vinnie Pestano (RHP): 2.77 ERA, 13.0 IP, 10H, 5 BB, 12 K, .217 BAA

Carlton Smith (RHP): 1.37 ERA, 19.2 IP, 13 H, 6 BB, 13 K, .188 BAA

Erik Stiller (RHP): 0.69 ERA, 13.0 IP, 6 H, 6 BB, 12 K, .140 BAA

Steven Wright (RHP): 3.07 ERA, 14.2 IP, 13 H, 6 BB, 11 K, .236 BAA

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It's no secret that the key to Akron's success this season has been their pitching. Not only has the starting pitching been good, the bullpen has been stellar.

It is amazing how you can pile up the wins when you go out there every night and get good outings from your pitchers innings one through nine on a consistent basis.

Several of the pitchers listed above are in the midst of some pretty impressive scoreless streaks. Smith (4-0, 2.68 ERA) has eight consecutive scoreless outings covering 17.1 innings and Wright (6-0, 2.78 ERA) has eight consecutive outings covering 15.0 innings. Not to be outdone, Stiller (5-3, 3.84 ERA) has allowed just two runs in his last 12 outings (20.2 IP) and Meyer has allowed just two runs in nine outings (9.0 IP) since his early June callup to Akron.

Stiller is the elder statesman in the Akron bullpen having spent much of the 2008 season in the Aeros pen, and this year when you take out his four spot starts his relief-only numbers are an impressive 5-0 with a 2.32 ERA and .189 BAA in 19 games. Wright actually opened the season in the Akron rotation before being shifted to a relief role for the first time in his career.

Smith is also pitching in a relief role for really the first time in his career.

Pestano has been consistent all year as the closer, and is 2-3 with a league leading 23 saves and a 3.03 ERA in 32 appearances.

On top of all that, this listing doesn't even include high upside arms like right-handers Josh Judy and Zach Putnam as well since they struggled during the month and missed some time due to injuries, as well as flame-throwing right-hander Neil Wagner too.

Several of these guys are primed for a callup to Triple-A Columbus, but while there is certainly space for some of them in Columbus because of all the veteran stashed on the pitching staff there, one of the things often overlooked is that there has to be pitchers ready to move up to Akron and fill their vacant spot. The Indians can't gut the Akron bullpen and promote these guys if there is nothing at High-A Kinston to replace them with, and currently the options are limited because most of the pitchers in the Kinston pen have had disappointing seasons, are hurt, or have been very inconsistent. The only pitcher who may be called up soon to allow for at least one member of Akron bullpen to move up (likely Wright) would be right-hander Chen-Chang Lee who in 26 appearances is 3-3 with a 3.83 ERA (51.2 IP, 41 H, 20 BB, 60 K).

Right-handers Jonathan Holt and Dallas Cawiezell are the only other possibilities.

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In all, it is an impressive collection of relievers in the Akron bullpen. Some who have high ceilings, some much lower, but many who are performing well and giving themselves a chance to get to the next level and realize that dream of pitching in the big leagues.

Paging Dr. Smith

Speaking of Akron right-handed reliever Carlton Smith, he is now becoming a legitimate option for the Indians big league bullpen in the future. Prior to this season he has mostly always been a starter, but he was transitioned to a relief role this year and

even though he was inconsistent at times earlier in the season, of late he has been dynamite and on quite a roll.

This is Smith's fifth year in the Indians system since they signed him out of high school as a 21st round pick in the 2004 Draft. He tied for the most wins in the system last year with 12 while pitching for High-A Kinston, and came into this season with a career record of 26-17 and a 4.30 ERA. He has never been one to strike batters out as he only has a career 5.6 K/9 rate, but he has done a pretty good job avoiding home runs (0.8 HR/9) and keeping batters off base (1.24 WHIP) in his career.

His success is driven by a hard sinker that sits around 91-93 MPH and has touched as high as 95 MPH. He has a pitch to contact mentality to get ahead in the count forcing hitters to pound the sinker into the ground for quick, easy outs. While he primarily throws his two-seam fastball because of its sinking action, he also complements it with three other pitches - a four-seam fastball, slider, and splitter.

Even though he is in a bullpen role, he has been told by the Akron coaching staff to continue using all four of his pitches.

His command continues to improve and his delivery is much more consistent which has allowed him to become sharper with his pitches and have the sort of success he has had to date.

