

## Minor Happenings: International Checkup

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Today is another special edition of Minor Happenings, this time checking in on some of the Indians recent International free agent signings of the past two years. The International Signing Period just finished up a few weeks back, and the Indians are supposed to release their list of 2009 International signings any day now. Today, T takes a look at three International signings from the last two years, and how they fared this season.

Today is another special edition of *Minor Happenings*, this time checking in on some of the Indians recent International free agent signings of the past two years. The International Signing Period just finished up a few weeks back, and the Indians are supposed to release their list of 2009 International signings. When that happens, I will be providing a report on the players signed as well as thoughts from the Indians and basic scouting reports on most if not all of the signings.

Until then, here are some pieces on three of the Indians International signings from 2007 (Trent Baker, Chun Chen) and 2008 (Chen-Chang Lee).

Also, a quick FYI, I will have a short year-end Minor Happenings piece this weekend, and then next week I will unveil my Tony Awards.

## Mini C.C. Has Good First Year For Tribe



He may be nowhere near the size of his predecessor in the organization C.C. Sabathia, but right-handed reliever Chen-Chang Lee had a very good debut season in the Indians organization this season

Sabathia stands in at 6'7" and 290 and is a former Indians prospect turned Cy Young Award winner. Lee, who is often referred to as "C.C." by friends, teammates, and Indians personnel, stands in at just 5'11" and 175 pounds. Even though he comes in a much smaller package, he packed a pretty powerful punch this season in the Carolina League for the Indians High-A affiliate Kinston going 4-6 with a 3.35 ERA in 45 appearances out of the bullpen. In 83.1 innings he allowed 67 hits, 28 walks and had 97 strikeouts.

Lee, 22, was signed by the Indians as an international free agent last September for a reported \$400,000. He was one of

the top amateur college prospects in Taiwan, and was just one of three amateurs on the Chinese Taipei (Taiwan) team that competed in Beijing, China during the 2008 Olympics.

"After the [2008] Olympics I signed with the Indians," said Lee in a recent interview at Akron through translator Jason Lin. "I knew John Mirabelli had been tracking me. My exposure to the Indians was primarily when I pitched for Chinese-Taipei teams in International competition. That's when Mirabelli and the Pacific Rim scout Jason Lee took a peek and saw me. I was fortunate to perform well in some big tournaments and that is when John, Jason and my agent were able to sit down and work some things out."

So far, Lee has lived up to his billing coming out of Taiwan as a good relief pitching prospect. He showcases a good four pitch mix of a fastball, sinker, slider and split finger that he throws from a sidearm slot. He averages around 91-92 MPH with his fastball velocity and has touched 95 MPH. He gets good movement on all his pitches and has shown a good ability to command the strike zone.

While Lee has good stuff and his numbers were solid, it was an adjustment for him this season coming stateside and playing professionally in the United States for the first time.

"It was a pretty normal season," said Lee. "I had some good outings and some bad outings. I was just trying to keep my emotions under control throughout the duration of the season and not get too caught up on stuff I can't

control.&quot;

This biggest thing the Indians worked on with Lee this year at Kinston was solidifying his arm slot. If he can be more consistent with a low three-quarter arm slot, the Indians feel he could develop into a very good relief prospect.

&quot;We are trying to solidify [his arm slot],&quot; said Kinston Pitching Coach Greg Hibbard recently. &quot;We'd like to see him kind of at a low three-quarter, I mean he is a side-to-side guy, but he needs to keep his hand above his arm a little bit and stay on top of the baseball. He has such a power arm that when he flies open his elbow will drop and he gets underneath the ball and everything kind of works uphill and he does not create much angle. He is not a real tall guy, so if he loses that arm slot and gets low it gets even lower. His breaking ball is also going to benefit from having a better arm slot.&quot;

With Kinston wrapping up their season two weeks ago, the Indians treated Lee by having him join Double-A Akron for their playoff run. While he did not dress for games or was ever active on the playoff roster, he was in Akron participating in pre-game workouts and hung around the clubhouse and with the team for the playoffs. The Indians wanted to expose him to the playoff environment and also help him get acquainted with what will be his new home in 2010.

With the playoffs over, Lee is now back in Taiwan and his first order of business is to fulfill his mandatory military service requirement.

