

Minor Happenings: Welcome Back, Mr. Goedert

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Saturday, June 19 2010 11:08 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.

As the draft coverage finally starts to dwindle down, it's time to get back into the thick of things and get caught up with what is going on in the minor leagues. That said, I will continue to provide [updates on the draft with who signs or who doesn't](#) , and you can keep track of all that have signed and get to know some of the players [here](#)

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Anyway, in case you missed them two articles posted earlier in the week on [Josh Rodriguez](#) and [Wyatt Toregas](#)

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In the case of Toregas, I will say that in hindsight I feel really bad for him. Over the course of a

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season and in the offseason I talk to many players or people associated with them who are frustrated for some reason or another. It's part of the game and the way it is because with every organization, every year, there are always a handful of guys who feel they are getting the short end of the stick, valid reasons or not. He's not the first player to be frustrated about roster decisions made by the front office of a Major League team. He won't be the last either. But bottom line, that frustration is typically kept in-house. My mistake was my haste in trying to explain, in Wyatt's words, why he was not in Double-A Akron or Triple-A Columbus and why he was instead in short-season A-ball in Mahoning Valley, but in that search I uncovered something much more than anticipated as he had a lot of built up frustration that found it's way out, and with his blessing we discussed it on the record for an article. It was a challenge to write especially after I promised him to keep it as light as possible, and in hindsight wish I had not published it. Not for me or the Indians, but for him. What's done is done, but I just wanted it known that even sportswriters (if you want to call me that) make poor judgment calls.

With that, onto the *Happenings*...

Indians Minor League Player of the Week

(for games from June 10 to June 16)

Jared Goedert (Third baseman – Columbus)

.450 AVG (9-for-20), 5 R, 3 2B, 0 3B, 3 HR, 7 RBI, 1 BB, 4 K, 1.526 OPS

As we near the halfway point of the season there have been a lot of very positive things that have happened so far this year in the Indians' farm system. The beauty of the minor leagues is you never really know who is going to fail or succeed, improve or



regress, level out or continue to climb, and so on. That's what makes the game of baseball special as every night something unexpected happens, and over the course of the season while there will be disappointments along the way there are some great surprises as well.

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This year we have seen the return to form of several former high level prospects that had become afterthoughts after last season. Maybe not afterthoughts to the Indians themselves, but definitely the fans. One of those is Triple-A middle infielder Josh Rodriguez [who I discussed last week](#), but another who is having arguably an even better season is Columbus third baseman Jared Goedert.

After a pedestrian showing in Goedert's professional debut in 2006 at short-season Single-A Mahoning Valley (.269 AVG, .711 OPS) he exploded onto the prospect scene at Low-A Lake County in 2007 where in 46 games with them in April and May that year he hit .346 with 16 HR, 51 RBI and had a 1.191 OPS. Those eye-popping numbers caught everyone's attention, and the Indians quickly moved him up to High-A Kinston to challenge him and also experiment with him some at second base to maybe help facilitate a quick move through the system.

Unfortunately, since the call to Kinston at the end of May in 2007 things slowly went downhill for Goedert. He struggled with injuries almost from day one with Kinston that year and struggled for most of the rest of that season, came back in 2008 and had an okay season in Kinston (.255 AVG, .709 OPS), and then seemingly bottomed out last year at Double-A Akron (.224 AVG, .657 OPS) because of injuries and poor performance once again.

This year though, the 25-year old Goedert is in the midst of a revival season. He started it off with an incredible spring training where he hit .426 (20-47) with 4 HR, 15 RBI and had a .787 slugging percentage. He carried it from there and went back to Akron and in 44 games hit .325 with 14 2B, 7 HR, 32 RBI and had a .922 OPS in 168 at bats before earning a call to Triple-A Columbus earlier this month. Since joining Columbus he has continued his rampage where in 11 games he is hitting .385 with 4 HR, 9 RBI, and a 1.232 OPS. Overall this season between the two stops he is hitting .337 with 11 HR, 41 RBI, and a .985 OPS in 55 games.

Finally healthy, Goedert is once again driving the ball with authority and pounding the gaps. Best of all, he may be making himself into a big league option at third base as soon as this year. Talk about an extreme change of fortunes from where he was at the end of last season where many (including me) thought he was on the outs in the organization to where he is now just a few months later.