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The Book On Perez

I had some e-mails asking if I had any information on the Indians newly acquired right-handed reliever Chris Perez and why I had not posted anything about him. Well, the main reason is because at the time of his pickup he was no longer a "prospect" anymore since he had 70 games and 65.1 innings in his two-year major league career with the St. Louis Cardinals.

That said,



he is very much an unknown and going into this season he was a top prospect in all of baseball (#91 according to Baseball America). Here is some information I was able to pull looking at his statistical history as well as from talking to a few people outside the Indians organization:

Perez played college ball at the University of Miami, FL from 2004-2006 before being drafted by the Cardinals in the 1st round of the 2006 Draft. He moved quickly through the Cardinals system as shortly after the draft he was sent to their Low-A full season affiliate Quad City where he went 2-0 with 12 saves and a 2.15 ERA in 25 games.

In 2007 he split the season in Double-A and Triple-A, pitching in a combined 54 games at the two levels going 2-1 with 36 saves and a 2.96 ERA.

He opened the 2008 season in Triple-A Memphis, but spent over half the season in St. Louis where in his major league debut he went 3-3 with 7 saves and a 3.46 ERA in 41 games.

He was 1-1 with 1 save and a 4.18 ERA this year in 29 games for St. Louis before being traded to the Indians.

The Cardinals had him pitching in the backend of games since the day he was drafted to develop him as a closer, though he could also end up a setup man down the road. Either way, he is projected as having backend of the bullpen stuff and has shown it on many occasions.

His fastball is effortless as it regularly sits at 94-95 MPH and he can reach back and get it as high as 98 MPH when needed.

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The fastball has good movement and natural sink, and he complements it with a hard slider he throws in the upper 80s that has good late action.

He has the makeup to handle late inning situations, and has unbelievable confidence.

As with any pitcher who throws as hard as Perez, commanding the fastball and locating it well will be a huge key in determining his success as a reliever. To date, he has been very inconsistent with his command and is very susceptible to walks (6.0 BB/9 in minors, 5.1 BB/9 in majors) and he has a penchant for missing up in the zone.

While his slider is good, it is not of wipeout variety, so to be a true dominant late inning reliever he needs to either continue to refine the slider to get it to that next level or perhaps learn to throw a curveball or changeup to mix in with his fastball-slider mix to give hitters something else to think about.

In addition to Perez, the Indians also will receive a player to be named later. The deadline to make that decision is September 1st, though it may be announced much sooner.

The St. Louis Post Dispatch recently listed right-hander Jess Todd and right-hander Francisco Samuel as a couple of possibilities for the player to be named.

Scary Incidents

Kinston left-handed starter Ryan Morris was involved in a scary incident last Sunday, and he wasn't even playing. He was in street clothes and charting pitches in the stands behind home plate at Grainger Stadium in Kinston when he was hit in the ribs

by a foul ball that went through the protective netting on the backstop. The way Grainger Stadium is situated is there are field boxes that go all around the home plate viewing area where a few people can sit in each box.

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The Indians and the opposing team always typically use one of the boxes directly behind home plate to chart pitches and get radar gun readings.

Upon getting hit, Morris doubled over in pain which caused a stir and Kinston trainer Chad Wolfe came rushing out of the dugout to check on him. Wolfe walked Morris to the clubhouse to evaluate the injury, and shortly after the game Morris felt better but was pretty sore.

X-rays were taken, but came back negative, and the final result was a nasty bruise under the right side of his rib cage.

He played catch on Monday, and while he the injury was still tender, he was able to make his scheduled start on Tuesday.

Ironically, he put forth one of his best outings of the year going five innings and allowing one run on three hits, three walks and had seven strikeouts.

In 15 starts for Kinston this year he is 3-8 with a 5.33 ERA (72.2 IP, 74 H, 46 BB, 65 K).

Another scary incident occurred on Monday night in Columbus when outfielder Trevor Crowe and shortstop Niuman Romero collided going for a fly ball in short left field. Crowe was charging in on the ball and Romero was running out from shortstop, and Crowe caught the ball moments before they both smacked into each other hitting hard knee to knee.

It could have been a lot worse as both sat just one game with some soreness, but were back in action the next night.

Romero is hitting .250 with 0 HR and 9 RBI in 29 games at Columbus, while Crowe is hitting .259 with 1 HR and 7 RBI in 31 games at Columbus.

Double-A & Triple-A All Stars

This week we learned who from the Indians Double-A Akron and Triple-A Columbus rosters have been selected to take part in this year's All Star games at the Double-A and Triple-A level.

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