

## Minor Happenings: Santana Continues To Destroy AAA

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Saturday, May 22 2010 10:09 AM - Last Updated Saturday, May 22 2010 10:36 AM

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*"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.*

Lots of movement in the system over the past few weeks due to injuries at all levels and callups to the big level, and lots more to come soon as the calendar flips to June.

I'm very much involved with a minor league baseball related reality TV show which is may begin shooting this fall, so be on the lookout early this coming week for a feature piece on this show. Also, in case you missed them, I did feature pieces on [Austin Adams](#) and [Bo Greenwell](#) this past week. I have lots more player features coming that are in the pipeline that I will post as I finish them, but have been slowed because of other projects I have going on.

I will also be in Akron tomorrow (Sunday) to see the Double-A debut of right-handed starter Alex White, so be on the lookout for a full length piece on him sometime this week and lots of video of him and others in Akron. I also have a big video update coming from my Myrtle Beach trip to Kinston.

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Onto the *Happenings*...

### Indians Minor League Player Of The Week

(for games from May 13<sup>th</sup> to May 19<sup>th</sup>)

#### Carlos Santana (Catcher – Columbus)

.375 AVG (9-for-24), 7 R, 1 2B, 0 3B, 4 HR, 9 RBI, 5 BB, 5 K

Triple-A Columbus Carlos Santana is not long for these pages, and soon when he gets to the big league he should never be heard of in *Minor Happenings* again. But, until he leaves for the big time, you better believe we'll continue to enjoy watching and

following him while he is here.

Santana continues to destroy International League pitchers and in 41 games he is now hitting .314 with 9 HR, 39 RBI, and a 1.011 OPS. He also sports a very healthy 30 walk to 28 strikeout ratio in 140 at bats. He leads the league in on-base% (.439) and walks (30), is 2nd in OPS (1.011), 4<sup>th</sup> in runs (28), 4th in home runs (9) and 10th in batting average (.314). Those are numbers which are MVP-caliber, though he will never be in Columbus long enough to win such an award.

Of course, it is no surprise to see Santana hitting and the Indians consider him a major league ready bat. He is simply in Columbus still so the Indians can get a longer look at catcher Lou Marson who likely will never have an opportunity like this with the Indians to play for an extended period of time. Santana is also working on refining his skills behind the plate with game calling, handling a pitching staff, and speaking English. All continue to improve. The Indians may also be manipulating his service time for Super 2 status since once he gets to the

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biggs he likely will never go back, so they don't want to make the multi-million mistake the Giants made in calling up right-handed pitcher Tim Lincecum by a few days which made him Super 2 eligible.

The Indians will give no clear date on when Santana will arrive in Cleveland, nor should they for obvious reasons. The way things look, and also going by past history when they had Victor Martinez come up in 2003 for good, it looks like he will come up sometime around the All Star break. My guess is he is called up for the start of the second half as it would be a good time to make that transition.

### *Honorable Mentions:*

Jared Goedert (3B – AKR): .409 (9-22), 5 R, 5 2B, 0 3B, 1 HR, 1 RBI, 3 BB, 2 K  
Joe Gardner (RHP – KIN): 2-0, 2 G, 0.00 ERA, 11.2 IP, 3 H, 3 R, 0 ER, 5 BB, 13 K  
Jordan Henry (OF – KIN): .478 (11-23), 6 R, 1 2B, 3 RBI, 6 BB, 2 K, 2 SB  
Luca Montero (OF – KIN): .409 (9-22), 6 R, 1 2B, 1 3B, 1 HR, 6 RBI, 1 BB, 3 K  
Austin Adams (RHP – LC): 1-0, 2 G, 2.25 ERA, 8.0 IP, 7 H, 2 ER, 3 BB, 13 K