"I actually have to serve my military service time when I get back," said Lee. "I am very fortunate to have been given an exception with the time I have to serve."

In Taiwan it is a requirement that all healthy males serve 15 months in the military. He was actually granted an exception to cut the mandatory service time down from 15 years to just 12 days because he was part of the Taiwan team that won a gold medal in the Asian Games a couple of years ago. Taiwan and many other Asian countries that have mandatory military service time often provide this perk to their players as an incentive to win these highly competitive contests between rival countries in the Pacific Rim.

Once his military service requirement is up, Lee just wants to go home, rest for a little bit, and then jump right into his training regimen to begin his preparation for the 2010 season.

"I am just going to get some rest, workout and stick to an offseason plan," said Lee. "I am going to try and work on getting my body stronger since the duration of a US season is a little bit longer than in Taiwan. I also want to continue to work on my offspeed pitches and the command of my fastball."

## **Chen Adapts To Many Changes**



The Indians tapped into the Pacific Rim for more talent back in September 2007 when they signed catcher Chun-Hsiu Chen to a minor league contract out of Taiwan.

Chen, 20, spent the entire time in Winter Haven in 2008 playing both in extended spring training and also in the Gulf Coast League (GCL) as he worked on his transition from third base to catcher. In the limited playing time he had in the GCL he showed some good potential as a hitter as the ball jumps off his bat, and he finished the 2008 season in the GCL hitting .261 with 3 HR, 15 RBI and a .745 OPS in 38 games.

Over the course of the 2008 season Chen made a lot of

strides as a catcher, and coming into the 2009 season it was thought that his bat would continue to impress. Unfortunately, that never happened as he hit just .215 with 1 HR, 19 RBI and a .635 OPS in 59 games at short-season Single-A Mahoning Valley. It was a struggle for him all season, which was surprising to the Indians.

Even still, Chen was excited to finally begin his hopeful ascent up the minor league ladder with his first stop in Mahoning Valley this year.

“Coming last year from the GCL and this year in Arizona where you don't get a lot of fans, it [felt] good being in Mahoning Valley this year,” said Chen through his translator Jason Lin. “They get good crowds [in Mahoning Valley] and it feels good to work my way up. It makes a difference as it gets you a little more amped up. Sometimes you may play a little better when there are fans and there is more on the line.”

Since signing two years ago, not only has Chen had to undergo a major transition to the very demanding position of catcher, but coming from Taiwan he also had to learn to adapt to a new culture while living in the United States.

“It definitely has been a transition coming from

Taiwan,&quot; said Chen. &quot;Some of the philosophies have been different here than they are over in Taiwan. Practices are a little bit different, not only what they teach but the duration of the practices. In America the practices are shorter but they are more specific, where in Taiwan the practices are longer and they might cover everything. Here you may practice bunt defenses one day and do something else another day, but in Taiwan you practice bunt defense, pitcher-fielding-practice (PFP), and everything every day. So that is why practices are longer. Here it is more focused.&quot;

Chen has also been taking English classes as being a catcher it is important that he be able to communicate with all of his pitchers. He has a relatively good understanding of the English language, but his vocabulary is still very limited. He often understands what people say to him in English, but he doesn't know all the English words and how to respond clearly yet.

Being thrown into the American culture and submersed in an English speaking world everyday has helped Chen pick it up very quickly. His improvement in English has been tremendous from when he first joined the Indians in 2007. For the most part, he can now handle all the pitchers on the mound on his own. He has come a long

way with his communication skills, though he still has a ways to go.

Chen has even gone periods of time completely on his own as his translator Jason Lin has to bounce around between three different places to be with Chen as well as the other two Taiwanese players in the system Chen-Chang Lee (Kinston) and Sung-Wei Tseng (Arizona). Living and being on your own while still not being completely comfortable with the language can make a person feel isolated and intimidated, but he had a good support system with his teammates, coaches, and his host family.

"I got used to being by myself and ordering my own food," chuckled Chen.

Chen's main focus since joining the Indians has been that conversion to catcher. He was a pitcher and third baseman in Taiwan, and is still learning to pick up all of the nuances to the game at catcher.