The Indians will have a decision to make soon on current incumbent third baseman Jhonny Peralta. They most definitely will not pick up his \$7M option for 2011, so it appears very likely

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he is traded sometime between now and the end of July. With that in mind, the Indians are going to need someone to play third base at the big league level for the last two-plus months of the season. They may choose to go with Andy Marte there, but if Goedert keeps this up he would almost have to be very much considered for the opening. With uber third base prospect Lonnie Chisenhall likely not ready to make his big league debut until at the earliest this time next year, they will need an option at third base to fill in as a stop gap. Goedert could be that guy. And, if given the opportunity and he performs well, maybe he becomes a longer term fit there.

Bottom line, what we are seeing with Goedert and Rodriguez are two prime examples of why you can never truly give up on a prospect, especially those who have been unfortunate with some injury issues which have deterred them from having success. Their success this year will not only help themselves, but the Cleveland Indians as well. A win-win for all.

Honorable Mentions:

Cord Phelps (2B – COL): .368 (7-19), 2 R, 2 2B, 0 3B, 1 HR, 4 RBI, 2 BB, 1 K, 1.060 OPS

Matt McBride (OF/1B – AKR): .381 (8-21), 3 R, 2 2B, 0 HR, 5 RBI, 3 BB, 4 K, .916 OPS

Karexon Sanchez (2B – KIN): .563 (9-16), 5 R, 3 2B, 1 HR, 3 RBI, 6 BB, 4 K, 1.633 OPS

Chun Chen (C – LC): .318 (7-22), 3 R, 2 2B, 1 HR, 4 RBI, 1 BB, 2 K, .920 OPS

Eric Berger (LHP – AKR): 1-0, 0.77 ERA, 2 G, 11.2 IP, 5 H, 1 ER, 4 BB, 10 K, .135 BAA

Previous Winners:

06/03 to 06/09: Josh Rodriguez (INF – Columbus)

05/27 to 06/02: Paolo Espino (RHP – Akron)

05/20 to 05/26: Kyle Bellows (3B – Kinston)

05/13 to 05/19: Carlos Santana (C – Columbus)

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)

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Director's Cuts

Here is a smorgasbord of quotes from Indians Director of Player Development Ross Atkins this week. Since there was no *Minor Happenings* last week, some of these are almost two weeks old, but nonetheless I am sharing now. Included is a quote from Atkins in response to the Toregas article.



On Wyatt Toregas: "We felt like Wyatt would benefit greatly from getting back into the best physical shape possible in order to compete at the upper levels of professional baseball, and Arizona provided us the opportunity to do that. We gave him his choice between Arizona and Mahoning Valley, and he chose Mahoning Valley because it is closer to his family and because he recently had a child."

On Michael Brantley: "Michael is a proven hitter and has the ability to put the bat on the ball, doesn't strike out, and gets on base. Whether or not there is more power in there is one of the things people are constantly talking about, but [the power] is not needed. He is not going to have to have power to be a Major League caliber player. The things he has to do to be a Major League caliber player is steal bases and being an above average defender because he has the ability to do that. The bat to ball is always going to be there and he is always going to get his hits. He has shown the ability to be an above average defender and make some exceptional plays. He has shown the ability to steal bases at an incredible clip. He has been identified as a very good base-stealer and has recently had a hiccup, but he is going to be identified as a base-stealer here in the Major Leagues and is going to have to get over that and learn when to make good decisions and how to pickup tendencies to take advantage of others' limitations. He is certainly up to the challenge, and I think the next transition [to the big leagues] for him will be an interesting and a more positive one."

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On telling players to hit for more power: "We haven't had success telling them they need to be more powerful and hit more home runs. I don't know if anyone in the game has as it is very hard to do. Really for the best hitters the power comes when two things happen, they get more consistent with their swing in the strike zone and then secondarily they miss less mistakes and capitalize on them when they get them."

On Jeanmar Gomez: "Jeanmar is a really interesting topic in that he had a lot of Double-A success [last year]. He really was impressive from a pitching standpoint and using his pitches, using his arsenal, commanding his fastball, and doing it with youth on his side. I think in doing so he really relied heavily on his command and has realized the importance of some of the power in getting the ball by bats and getting the guys to chase the pitches that are just slightly out of the zone. I think Triple-A has shown him that he is going to have to do both, not just command and use his pitches, but also maintain his power in his delivery and stuff. His last outing was a good one. He has worked hard with Charlie Nagy and our pitching coordinator [Dave Miler] to make those adjustments, but they don't happen overnight."