### *Previous Winners:*

05/06 to 05/12: T.J. McFarland (LHP – Kinston)  
04/29 to 05/05: Trey Haley (RHP – Lake County)  
04/22 to 04/28: Jason Donald (INF – Columbus)  
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 chimed in this week on a couple players at Triple-A Columbus. He also provided some insight into how the recent rash of injuries has affected the Columbus roster and how they may go about filling in for the players they have lost there:

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*On Shelley Duncan:* "He was immediately a presence in the clubhouse, on the bench, in the lineup and in the league. He has



had a ton of Triple-A success and had some major league time, and he is someone we have already benefited from. I think him being around our younger players at the Triple-A level was a calming and professional influence. He has earned the opportunity to be in a major league setting. Sometimes it takes guys a couple times through different transitions or opportunities before things start to click, so hopefully this will be the time for him. We are by no means happy about the circumstances, but are happy for Shelley that he is going to be getting his opportunity. As a player he is a professional batter with power. As a defender he plays first base well and can go to the outfield with an average to above average arm. So it will be interesting to see how he fares here."

*On how the loss of Duncan and Jason Donald affects the Triple-A Columbus roster:* "I think immediately Jose Constanza gets regular playing time and gets to play everyday, and we will see if that 1.000 OPS holds true with everyday reps. Jordan Brown will be coming back off the DL so he will plug in there, and [Michael] Brantley is there already. So those are the three primary outfielders after the Duncan promotion. In the infield (after the Donald promotion), we have Anderson Hernandez and Brian Bixler there playing everyday in the middle and it creates some opportunities for Josh Rodriguez who has recently come up from Double-A. I think more long term we will start to consider the guys in Double-A and which guys are the right guys to come up and take those every day at bats, but we need to make sure that when those moves do occur they are not short term temporary moves."

*On filling in at the Triple-A level with so many players leaving recently:* "Each need depends on what is available essentially, and it depends on how short term or long term we are looking. As we get more information on the injuries we are dealing with we will be able to make the decisions. If it looks like we are going to have some long term needs it may mean adding a piece (minor league free agent), but I think we are equipped to handle those short term needs. If it means pulling up a player from Double-A and in the long run potentially sacrificing the play

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of someone who is not of high priority as some of our younger prospects then we can do that. It really will depend upon the length of these injuries and at that time we can readily assess."

*On Frank Herrmann:* "Frank has improved every day since he put on a professional uniform. He will certainly pitch in the Major Leagues at some point and it's truly a testament to his determination, athleticism and of course some natural ability. Frank has always answered every challenge we've given to him and we feel he will continue to."

### Pestano Scraps Delivery

Triple-A Columbus right-hander Vinnie Pestano made a living throughout most of his college career and the first three years of his professional career by throwing from a unique sidearm slot that was very close to being a submarine delivery. He experienced a



ton of success with the delivery, but the byproduct of such an unorthodox arm slot is he also experienced a lot of arm issues because of it. After he hurt his elbow last July and then after returning only to hurt it again last fall, he decided to scrap the delivery and go to a more conventional low three-quarters delivery by throwing more over the top.

With his new delivery, Pestano's arm feels great and the results are showing on the mound. He opened the season at Double-A Akron and in 14 games went 1-1 with a 2.70 ERA (13.1 IP, 12 H, 2 BB, 18 K), and in the past week was promoted to Triple-A Columbus where in three appearances he is 0-0 with a 0.00 ERA (3.2 IP, 4 H, 0 BB, 7 K).

Pestano now has just 25 strikeouts to go along with 2 walks in 17.0 innings, and some of this may have to do with the increased velocity he is experiencing as a result of dumping the sidearm approach for the over-the-top approach where he is now throwing harder. He picked up the new delivery in January and it appears to be taking hold well as his two-seam fastball has had more life and has consistently been around 91-93 MPH and up to 95 MPH. This is a

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noticeable difference as with the old delivery he consistently sat at 89 to 91 MPH and occasionally touched 93 MPH.

