

Minor Happenings: Carrasco About Ready For Prime Time

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Tuesday, August 24 2010 6:00 PM - Last Updated Tuesday, August 24 2010 6:54 PM



"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 made a day long journey to Double-A Akron and Triple-A Columbus yesterday to see both teams in action, mostly because I wanted to see recently acquired right-handed pitcher Corey Kluber pitch and also see right-hander Carlos Carrasco in action. During my visits I talked to about a dozen players, so will have feature pieces on them over the course of the next several weeks and into the offseason. I also talked to a lot of scouts, so I will mix some of those things I have learned into future updates.

I'll be hitting up Low-A Lake County later this week, and hopefully short-season Single-A Mahoning Valley on Tuesday or Wednesday night. It's a mad dash to see these guys, get interviews, and talk to scouts and organizational personnel before the season ends in two weeks!

Onto the *Happenings*...

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Indians Minor League Player of the Week

(for games from August 12th to August 18th)

Carlos Carrasco (Right-handed pitcher - Columbus)

1-0, 2 G, 0.69 ERA, 13.0 IP, 8 H, 1 ER, 0 BB, 14 K, .174 BAA

Triple-A Columbus right-handed pitcher Carlos Carrasco is putting the finishing touches on his development at the minor league



level where when he comes up to Cleveland in September the minor leagues will hopefully be permanently in his review mirror. His performance over the past few weeks since returning from injury show that may be the case.

Carrasco, 23, is now 1-2 with a 2.73 ERA (26.1 IP, 20 H, 2 BB, 24 K) in his four starts since returning from the disabled list because of a forearm issue that cropped up in mid-July. He's been at his best, and looks to be about ready to attack major league hitters on a consistent basis. In his first three starts back there were some concerns as his velocity was only at 89-91 MPH as compared to the 93-96 MPH it had been at all year prior to the injury setback, but in his outing yesterday he was consistently in the low 90s and was often touching 93-94 MPH. It looks like he has regained the confidence to let it loose with his fastball, where with the impeccable command he has shown of late should only help. On top of that he is pitching a lot more with his curveball, which as been a big reason he has been so effective of late.

In yesterday's outing, Carrasco was unbelievable the first 5+ innings. He had everything working and really commanded the zone with all of his pitches. He hit the first batter of the game and then proceeded to pick him off first and ended up setting down the next 16 batters in order. He was near-perfect and had a no-hitter through 5.2 innings before things unraveled for him in the 6th inning, mostly because of some questionable strike calls by the home plate umpire and some weak hits which were perfectly placed. He allowed two runs in the 6

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innings before departing going 7.2 innings and allowing 4 runs on 7 hits, 1 walk, and with 8 strikeouts.

The one issue that continues to show itself, and is a significant concern, is that when Carrasco has to pitch from the stretch he tends to lose focus. I was at the game yesterday and in talking to one scout he mentioned that "when he pitches from the stretch, the game speeds up on him." This is a serious flaw for him, and something he needs to find a cure for as it is really the one thing that continually does him in where he has a tendency to not be able to work out of jams. It's been the big knock against him for awhile now. Some say it is a lack of toughness, others say it is a lack of focus. Whatever it is, if he envisions being a major league pitcher and sticking as one, this is an obstacle he will have to overcome and work his way through. Maybe it will come together for him when he settles into a rotation spot in the big leagues (we hope).

Honorable Mentions:

Jose Constanza (OF - COL): .545 (12-22), 6 R, 1 2B, 1 3B, 4 RBI, 6 BB, 1 K, 5 SB, 1.325 OPS
Cord Phelps (2B - COL): .320 (8-25), 3 R, 2 2B, 0 3B, 2 HR, 9 RBI, 1 BB, 4 K, 1.010 OPS
Lonnie Chisenhall (3B - AKR): .450 (9-20), 4 R, 2 2B, 0 3B, 1 HR, 9 RBI, 7 BB, 3 K, 1.271 OPS
Jason Kipnis (2B - AKR): .429 (9-21), 7 R, 1 2B, 1 3B, 2 HR, 7 RBI, 5 BB, 3 K, 1.413 OPS
Jordan Henry (OF - AKR): .423 (11-26), 7 R, 1 2B, 1 3B, 0 HR, 4 RBI, 4 BB, 5 K, 1.038 OPS
Tim Fedroff (OF - AKR): .364 (8-22), 4 R, 1 2B, 2 3B, 0 HR, 1 RBI, 2 BB, 3 K, 1.031 OPS
Chun Chen (C - KIN): .474 (9-19), 4 R, 2 2B, 1 HR, 3 RBI, 6 BB, 2 K, 1.337 OPS
Jason Smit (OF - LC): .435 (10-23), 3 R, 4 2B, 1 3B, 0 HR, 4 RBI, 2 BB, 4 K, 1.176 OPS
Greg Folgia (OF - LC): .423 (11-26), 3 R, 1 2B, 0 3B, 0 HR, 3 RBI, 0 BB, 8 K, .869 OPS
Brian Heere (OF - MV): .353 (6-17), 2 R, 1 2B, 1 3B, 0 HR, 2 RBI, 3 BB, 3 K, .979 OPS
Luis Encarnacion (RHP - AZL): 0-0, 2 G, 2.16 ERA, 8.1 IP, 6 H, 2 ER, 1 BB, 5 K, .182 BAA
Mike Rayl (LHP - MV): 1-0, 2 G, 2.31 ERA, 11.2 IP, 5 H, 3 ER, 4 BB, 15 K, .132 BAA
Scott Barnes (LHP - AKR): 0-0, 2G, 2.25 ERA, 12.0 IP, 6 H, 2 ER, 5 BB, 10 K, .143 BAA

Previous Winners:

08/06 to 08/12: Alex Kaminsky (RHP – Mahoning Valley)
07/28 to 08/05 T.J. House (LHP – Kinston)

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07/22 to 07/28: Adam Abraham (3B – Lake County)
07/15 to 07/21: Jason Kipnis (2B – Akron)
07/08 to 07/14: Jesus Aguilar (1B – Arizona)
07/01 to 07/07: Matt McBride (OF – Akron)
06/24 to 06/30: Michael Brantley (OF - Columbus)
06/17 to 06/23: Jason Kipnis (2B – Akron)
06/10 to 06/16: Jared Goedert (3B – Columbus)
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)

Coach's Corner: Greg Hibbard

I recently had a chance to sit down with Double-A Akron pitching coach Greg Hibbard and talk about a few pitchers on his staff, and here is what he had to say:

On Nick Hagadone: "Normally at this level in Double-A we typically have a priority system to where you have your starters, your



three priority relievers, and then your 10th, 11th, and 12th guy in the bullpen. Recently we haven't really had priority guys and just been pitching guys which is beneficial to their development versus making sure they get their innings. He is considered a priority reliever now where every two days we are going to get him into the ball game for hopefully two innings. I think it is kind of a step back from being in a starting role and trying to simplify what he is doing

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right now over short stints and trying to maintain his focus a little more over the two innings that he is in versus the mindset he is starting and has to go five and pitch deep into games. Just to clear his mind and ease his focus a little bit as he has been inconsistent with repeating his delivery. At this level if you are not repeating your delivery and not locating you are going to give up hits and they are going to put good swings on you. I think that at times has compounded maybe a little bit of his consistency in the strike zone as one of the best ways to get the pitcher out of the zone is to swing the bat. So when they are swinging the bats better that tends to kind of allow pitchers to walk guys once in awhile."

On Kelvin De la Cruz: "We are just trying to get him to repeat his delivery. At this level distractions can be a big thing. We are seeing a lot of progress in his daily routines and that is one of the things that we have really strived for him to be able to accomplish. Have better preparation on game days and just some high level stuff that he is finally learning at how important that is at this level and maybe the next two levels, and he is really showing signs of improvement in his bullpen work. We are seeing him prepared to get people out in the first inning, we are just not seeing a lot of results in pitching deep into the game every time and we haven't seen it translate into the game yet with the hard work he is putting in his throwing program, in his side days, and in learning how to attack hitters and how to use his stuff. It has been a slow process, which is not unusual. He is a young kid and he is still developing tremendously at the Double-A level which is tough for everybody."

On Alex White: "He is so talented as far as having a 95 MPH fastball with the feel for command down in the zone with some late action. We are not saying that can't work at the higher levels, we are just making sure that we develop the slider a little bit and get his splitter a little more consistent, and mainly just making some minor adjustments with his delivery which is going to allow his secondary pitches to have some late depth. We are just looking at some of the misses that he has from time to time when he pitches which is conducive to his delivery being a little bit out of whack from time to time, so we are just trying to address some of those small issues with his delivery. He responds well as he is a very talented, strong kid that is able to apply things he sees or you talk about. I really believe he understands the importance of what he is working on."