On Vinnie Pestano: "Vinnie has really been unbelievable. His whole career he has a great pedigree and really has always pitched in high leverage situations his whole career and continues to do that for us and continues to pretty much dominate. Now he is doing that in Triple-A as his strikeout rates are great and he gets the ball on the ground. He is similar to Joe Smith in that he could get a little bit exposed to a Major League left handed hitter, but we will find out because he is showing us he deserves an opportunity, [though] the opportunity to pitch in the Major Leagues is obviously dependant upon need."

On Bryce Stowell: "His numbers are unbelievable. His strikeout rates are as high as anyone we have and maybe as high as anyone in minor league baseball. He has been dominant and up to 98 MPH with a power breaking ball and has a very impressive amateur pedigree in that we were fortunate to get him where we got him in the draft. He had not quite as dominant of a year last year in the starting rotation, but since we have moved him to the pen he has really taken off."

On Rob Bryson: "It is a couple of things with Rob. We have always been excited about the arm, but we wanted to temper that excitement to make sure he was sustaining his health and stuff coming off shoulder surgery and he has done that. Like Bryce he has been in the upper 90s and striking out a ton of hitters. You really don't see that kind of strikeout to walk ratio."

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These are older quotes, about a week and a half to two weeks ago, so keep in mind the time when he talks about the players:

On Hector Rondon: "We will see, but he is not going to be back in action in the short term. He has a mild strain to the UCL. We have had a lot of success with rest and rehabilitation programs that David Huff and Kelvin De La Cruz and some others have had with us. He is in the beginning stages of that and we will see him toward the end of the year. It is certainly disappointing, but he is still very young and it is the first hiccup he has had with his health. We have some good information and reasons for why we think it occurred, so the upside to that is maybe we can make sure it doesn't happen again."

On Lonnie Chisenhall: "He is just DHing. If he were playing in the Major Leagues he would already be playing third base. We are a little bit more conservative in the minor leagues. He is rehabbing his shoulder to make sure he has zero pain when he comes back into the fold. He should be back in at third base next week. We are definitely glad to see him back in the lineup and he has already had a couple of good games."

On Nick Hagadone: "He has had a very similar outing that he had in A-ball, which is a good sign that he has not been affected by the move, a new team, a new environment and an entirely new lineup. He had very level performance [in his first outing]. That's a good sign and we are looking forward to many more of those from him. He has a long career ahead of him. He is one of the more physical individuals that we have, he is extremely strong, extremely committed, and extremely mature, so it will be an exciting second half for Nick."

On Aaron Laffey: "He goes right into the rotation and will be built up in a hurry. There is essentially a pitch count threshold that we will follow, but he should be a major league option within 10 days and potentially even sooner."

On Lake County: "On both fronts it has been very positive. They were so young that we were actually preparing ourselves for some lapses in performance and they have been more consistent than we projected. On the pitching front it has been the most encouraging with Trey Haley and Austin Adams leading the charge. Joe Gardner was there and is now in Kinston. Those are the three names that really stand out. Haley and Adams have been up to 97 MPH, both are flashing average to above average secondary pitches, both are extremely athletic as Adams is a former shortstop and Haley grades out objectively as one of the most athletic pitchers in our system. On the position player front, clearly the two better prospects there are

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Bo Greenwell and Roberto Perez. I think a nice surprise for us has been Casey Frawley. Not necessarily a surprise with his offensive performance, but how well he has played different positions and primarily how well he has played shortstop. It is really hard to find someone who can play shortstop and swing the bat consistently."

On the approach of advancing pitchers in the system: "We really have not been able to hit the nail on the head there as it is really tough to project when things come together for guys, and then when they do what does that ultimately mean. For someone like Trey Haley who is 19 it is probably going to take him longer to repeat those performances, to repeat his arm slot, and to repeat the routines, and for someone like Austin Adams who is 23 it should be a little bit quicker. Once things get consistent for him there is no slowing him down and he is the type of player who could go two or three levels in one year while Haley most likely will be someone that pitches at a level every year. Having said that, Haley is so talented and with how athletic he is and the power that he features, if he does start to put together 10-15 consecutive good starts his path will be more rapid than a year to year path. More generally, a guy from Lake County is technically three years away. We don't always hold to that process, but I think baseball keeps you to that standard. The challenges that are inherent in 142 games in the minor leagues and the challenges that are inherent in establishing routines and consistency so that you can handle the rigors of a Major League season require those steps. College players are more able to handle a quicker transition typically just because of their four years in college."