In addition to the velocity increase, Pestano's early season success can also be attributed to some new weapons in his arsenal. He added a four-seam fastball to his pitch mix this year, and he also has revamped his slider because of the new throwing motion by changing it from the slurvy slider it used to be as a sidearmer to now a harder, tighter pitch with good late break. He is very much in the bullpen mix for the big league team in the near future, though the biggest question he needs to answer at this point is that he can stay healthy.

### Abreu Showing Signs Of Life

High-A Kinston outfielder Abner Abreu has developed a reputation as a slow starter. Last year at Low-A Lake County he got off to a horrific start where he hit a paltry .208 with 0 HR, 3 RBI and a .532 OPS in 17 April games. He responded to the awful April last year with a sensational May and June where he hit .348 with 6 HR, 22 RBI and a .982 OPS in 29 May games and then



hit .339 with 1 HR, 5 RBI and a .930 OPS in 17 June games before going down with a shoulder injury which ended his season.

After Abreu got off to his patented poor April start this year where he hit .230 with 0 HR, 9 RBI and a .603 OPS in 20 games, many thought he'd get hot once like he did last year when the calendar switched to May. So far that has not happened as in 15 games so far this month he is hitting just .246 with 1 HR, 6 RBI, and a .634 OPS. He is showing signs that he may be starting to put things together as in his last eight games he is hitting .345 (10-for-29) with 1 HR and 6 RBI. Overall in 35 games this year he is hitting .237 with 1 HR, 15 RBI and a .616 OPS, not the kind of numbers you expect from a top ten prospect in the organization.

Once again the main culprit has been Abreu's inability to consistently put the bat on the ball as

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he is still striking out at a scary rate with 48 strikeouts and only 8 walks in 131 at bats (2.7:1 AB/K), but his strikeout total is something that will always be high and will be acceptable if he is very productive. He has shown better at bats of late and just not gotten the results yet, so that is somewhat encouraging, but he is still struggling mainly because he has been over-aggressive at the plate and getting himself out. He is pulling off pitches and not staying on them like he should be which has resulted in a lot of strikeouts and poorly hit balls. The Indians are working with him to stay within himself and let things come naturally instead of him over-swinging and trying to show his incredible raw power.

It is a growing process, and really this is the first time Abreu has experienced such a long stretch like this where he has struggled, so in the end it may be good for him and enhance his development down the road. He went down with a groin injury earlier this week, but it is not serious and he is day-to-day and should be back in the lineup any day. The injury is unfortunate, but perhaps it is a blessing in disguise as it may give him a chance to catch his breath and assess his performance and approach so when he comes back he can get back to hitting like the prospect many think he can be.

## Tomlin Keeps Performing

Triple-A Columbus right-handed pitcher Josh Tomlin continues to compete outing after outing, and to date in nine appearances (six starts) he is 5-1 with a 2.11 ERA and in 38.1 innings he has allowed 29 hits, 9 walks, and has 27 strikeouts. It is not all about



numbers of course as the other half to the equation is stuff and ability and how it translates to the big league level, but he just continues to pile up some impressive numbers at every level he has been at.

Tomlin, 25, is not a power pitcher by any means and instead relies on his impeccable ability to command and control his pitches around the strike zone. He limits the damage by eliminating walks and when batters do put the ball in play against him they are only hitting .213 off of him this year. He works quickly on the mound and uses a pitch to contact approach.



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For now Tomlin is pitching in the starting rotation, a role he was put into after the season started when left-hander Scott Lewis came up lame a few weeks ago. When or if the Indians promote another starter from Double-A Akron, he could move back to the bullpen, but at the moment the Columbus rotation is already one starter short with right-hander Hector Rondon on the shelf with an arm injury and there are no starting pitchers in Akron who look to be in line to receive a callup to Columbus at any point this season. As a result, Tomlin very well could remain in the Columbus rotation all year.