On Scott Barnes: "He has applied some of the things we have identified with him working underneath his pitches a little bit and his fastball command was a little bit more up in the zone. He didn't have the late sink down in the zone [earlier in the year]. For a guy like him he can't pitch up in the zone, and as a result his slider was a little side to side and his changeup was a little up to his arm side. For instance, just his separation over the rubber. When guys gather in over the rubber they tend to drift or get off line with their direction. That's one of the things that he is trying to work on and he knows the importance of him staying on line, and the importance of his hand not working below the baseball. He has a tendency of his hand to fall out from

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behind the ball, so he has to keep his hand behind the ball so he can work through the baseball and get some two-seam sink. He understands that. Effort level is very important for him as when his effort gets too high you will start to see his delivery get a little bit away from him. He has been really good as far as his composure on the mound and has made a lot of strides in that direction. Being a better teammate was a big key for him too. Not that he was a horrible teammate before, but just some little things that he has had to make some adjustments with."

On Paolo Espino: "I think he has done a really good job. He tends to kind of figure things out, and is a lot like Josh Tomlin. He is kind of a finesse right-hander that has to locate his fastball, and when he doesn't he gets in trouble. We identified some things he can do when they get on his fastball, like using his secondary stuff earlier in the count. He has been solid with his record and ERA, and the amount of innings he has given is reflective to the job he has done this year. He has been very professional and knows the importance of repeating his delivery. If his effort gets out of hand his fastball tends to get up in the zone and becomes hittable. He is aware of what he has to do to attack hitters."

On Eric Berger: "I want to believe where he is at right now is probably where he would have liked to start the season. He is probably a month and a half behind where he would have been [because of the injury at the end of spring training]. He is able to make the right adjustments, which is what you want to start seeing in guys at this level and above. When guys are struggling to show that they are able to make adjustments, to make that little tweak in the middle of an inning and able to get their fastball down in the zone, or throw their breaking ball for a strike. Sometimes at other levels that is the thing they are striving to do, to become more of a coach within themselves on the mound. Eric has been able to do that, to find his composure, know what the fix is to get the fastball in the strike zone, and that is all part of preparation and bullpen work and knowing yourself. You have to know who you are."

On Bryan Price: "He has been one of our most reliable guys out of the pen. He comes in throwing strikes. He has a solid two-pitch mix with his fastball-slider, but he is starting to throw a little bit of a forkball-splitfinger to left-handers just to kind of get them off his fastball a little bit. He has made some adjustments on the rubber where he has moved over toward the middle which has put his arm more on the plate which has helped him more with a put away slider. I am starting to see more swing and miss with his slider in counts where he can use it where in the past he'd throw it and they would spit on it but now he is starting to get some swing and miss on some two-strike sliders. Way at the beginning of the season he had a little tenderness coming out of spring training. Since he has come back he has been solid, his velocity has been much better, and he has carried it through the whole season. He is in a good place right now within himself."

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Knapp Time

It has been a long time coming – almost a year really – but right-handed pitcher Jason Knapp is right back where he started with



the Cleveland Indians organization in Low-A Lake County. The difference is, this time he is 100% healthy.

When the Indians acquired the 19-year old Knapp last year he had been on the disabled list with bicep tendonitis, but little did they know that there was a more serious issue with the shoulder that would eventually shut him down in the offseason and force him to miss most of this season while he rehabbed from arthroscopic shoulder surgery. His return to pitching has been slow this year, though the Indians have been overly conservative so as to ensure as best as they can there are no hiccups with his recovery. Had it been an older pitcher and one closer to the big leagues, he may have been back pitching as soon as April or May this year; however, because of his youth, arm, projection and outstanding talents, they erred on the side of extreme caution in getting him back on the mound with an affiliate this year.

Now that Knapp is on the mound, he is back to dominating hitters once again. He made five starts on a return to throw program for rookie-level Arizona and went 0-2 with a 1.46 ERA (12.1 IP, 5 H, 4 BB, 18 K). In Arizona he was consistently hitting in the mid-90s and touching 98 MPH, and his secondary stuff looked good. After he was deemed ready to go, the Indians last week sent him to Low-A Lake County where he made his season debut there on Friday night. He was on a four inning of 65 pitch limit, whichever came first, and ended up going four shutout-hitless innings and allowed two walks and had seven strikeouts. His fastball didn't have its normal velocity as it was at 92-95 MPH, but he pitched very well and looked sharp.

