

Minor Happenings: Donald Could Join Indians Very Soon

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Friday, April 30 2010 8:10 AM - Last Updated Friday, April 30 2010 10:49 AM



"Minor Happenings" is a weekly column which 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 will be in Akron tonight (Friday) to finally get my first look at the team. They, like the parent club, have been on the road for a majority of the first three weeks of the season, but they kick off their second home stand this weekend. Be on the lookout for lots of Akron player articles in the coming weeks. Next week I head to Myrtle Beach for a week to get my first look at High-A Kinston.

In case you missed them, this week I posted player articles on [Joe Gardner](#) and his smoking start, this being [S](#)
[cott Lewis](#)
' last chance, and I updated and re-posted my article on [extended spring training](#)

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SportsTime Ohio's weekly TV program "Indians Minor League Magazine" kicked back up this week. The show is a half hour and airs every Tuesday evening from 6:00-6:30 PM EST, though is re-aired several times a week. I am doing the writeups and recommendations for them for their "Diamond In the Rough" feature, which you can see along with the entire show [in the video I posted to my site](#)

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Onto the *Happenings*....

Indians Minor League Player of the Week

(for games from April 22 through April 28)

Jason Donald (Shortstop/Second Baseman - Columbus)

.440 (11-25), 4 R, 1 2B, 0 3B, 1 HR, 7 RBI, 5 BB, 3 K, 2 SB

Triple-A Columbus middle infielder Jason Donald is off to a very good start this season as in 21 games he is hitting .333 with 2 HR, 13 RBI, has 6 stolen bases and a .938 OPS. He has really done it all so far, be it defensively by rotating between second



base and shortstop and playing solid to above average defense at both positions, or offensively where he is running the bases well, making consistent contact and hitting the ball with authority, and getting on base at a great clip. At the moment he ranks 11th in the International League in hitting, 2nd in runs (16), 2nd in

hits (27), 10

th

in on-base percentage (.432), 15

th

in OPS, 10

th

in stolen bases, 14

th

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in RBI, and 2
nd

in doubles (8).

Donald's hot start pales in comparison to the start he got off to last year at Triple-A Lehigh Valley in the Phillies organization and also with Columbus when he was traded to the Indians at the end of July for Cliff Lee. He battled a left knee injury and later a back injury when he was with Columbus, and it showed in his performance as he hit just .236 with 1 HR, 16 RBI, and .629 OPS in 51 games last year at Lehigh Valley, and then hit just .257 with 1 HR, 1 RBI and a .750 OPS in 10 games for Columbus before his season ended prematurely in mid-August because of his back injury.

Donald looks to be back to being the prospect he was after the 2008 season where he ignited his prospect stock by hitting .307 with 14 HR, 54 RBI and a .888 OPS in 92 games for Double-A Reading, and then after that season had a sensational performance in the Arizona Fall League hitting .407 with 5 HR, 17 RBI and a 1.233 OPS in 25 games. He is a player who at the time of the Cliff Lee trade looked bad because of his sub par performance due to injury, but he may finally be showing the true player he is capable of being and that he had more value than originally thought when the Indians acquired him.

With second base wide open in Cleveland, Donald is very much the favorite to become the everyday starter at that position by the end of the season. With Luis Valbuena struggling in Cleveland and Donald shining in Columbus, it is only a matter of time before the Indians turn to Donald to see if he can help provide a spark to the team and struggling offense. Valbuena would either go down to Columbus where he would continue to play second base everyday and play some shortstop and third base, or he could stick in Cleveland as the utility player, a role many think he will ultimately move into in the near future once Donald settles in with the Indians. Valbuena would be able to platoon initially with Donald to help Donald's initial transition to his first big league exposure and Valbuena would also be able to play third base and shortstop. If this were to happen then infielder Mark Grudzielanek would be released.