Either way, the Indians love the versatility Tomlin provides with his arm in that he can start or relieve and more importantly he throws strikes. He has a tough hurdle to jump in getting to the big leagues this year as starters Carlos Carrasco, Hector Rondon and maybe even Yohan Pino are above him in the pecking order, and on the bullpen front Jess Todd, Jensen Lewis, Joe Smith and Frank Herrmann are probably above him as well. That said, there is a chance at some point this year if he keeps pitching like this that he could get a big league callup, and if not it would increase his chances to making a big league roster in the offseason.

### Barnes Struggling With Delivery Change

So far it has been a season to forget for Double-A Akron left-handed starter Scott Barnes. In eight starts he is 1-4 with a 6.11 ERA and in 35.1 innings has allowed 34 hits, 22 walks, and has 36 strikeouts. This is not the kind of start envisioned for him coming into the season where many felt he was an up-and-coming pitching prospect in the system after being acquired from the Giants last July in a trade for Ryan Garko.



Barnes' issues to date may stem from a change the Indians have implemented to his delivery which he is still trying to work through. It is minor in nature, but sometimes even the smallest of changes to a delivery can alter everything. He used to work from the far right side of the rubber,



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but the Indians challenged him to make a change where he works more from the middle of the rubber and he is still adjusting to the change. The Indians also want him to become more efficient with his delivery and understand that in the short term his numbers may suffer, which is what is happening as his fastball command has been noticeably off. He is also working on controlling his emotions on the mound as when things start to snowball on him he gets frustrated and lets his emotions show, so the Indians are working with him to better control his emotions and stay within himself.

Barnes has actually pitched better of late as in his last three starts he is 1-1 with a 2.45 ERA (14.2 IP, 9 H, 4 ER, 8 BB, 17 K), so maybe things are starting to come together for him.

### Still Cruz-ing

If there were any concerns on whether Double-A Akron left-handed starter Kelvin De La Cruz was finally 100%, they should no longer be there. Since being promoted to Akron, De La Cruz has made three starts and is 1-2 with a 5.40 ERA, numbers which



are heavily skewed after he was pounded last night for seven runs and nine hits in four innings of work. In his prior start last Saturday he threw five hitless-shutout innings though was effectively wild throwing 87 pitches and had five walks and a hit batter. Combined with his other six starts at High-A Kinston he is now 3-4 with a 3.67 ERA (49.0 IP, 36 H, 15 BB, 40 K) on the year.

What makes De La Cruz so intriguing as a pitching prospect is not only does he have the stuff, but he has a very good pitchers body standing at 6'5" 190 pounds (he's bigger than 190, but that's what he is listed at). He has a very strong lower half and is really starting to come into his own as a pitcher with a lot more maturity on the mound where he is attacking hitters better and learning to make adjustments in-game. All three of his pitches are effective finishing pitches where he has shown the ability to miss bats and strike batters out. What he needs to continue to get better at is solidifying his arm slot and repeating his delivery pitch to pitch.

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Everything is there with the tools and makeup for De La Cruz to be a good pitcher in the big leagues, but there is still a long way to go and many pitfalls to avoid in order for him to get there.

Since he is already on the 40-man roster there is a good chance if he stays healthy and continues to progress that at the end of the 2011 season he could see some time in Cleveland as a September callup, but any significant time in Cleveland should not be expected until 2012. Of course, if he stays healthy and keeps pitching like has this season, those plans could surely be altered and he could speed up that timeline and be a legitimate option sometime next season.

### McFarland Still In Control

High-A Kinston left-handed starting pitcher T.J. McFarland continued his assault against the Carolina League this past week. On May 15<sup>th</sup> he got the win after going 5.1 innings and allowed 1 run on 4 hits, 2 walks and had 5 strikeouts, and then on Thursday

night he did not get a decision but was very good again in going 6.0 innings and allowed 2 runs on 6 hits, 2 walks, and had 5 strikeouts. In eight appearances this year he is now 5-0 with a 1.07 ERA and in 42.0 innings has allowed just 25 hits, 9 walks, and has 29 strikeouts. His 1.07 ERA still leads the Carolina League.