"When I signed I was not a catcher, so when I got here I was pretty raw and I am still learning the position," said Chen. "I am still trying to learn all the nuances and what it takes to be an everyday catcher. My defense, calling the game, and blocking has

improved dramatically since Instructional League in 2007. I am just trying to get better as a catcher in every aspect from receiving, to blocking, to calling games.&quot;

With Mahoning Valley's season wrapping up last week, Chen went right out to Arizona to participate in the Indians Instructional League. Once that concludes in mid-October, he will finally return to his home in Taiwan.

Overall, it has been a solid year of development for Chen as by the time things wrap up he will have spent almost eight months from March through the middle of October continuing to develop as a hitter and catcher. He has made big strides as a catcher, but next year hopes his bat will start producing.

&quot;Primarily I always want to help give the team every opportunity to win no matter where I am at,&quot; said Chen. &quot;Secondly, I want to take care of myself and hopefully have good defensive and offensive statistics. Next year I want to continue my development and improvement as a catcher and hitter.&quot;

## **Baker Growing With Indians**



Baseball scouting for young talent these days goes well beyond scouting all the high school and college talent stateside for the Major League Baseball Draft. For the past few decades, scouring Latin America for talent has proven to be a success for many major league teams, and recently they have turned their attention to the Pacific Rim for talent in Asian countries as well as in Australia and other countries.

The Indians have recently dipped into the outback and plucked several players from Australia, most recently with infielder Jason Smit in 2006 and then pitcher Jacob Reust and outfielder Trent Baker in 2007. Reust was released earlier this year in spring

training, and Smit played with short-season Single-A Mahoning Valley this season.

Baker opened the 2009 season in extended spring training, and after two years in the organization finally played his first official games as an Indian with the rookie-level Arizona League team this year where he hit .237 with 0 HR, 19 RBI, 13 stolen bases, and a .625 OPS in 50 games. He also got a late season callup to Low-A Lake County in the last week of August for a cup of coffee with them and hit .071 in 14 at bats.

After spending so much time at the Indians spring training complex the last two years for Instructional League, spring training, extended spring training, and rookie-level games, Baker was excited for the opportunity to finish out the season with Lake County and play in a more fan-oriented environment.

"It [was] good and I [was] excited," said Baker in a recent interview about his callup to Lake County. "Obviously it is a pat on the back after the work I have done in Arizona. It was hot there.

Spring training, then extended spring training, and then the season, it wears you down a little bit and you just gotta keep battling through it.&quot;

This was Baker's first full year in the organization. He had been with the Indians since signing in 2007, but spent only part of the 2008 season with the organization. He was in spring training and extended spring training last year, but about halfway through the year he went back home to try out for the Australian Team and broke his wrist. He was sidelined for the rest of the year, but did manage to come back for Instructional League last fall.

Baker's numbers this season were not very good overall, though he did get off to a good start in the Arizona League. A month into the season he was hitting .300 with a .795 OPS through 23 games, but he seemed to wear down hitting just .183 (21-for-115) in his last 27 games.

&quot;Yes, especially in extended spring training and through my first half of my season in the AZL I was doing good and felt good,&quot; said Baker. &quot;I just got tired toward the end and my

average just started to drop out.&quot;

Baker's best attributes are his speed and defense where he shows very good athleticism and range in the outfield along with good speed on the bases. His biggest area in need of improvement is obviously with his hitting. He is not a power hitter by any means, and needs to work on making more consistent contact at the plate and developing a more disciplined approach.

&quot;At the plate my swing [late in the season] started to get long,&quot; said Baker. &quot;So I was told to keep my hands in tight toward my body and shorten my swing path to keep up with the faster pitching and be able to adapt to the offspeed stuff.&quot;

With Baker's two week vacation to Lake County now over, he is currently back in Goodyear, Arizona participating in the Fall Instructional League. So it is back to the Arizona desert and another month at the Indians spring training complex before his season officially ends in mid-October and he goes back home to Australia for some much needed time off.

Baker just turned 19 in June, so he is still growing and adapting to the game. The next two seasons will be huge for him as he matures with his body and as a baseball player. In the meantime, this offseason he plans to work on his hitting and hitting the weight room.

"I want to work on my speed for sure," said Baker. "I will work with Peter Gahan, the Indians Australian scout who lives close to me. He works on my swing a lot and has been a big help. I also need to get bigger in the gym. I am pretty small and still young, and now that I am playing with some older guys I need to put some weight on me."