Knapp's long absence from pitching actually helped him become even stronger and in the best shape he has ever been in, which is a credit to his outstanding work ethic. Most importantly, he has become more of a student of the game in understanding what it takes to "pitch" rather than just "throw" like so many young pitchers fresh out of high school do. Now that he has a chance

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to apply his understanding of how to pitch, it will be interesting to see how it translates going forward.

Knapp is scheduled to make his next start on Wednesday on the road in Fort Wayne, Indiana. He is still being ramped up with his pitch count, and should be on a five inning 80 pitch count in the next start (or following one). With two weeks left in the regular season he will probably make three more starts for Lake County and then make at least one start in the playoffs before he will report back to September in mid-September for the Fall Instructional League to make up some innings.

Random Notebook

Triple-A Columbus right-handed pitcher **Shane Lindsay** is an intriguing arm because he shows above average arm strength with his mid-90s fastball, but lacks much command with it as he is unable to control it in the zone and he has problems consistently repeating his delivery. He's also had problems staying healthy as he suffered a torn labrum in 2006 and a broken hand in 2008. The impressive arm is a big reason why teams keep picking him up, but the command issues are also a big reason why he has now pitched in three different organizations this year as well. To date, in 31 combined appearances this year in the minors he is 1-2 with a 5.20 ERA and in 36.1 innings has allowed 30 hits, 45 walks, and has 49 strikeouts. The .222

batting average against and 12.1 K/9 are impressive, but the 11.1 BB/9 is horrifying.

Double-A Akron third baseman **Lonnie Chisenhall** has had a very nice season this year, especially considering the shoulder issues he has battled through much of the season. He continues to show great natural ability with his hands and some good pull side power at the plate, and his defense at third base continues to be above average to exceptional (depending on who you talk to). In a recent visit to Akron, an NL scout made it clear that he thinks Chisenhall has a chance to be a very good big league third baseman and projects well because he is still only 21-years old, plays great defense, and has a stroke that should make him a .300 hitter down the road. In 101 games this year he is hitting .273 with 15 HR, 72 RBI and a .788

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OPS.

High-A Kinston right-handed reliever **Dave Roberts** has battled inconsistently this season. His problem has been his over-reliance on his fastball this year, which is something he and the Indians are trying to work through by mixing in his changeup and curveball earlier in counts to help keep hitters off balance. As a result, he recently has been showcasing his secondary stuff a lot more, but it does not appear to be working much as he has struggled a lot where in his last ten outings he is 0-1 with a 9.37 ERA (16.1 IP, 22 H, 7 BB, 12 K). Overall this season the 23-year old is 1-3 with a 5.91 ERA, and in 64.0 innings has allowed 82 hits, 21 walks, and has 61 strikeouts.

Low-A Lake County second baseman **Argenis Martinez** is slowly starting to put things together offensively. Though he has struggled in his last ten games and is hitting just .212 with a .580 OPS, he has actually hit a lot better in the second half (.261/.671) compared to the first half (.171/.459) of the season. The 20-year old defensive specialist is showing more confidence at the plate, and his turnaround has been helped by keeping his legs more grounded during his swing and getting him to work on the top half of the ball. In 90 games this year he is hitting .214 with 0 HR, 23 RBI and a .562 OPS.

Short-season Single-A Mahoning Valley outfielder/first baseman **Chase Burnette** has been one of the few bright spots in what has mostly been a disappointing affiliate to follow this year. He has shown a nice, refined swing with good bat speed and physical strength, and leads the team in almost every offensive category. Given that Low-A Lake County will be in the playoffs and Mahoning Valley is going nowhere, it looks very possible that he will soon get a call up to Lake County for some action down the stretch and in the playoffs. In 59 games he is hitting .288 with 8 HR, 28 RBI and a .813 OPS.

Rookie-level Arizona wraps up play with coming weekend, so several players could be on the move to Mahoning Valley and Lake County in the next week. One player who may get some action could be outfielder **LeVon Washington**, though he left his pro debut the other night after just one plate appearance so he may have suffered an injury. As of this writing I am not sure what his status is, but will follow up via Twitter (

[@TonyIPI](#)

)

. First baseman/catcher

Juan Aponte

and/or outfielder

Anthony Gallas

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could go to Mahoning Valley to allow

Chase Burnette

to go to Lake County. Given their age, second baseman

Logan Thompson

and outfielder

Henry Dunn

could also see time at Mahoning Valley or Lake County. Younger players like

Alex Lavisky

,

Tony Wolters, Aaron Siliga

,

Mark Brown

, and

Marcus Bradley

, and others are not expected to be promoted.

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