McFarland has only been in the rotation for three starts since he was inserted into it on May 10<sup>th</sup> after left-hander Kelvin De La Cruz was promoted to Double-A Akron. He initially opened the season coming out of the bullpen in a piggyback situation where he came into games in the 4<sup>th</sup>

or 5<sup>th</sup>

inning that left-hander Nick Hagadone started. The key to his success so far has been some very good control of his outstanding sinker, but another big key has been a much improved mental approach to the game. In addition to throwing strikes consistently and keeping the ball down in the zone, his much improved maturity and mental toughness have really paid off for him this year. He turns 21-years old in June, so he is likely to spend most if not all of the rest of the

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season in Kinston regardless of how well he pitches, but if he keeps this up and shows he needs a bigger challenge it is possible he could see some time at Double-A Akron late in the season.

### Infirmary Report

Here is an update on some of the recent injuries from the past week as well as when some others may return:

Double-A Akron third baseman Lonnie Chisenhall finally went on the disabled list yesterday with what is being called a sore



shoulder. He underwent an MRI and no significant injury was discovered, but he has been battling shoulder pain for awhile. I've heard it is a small tear in the shoulder area, while some have classified it as a shoulder impingement. Either way, he is not expected to be on the disabled list for long and some rest and rehab is expected to help it heal naturally.

High-A Kinston outfielder/first baseman Roman Pena is likely done for the season with a right knee injury he suffered last Sunday. He hurt his foot while planting it while trying to field a ball in the hold between first and second base. He recently underwent an MRI, but the fear is it is an ACL tear. No word yet on the exact injury or how long he will be out.

High-A Kinston first baseman Nate Recknagel is on the disabled list with an injured knee and will be out at least a week or two. He recently had an MRI on the knee, though results of it are unknown at this time.

As mentioned previously above, High-A Kinston outfielder Abner Abreu has a groin strain and is

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day to day. It is not considered serious, and he should be back in the lineup any day.

High-A Kinston third baseman Kyle Bellows is battling through some soreness in the back of his knee but has not missed any time.

## Comings & Goings

I have been going through and catching up on some reports and recent transactions, and I discovered some recent moves the Indians have made beyond the full season teams have yet to be reported. Three players that were in extended spring training are no longer with the organization as left-handed pitcher Heath Taylor and right-handed pitcher Jose Campos have both voluntarily retired while right-handed pitcher Michael Valadez, who was making the conversion from catcher to pitcher, has been released.

The Indians have signed Julio Ramirez, though at this moment I am not entirely sure if he is the former Major League outfielder who is now 32 years old or a new young Latin American signing.

## Affiliate Notebook



*Columbus Notes (27-16, 1<sup>st</sup> place, 2.5 GU):* Right-handed reliever Saul Rivera was traded on Monday to the Arizona Diamondbacks for cash considerations. In 15 games with Columbus he was 2-0 with 4 saves and a 0.53 ERA (17.0 IP, 9 H, 7 BB, 11 K). He had a May 15<sup>th</sup>

opt out clause to where if he was not in the big leagues he could request and be given his release, and with no open spot in the big league bullpen for him they had to trade or release him. ... 29-year old left-hander Mike Gosling went out in style on Monday when he pitched six shutout innings and then after the game announced his retirement. His road back to the big

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leagues seemed long so he decided to retire and go home to be with his wife and newborn son. In 13 games this year he was 3-0 with a 2.96 ERA (27.1 IP, 22 H, 9 BB, 24 K). ... Outfielder Michael Brantley is hitting .305 (29-95) in his 23 games at Columbus including 21 runs scored. ... Right-handed reliever Frank Herrmann has thrown 20.1 consecutive scoreless innings and on the year he is 1-0 with 2 saves and a 0.42 ERA (21.2 IP, 14 H, 1 ER, 7 BB, 15 K). ... Columbus leads the International League in batting average with a .286 team batting average (403-1409).