Scout's Takes

Indians Director of Amateur Scouting Brad Grant talked a little this week about the draft and some of the players they received:

On the draft: "We are very excited about it. We were able to come in and add some quality pitching and also add some athletes as well. We are happy with how it has turned out so far."

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On Drew Pomeranz: "He has a lot of ability. He is a big 6'5" left-handed starter with a power mix. He has a 90-95 MPH fastball with late life to it. Hitters don't seem to track his fastball well and then he has that knuckle curveball that is similar to Cliff Lee's as he has the same grip. He gets a lot of swing and miss, and is a big, physical starter. This year with the fifth pick we had expectations of who we were going to get and Drew was one of them. We knew early on we wanted him. We saw him since high school, last summer with Team USA he was dominating there, and then over the course of this spring. We are excited about him."

On LeVon Washington: "He are excited to have the opportunity to draft LeVon. He is a premium athlete and on a 2 to 8 scale he is a 7 runner. He plays center field and has an advanced approach to hitting. He has a good left handed swing with some good power gap type carry. He is a high upside guy we were excited to draft in the second round."

On drafting college arms early: "That's just kind of the way the draft turned out. We came in knowing the depth of the draft class was high school pitching, but the way it unfolded [in the early] going we came out with three premium college arms. We are happy with how it turned out as it was not something that was planned. But we came out with Drew Pomeranz, Kyle Blair and Cole Cook, especially where we got those guys."

On Alex Lavisky: "Alex is fun. He is a very mature high school player who is very athletic and very advanced for his age. He had a chance to catch Stetson Allie and did it easily. The fun thing to watch about Alex is he doesn't drop a ball back there. He is able to throw as he has a solid average arm behind the plate, and has the big power. With [Mahoning Valley], Lake County, Akron and Columbus right down the road, mom and dad will be able to see him a lot if we get the chance to have him enter into the system. So hopefully it all works out."

On Chisenhall/White: "It's fun and been exciting to watch the progression of Lonnie move from short over to third and make that transition pretty easily and then obviously hit. He has a pretty left-handed stroke with power. And then Alex done exactly what we thought he would do. It is a power arm that is going out there and getting a lot of swing and miss, a lot of ground balls, and he is doing very well and holding his own at Akron right now. So we are excited about both of them and hopefully they can keep moving up to the big leagues."

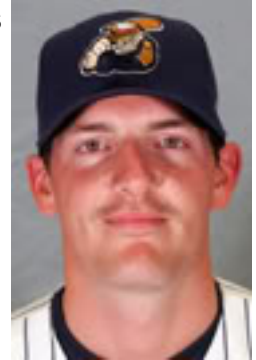
Award Winner

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Congrats to High-A Kinston right-handed pitcher Marty Popham for being named the Carolina League Pitcher of the Week earlier this week. He had two outstanding start for the period against Wilmington and Myrtle Beach where he threw 13 scoreless innings



and gave up just ten hits, struck out 12 batters and only allowed one walk. In his last outing on Sunday he retired the final ten batters he faced and struck out the last four in a row. In three of his five starts with Kinston he has not allowed a run and in one of the other two outings he only allowed one run, and in every start he has struck out at least five batters while walking no more than two batters. Overall this season in 13 games (9 starts) he is 4-2 with a 3.36 ERA and in 61.2 innings has allowed 62 hits, 13 walks, and has 57 strikeouts.

Popham reminds me a lot of right-hander Frank Herrmann, another guy who was unheralded coming out of college but worked his way through the system and just continued to get better. Both are big, strong pitchers (Popham is 6'6 235 pounds) with heavy fastballs that generally sit in the low 90s but have the ability to reach back for more if needed. In talking with some scouts who have seen him in Kinston recently, they were surprised how an arm like his was able to be picked up so late in the draft. They were having a hard time figuring out what they could be missing that caused him to slip, but they were pleasantly surprised with his stuff and feel he has a chance to be good some day. Time will tell, but so far so good for him.

All Stars

The Midwest League announced their mid season All Star teams a short bit ago, and the Indians will have five players represent them from Low-A Lake County. The players selected to the team were right-handed pitcher Trey Haley, right-handed pitcher Nick