Honorable Mentions:

Wes Hodges (1B – COL): .346 (9-26), 2 R, 2 2B, 0 3B, 0 HR, 5 RBI, 2 BB, 6 K

Brian Bixler (INF – COL): .333 (7-21), 5 R, 0 2B, 0 3B, 2 HR, 4 RBI, 3 BB, 5 K

Josh Tomlin (RHP – COL): 2-0, 2 G, 1.13 ERA, 8.0 IP, 4 H, 1 ER, 1 BB, 7 K

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Lonnie Chisenhall (3B – AKR): .370 (10-27), 3 R, 1 2B, 0 3B, 0 HR, 2 RBI, 1 BB, 4 K

Karexon Sanchez (INF – KIN): .333 (8-24), 2 R, 1 2B, 1 3B, 1 HR, 5 RBI, 1 BB, 6 K

Jason Kipnis (2B – KIN): .435 (10-23), 6 R, 2 2B, 1 3B, 1 HR, 3 RBI, 4 BB, 4 K

Nate Recknagel (1B – KIN): .333 (8-24), 7 R, 1 2B, 0 3b, 2 HR, 4 RBI, 4 BB, 8 K

T.J. House (LHP – KIN): 0-0, 2 G, 1.00 ERA, 9.0 IP, 6 H, 1 ER, 4 BB, 11 K

Previous Winners:

04/15 to 04/21: Bo Greenwell (OF - Lake County)

04/08 to 04/14: Carlos Santana (C - Columbus)

Director's Cuts

Indians' Farm Director Ross Atkins shared some thoughts this week on three Triple-A Columbus Clippers who could be on the move to Cleveland soon:

On Hector Ambriz: "He has been great. He had a small hiccup in spring training where he had some elbow soreness and



tightness. This has essentially been his spring training and he has been unhittable. I think the subjective comments are his pitches and stuff are as good as anyone we have there in Triple-A. He is striking guys out and touching mid 90s along with an above average slider. He has really been more than impressive so far. His rehab assignment will come to an end [soon] and we will have to make a decision."

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On Carlos Carrasco: "He has performed well. He is flashing an above mid-90s fastball. He is showing more fastball than what we have seen in the past as he has been up to 97 MPH and is striking guys out as well. I think there is still development left for Carlos. As with any player the consistency and the transition to the major leagues is more difficult than it is for a young hitter. That development is finding ways to not only to continue to find a way to refine your pitches and the way you attack hitters, but how you refine the way you attack a game. How is your focus, are you your best for 105 pitches every five days, and are you preparing for each of those pitches to be able to give your best effort against an AL Central lineup? It is a great challenge. We are going to find out how he handles that. He has certainly made strides and is maturing as a starting pitching prospect."

On Jason Donald: "He was injured when we had him at the end of last year. He was coming off a knee injury and then injured his back, so we never saw him at 100% and now we are. He is performing on both sides of the field and running the bases well. He is stealing bases, he is going first to third easily, he is scoring from first, he is driving the ball out of the ballpark, he is hitting for average, getting on base, and playing solid defense at second and short. So he is certainly a middle infield prospect and making himself an everyday middle infield player with a chance to impact a major league team here real soon."

On The Move?

In addition to Jason Donald, there could be some other players at Triple-A Columbus who may be on the move very soon.

First off, right-hander Hector Ambriz is the first player likely heading for a callup to Cleveland as he is currently on a 30-day



rehab assignment which started on April 8th and will expire on May 7th. With that in mind, the Indians need to make a decision on him over the course of the next week as once his rehab assignment ends, per Rule 5 Draft rules, he must either be activated on the 25-man big league roster or offered back to the Arizona Diamondbacks. As many will recall the Indians picked him

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up in the Major League phase of the Rule 5 Draft this past December, and after battling some arm soreness in spring training is looking like he is 100% and ready to get a crack at the Indians big league bullpen. In seven appearances with Columbus he is 0-0 with a 1.13 ERA, and in 8.0 innings has allowed 9 hits, 1 walk, and has 15 strikeouts. The Indians have every intention of keeping him, so it is just a matter of whether they call him up to Cleveland next week or they complete a trade to obtain his full rights so they can option him to the minors instead.

Right-handed starting pitcher Carlos Carrasco is about ready for a big league callup, so if an injury occurs or performance issues affect the Cleveland starting rotation he will be called up right away. The problem for him is that Fausto Carmona, Jake Westbrook, Dave Huff and Mitch Talbot are all for the most part pitching well, and Justin Masterson is getting an extended look in the rotation. The only chance at the moment for Carrasco to get to Cleveland anytime soon would appear to be an injury, though you have to wonder if Masterson's issues with getting lefties out and his inconsistency from start to start will eventually



wear on the Indians to where they make the move (finally) to put him back into a setup role in the bullpen and then call up Carrasco. At the moment in five starts Carrasco is 2-1 with a 3.49 ERA and in 28.1 innings has allowed 29 hits, 14 walks, and has struck out 25 batters.