*Akron Notes (16-25, 6<sup>th</sup> place, 8.5 GB):* Outfielder/infielder Jared Goedert has had multi-hit games in four straight and currently holds a nine-game hitting streak. During that stretch, he's batting .406 (13-32) with 7 2B, 1 HR and 3 RBI. Over his last 19 games, he's hitting .380 (27-71) with a 9 2B, 3 HR, 14 RBI and 10 runs scored. He ranks second in the Eastern League with his .348 average (39-112) and fourth in slugging% (.554). ... Infielder Cord Phelps is hitting .336 (46-137) on the year which trails Goedert for the team high and is 3rd in the league. He's 14-for-28 when runners are in scoring position. ... Right-handed reliever Carlton Smith has been very good in his six appearances with Akron (7.1 IP, 4 H, 1 R, 2 BB, 5 K). ... Over his last three starts left-handed starter Scott Barnes has gone 1-1 with a 2.45 ERA (14.2IP/4ER) and has limited hitters to a .166 average (9-54). ... Outfielder Nick Weglarz is hitting .285 with 7 HR, 27 RBI and a .897 OPS in 37 games.



*Kinston Notes (22-20, 3<sup>rd</sup> place, 7.0 GB):* Second baseman Jason Kipnis is batting .309 on the year (43-139) with 5 2B, 2 3B, 4 HR and 22 RBI while scoring 21 runs. He has 8 RBI over his last seven games and is 8-for-22 over his last 6 games. ... Outfielder Jordan Henry is hitting .361 (26-72) on the year so far with 15 runs scored. He's played in 21 games because he has spent some time on the disabled list, but over his last 13 games he's batting .390 (19-47) with 2 2B, 4 RBI, 8 runs scored and 6 stolen bases. He is 9-for-9 in stolen base attempts this year and has 19 walks compared to 12 strikeouts. ... Infielder Karexon Sanchez has had three straight multi-hit games going 6-for-13. He is hitting .279 with 3 HR, 22 RBI, and has an .800 OPS in 35

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games. ... Left-handed pitcher T.J. McFarland is 5-0 on the year with a league best 1.07ERA (42.0 IP, 31 H, 5 ER, 29 K). He has not allowed more than two runs/earned runs in any of his eight games. ... Left-handed pitcher Nick Hagadone has allowed five earned runs over his last two starts (8.2 IP, 7H) after allowing only four earned runs in his first six starts (20.2 IP, 17 H). He is 0-2 with a 2.76 ERA in nine starts (32.2 IP, 27 H, 26 BB, 39 K). ...Right-handed pitcher Joe Gardner is 2-0 with a 0.00 ERA in three Kinston starts (16.2 IP, 5 H, 3 R, 7 BB, 17 K).



*Lake County Notes (29-13, 1<sup>st</sup> place, 2.5 GU):* Catcher Chun Chen was named the Midwest League Batter of the Week for the week of May 10 through May 16. He hit .435 in six games and had 2 2B, 3 3B, 1 HR, 5 RBI and scored 4 runs. On the season he is hitting .308 with 3 HR, 18 RBI, and has an .886 OPS in 27 games. ... Third baseman Jeremie Tice leads the Midwest League with 34 RBI and has had 11 RBI in his last 10 games. ... Infielder Casey Frawley is batting .313 (42-134) with 11 2B, 3 3B, 3 HR and 26 runs scored on the year. He is batting .370 (30-81) in 20 road games and has multi-hit games in five of his last eight going 12-for-36. ... Left-handed reliever Matt Packer has had six scoreless outings over his last eight appearances allowing just two earned runs during that span (13.2 IP, 8 H, 13 K, 2 BB). ... Right-handed starter Trey Haley is 3-0 with a 1.90 ERA (23.2IP/5ER) over his last four starts (16 H, 20 K).

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