

Minor Happenings: Akron Falls Short In Quest For Repeat

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Monday, September 18 2006 7:00 PM -

In this latest version of Minor Happenings, Tony chronicles the AA Akron Aeros run at back to back titles. Lastoria also reports on all the Indians elite prospects, and what the team has in store for them this off-season as well as next season. Tony also reports on the addition of Mike Rouse from the A's, and wraps up the seasons of the Indians other minor league affiliates.



Minor Happenings” covers the important developments and news in the Indians farm system over the course of the past week. Information in this report is collected from the various news outlets that cover each team, some national news, and in some cases from private sources connected to the Indians organization.

Akron lost the decisive game Game 5 to Portland on Sunday, falling in the Eastern League Championship 3 games to 2. The Aeros almost pulled off an improbable comeback after they lost the first two games of the series as they bounced back to take the next two games at Portland in thrilling fashion only to fall short in Game 5.

In Game 1, Portland jumped on ace Adam Miller early by scoring 4 runs in the first 3 innings. Akron made a late comeback, scoring 3 runs in the 8th, but the comeback fell short and they fell 4-3. Miller ended the game going 6 innings giving up 7 hits and 2 walks while striking out 9. After giving up 5 hits and 3 runs in the first 1+ innings, Miller settled down and allowed only 2 hits, 1 run and struckout 6 hitters the last 5 innings. OF Trevor Crowe (2-4, 2 2Bs) and OF Brian Barton (2-4, 2B, 3B, RBI) led the offense.

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In Game 2, Akron starter Aaron Laffey fell apart in the 4th inning giving up six runs by hitting a batter and walking four batters, of which three of those walks were with the bases loaded. Laffey's final line was 3.1 IP, 3 hits, 8 runs, 4 walks, and 6 strikeouts. The offense twice brought the Aeros back to within a run, but in the end the pitching and execution all night was atrocious for the Aeros, and they ended up losing 13-8. The offensive stars of the game were 3B Pat Osborn (3-5, 2B, 3 RBIs), 1B Jared Sandberg (2-5, HR, RBI), C Wyatt Toregas (1-4, HR, RBI) and DH Ryan Mulhern (2-4, 2 RBIs).

As the series shifted to Portland, the Aeros won two exciting games in their last at bat. In Game 3, with the score tied 4-4 in the top of the 9th, the Aeros rallied for 2 runs to take the lead and win the game. The key to the game was the Aeros bullpen, as after starter Sean Smith left early (4.1 IP, 4 hits, 3 runs, 1 BB, 4 Ks), the bullpen of Reid Santos, Tony Sipp, Jim Ed Warden, and Travis Foley held Portland to 1 run on 2 hits the last 4.2 innings. 2B Brandon Pinckney (4-5, 2 2B), OF Ryan Goleski (2-3, HR, RBI), and OF Brian Barton (3-5, 2B, 2 RBIs) led the offense.

In Game 4, the Aeros again rallied in the top of the 9th. This time, down 5-4 they rallied for 2 runs to win the game 6-5. 2B Brandon Pinckney had a key 1-out singled with runners on 1

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to tie the game, and OF Ryan Goleski followed with a sacrifice fly to take the lead. Once again the starting pitching was not good, as Jensen Lewis went 5 innings and gave up 4 runs on 7 hits while striking out 8. Pinckney (4-5, RBI) and C Wyatt Toregas (1-3, HR, 3 RBIs) were the key contributors on offense.

With the series tied 2-2, Portland threw their ace Devern Hansack in Game 5, but the Aeros did not counter with their ace Adam Miller who would have been pitching on normal rest. Miller was not given the green light to start the game by Tribe officials because he had already logged 167 innings this season. Instead, 5th starter Bear Bay got the call and he was lit up to the tune of 8 runs in 3 IP. The bullpen and offense couldn't bail the starter out this time, and the Aeros fell 8-5. SS Ivan Ochoa (3-4, 2 3Bs, RBI) and 1B Shaun Larkin (2-4, HR, RBI) led the offense.

With the loss, the Aeros failed in their attempt to repeat as Eastern League champs, but this

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was the Aeros 3rd trip in 4 years to the title series (they won in 2003 and 2005). Congrats to the Aeros on a very good season, and with a lot of talent likely coming over from the Carolina League champion Kinston Indians next year, the Aeros should continue to be a force to reckon with in 2007.

Why No Miller?

With so much at stake for Akron in the all-important Game 5 for the league championship, some may question why Miller was held out of action to make the start in Akron's biggest game of the season. Basically, the decision came down to what was best for Adam Miller and the Cleveland Indians than what was best for the Akron Aeros. Miller already had logged 167 innings this season, and is coming off an arm injury last season that held him to only 70.1 innings. Being that Miller is the most prized gem in the entire Indians farm system, the Indians just did not want to risk one additional start and erred on the side of caution.

Roster Move

Akron made a roster move prior to the Championship Series with Portland. Right-hander JD Martin was added to the roster, and right-hander Nick Pesco was transferred to the Kinston roster. Martin is a starting pitcher, but was used in the series out of the bullpen. He was on a 60-pitch count, so he offered some flexibility to Akron manager Tim Bogar to use him in relief for multiple innings. Martin appeared in 2 games (Game 1 and 5), and pitched 6 innings while giving up no runs on 2 hits, 1 BB and struckout 6.