Outfielder and first baseman Jordan Brown was just activated from the disabled list on Thursday and played his first game of the season on Thursday night going 1-for-4. If he proves to be 100% and he shakes the rust off his bat and gets back to his 2009 form at the plate right away, Brown could be in Cleveland very soon. The Indians are wondering if Matt LaPorta is still playing hurt, which would help explain his precipitous decline in his power this spring, and they may consider shutting him down to make sure he gets himself back to full health. If this happens, it could finally be the open door that Brown has needed to get a chance in Cleveland, and he could also add a much needed boost to a struggling offense in Cleveland. The Indians could always opt to go with outfielder Trevor Crowe as their first option to replace LaPorta since Austin Kearns has assumed everyday left field duties and Crowe is more suited as a fourth outfielder, but with the offense struggling and Brown's bat available, it may be too hard to pass him up this time. Michael Brantley would also be in the mix too. The knee injury he suffered in spring training is really unfortunate as had he been healthy he may have already gotten the call to Cleveland, but time will tell and barring another injury setback for him he should still see time in Cleveland at some point this year.

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Coach's Corner: Chris Tremie

Former Low-A Lake County and High-A Kinston manager Chris Tremie is enjoying his new role this year where he is splitting duties as the rookie level Arizona League Indians manager and also as the organization's catching coordinator for the minor leagues. Rookie ball doesn't kick up until late-June, so currently Tremie is visiting all the catchers in the system to see how they are doing and also to assist with their continued development. I recently spoke with him at Lake County while he visited there, and this is what he had to say about some of the catchers in the system and what they are working on this year:



On Carlos Santana: "The English is something he is working on. He is also refining his catching skills as well and he is doing a good job. He has a good strong arm, so he is just refining his release and getting rid of the ball quicker and continuing to work on it. He is playing well, and it is just a matter of refining his [catching] skills."

On Roberto Perez: "In the few games I have seen him play he has really done a nice job behind the plate. He had a good spring training and we look for him to continue to play, learn and do what he is doing and continuing to get better as he goes. He's doing a pretty good job all around as a catcher. He blocks the ball well, he receives it well, he does a good job with pitchers calling a game, and is throwing extremely well, so he is doing a nice job all around behind the plate."

On Chun Chen: "He is doing well. He is throwing the ball better, getting rid of it quicker with more consistency, and he receives the ball well and is a good blocker. [He is a converted third

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baseman] so he just needs playing time to continue to grow. He is on the right track and has done a good job. He just needs experience behind the plate. It is not one skill [he needs to hone in on], it is just repetitions behind the plate and with his throwing making sure he is consistent with what he is doing."

On Doug Pickens: "He can also play first base and swings the bat well, and had a good second half in Kinston last year offensively. He does a nice job behind the plate receiving the ball and working with pitchers. He does a nice job and he is in a position now where he is getting a chance to play regularly behind the plate, first base and DH a little bit. So he gets to do multiple things which is good for him."

On Alex Monsalve: "The main thing I see out of him is athletic ability. He is a good athlete behind the plate. He has arm strength and he has some tools to work with back there. He is at the beginning stages of catching so he is just working his way up. There is a lot of ability there and we just have to give him time to settle into the catching position and see where we go from there. He is a young kid who is 18 years old, is athletic, has arm strength, and is strong. We think he is going to have the ability to hit with some power. His biggest strength is his overall natural ability right now and as he plays more I am sure that we will have other things we really like. Right now it is just the overall package which is pretty nice and that we are pretty excited about."

On Dwight Childs: "He had a good spring behind the plate. Even though he is thin in stature, he blocks the ball well, moves well, receives well, and throws really well. So defensively he has some tools and is a pretty good catcher."

Rondon's New Slider

While the Triple-A Columbus team is in first place and the offense is lighting up the scoreboard, not everything is all warm and fuzzy these days in Columbus. In particular highly touted right-handed starting pitcher Hector Rondon has really struggled in the

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