Kinston Wins Championship

Kinston won the Carolina League Championship last week. For more on this, check out the writeup from last week in a special edition of Minor Happenings:

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http://www.swerbsblurbs.com/article_detail.php?id=793

Director's Cuts

With the minor league action down to just Akron, Farrell's comments were brief this past week. Here is a quick recap of some players and points he touched on:

On Adam Miller: Miller was named the Pitcher of the Year in the Eastern League, and the progress he made this year is a direct result of him learning to be a pitcher. The development of his changeup, knowing when and how to use it, has been key to his transformation from a thrower to a pitcher. Miller locates his fastball very well to both sides of the plate, and he continues to mature as a person and player. He will be in Buffalo to start the year next season, and barring any setbacks due to injury is in line to be a mid-year callup to the big league team.

On Logren and Lewis: Farrell raved about the seasons that Chuck Lofgren and Scott Lewis put together at Kinston this year, and feel their success speaks volumes of the competitiveness and talent each possess. In particular, Lewis was phenomenal considering how he battled and attacked hitters while being handicapped with such a strict pitch limit. Both Lofgren and Lewis have very good fastball command and have the ability to create missed swings with it, and both create deception with their delivery.

On Kinston's success: When asked why Kinston is always so good, Farrell mentioned that the environment is conducive for the player to concentrate on what they need to do to improve. Also, of late the Indians have drafted some good players who have been in Kinston, and when they have left to go to Akron they have been able to backfill with good players. Farrell also commented that the way the club is structured helps, most notably how they handle the bullpen. The bullpen system is setup almost like a mini-rotation, and guys get proper rest and work on the side a lot.

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Crowe Decision Close

The Akron Beacon Journal recently noted that a decision on Crowe at 2B could be decided upon very quickly this off-season. According to Farrell, Crowe will go to the Instructional League (which starts soon) and a determination will be made two weeks into the camp. After two weeks, if the Indians feel the transition to 2B is not working, they will move him back to the outfield; however, if he does well he will go to the Arizona Fall League (AFL) and continue to play 2B. He is going to the AFL regardless, but the Indians will decide early on whether it will be as an outfielder or 2B.

The decision to move Crowe to 2B is a key decision for the Indians. Farrell feels that as an outfielder, Crowe will be major league ready and up in the big leagues sometime next season. But, as a 2B, Farrell believes the transition will take an additional year and we won't see Crowe in an Indians uniform until sometime in 2008. With such a glaring need at 2B, the Indians are weighing whether a move to 2B is worth adding an extra year of development time for Crowe. His offense would suit the team well as an outfielder or 2B, but Farrell believes his offense would make him a special player at 2B.

Indians Pickup a Middle-infielder

The Indians picked up SS/2B Mike Rouse off of waivers from the Oakland A's this past week. It was an interesting move in that they used a spot on the 40-man for a guy they said won't play the rest of this year. If they aren't playing him the rest of this season, it would make no sense to pick him up unless they really plan to keep him on the 40-man all off-season as a 2B or infield utility option for 2007. And, Farrell pretty much hammered this home when he mentioned this week that Rouse was acquired for middle-infield depth next season.

Who is Mike Rouse? Rouse is a former top prospect for the Oakland A's who simply flamed out with the organization. Maybe the Indians are hoping a change of scenery will help here (like it did for Brandon Phillips in Cincinnati). Anyway, Rouse was recently ranked the A's #8 prospect in 2004, and is a left-handed hitting SS drafted out of Cal-State Fullerton in the 5th

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round of the 2001 Draft. Rouse is considered to be a good defensive SS with great hands, focus, and a very good ability at reading balls off the bat. He does lack some arm strength, which is why his more permanent position could be 2B.

At the plate, he doesn't offer much power right now, but is projected to develop more power, gets on base, and owns career numbers of .275/.363/.407 (FYI, Brandon Phillips career minor league line:.274/.339/.418).

Looming Roster Decisions

As the Rule 5 Draft and roster deadline gets closer, I will take a much deeper at the Indians 40-man roster situation and the Rule 5 Draft. For now, here is a quick list of some players the Indians could stand to lose in the draft if these players are not placed on the 40-man roster this offseason: LHP Scott Lewis, RHP Adam Miller, RHP Nick Pesco, RHP Sean Smith, RHP JD Martin, LHP Aaron Laffey, LHP Tony Sipp, OF Ben Francisco, OF Ryan Goleski, 1B Ryan Mulhern, SS Asdrubal Cabrera, C Wyatt Toregas, C Max Ramirez, and 2B Eider Torres.

The draft isn't until December, but the Indians will be making final preparations for their 40-man roster in October and November before their final version is due in mid November. The Indians will have some tough decisions to make, as they likely will only have 7-8 roster spots at most available to protect players from the list above. More on the looming roster decisions and the Rule 5 Draft later in the off-season.

Minor League Affiliate Status Update

After the Indians pulled out of Burlington a little over a week ago, some may be curious what the Indians status is with their other five main affiliates: Buffalo (AAA), Akron (AA), Kinston (A+), Lake County (A), and short-season Mahoning Valley (A). The Indians recently announced they

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extended their player-development contracts with Mahoning Valley through 2008 and Lake County through 2010. Earlier in the season, Buffalo's player-development contract was extended through 2008, and Akron and Kinston also are in tow through 2008.

Player-development contracts run in two-year increments, which allow teams to move to a better situation if they are unhappy with a particular affiliation. With most of the affiliates in immediate proximity to the home offices at Jacob's Field, no one except maybe Kinston could move in a few years.

Final Parting Shot

Later this week, the final minor league piece of the season will be provided when I give out my first SwerbsBlurbs.com Minor League Player Awards.

Also, with the conclusion of Akron's playoff run, all of the Indians' minor league affiliates are done for the season. And with that, "Minor Happenings" is done for the season as well. Minor league reports should start again on a weekly basis next April; however, even in the off-season there still are some important developments in the system to report. With that, there will still be 1-2 "Minor Happenings" reports each month starting in late October until next April.

Thanks for reading.