Since a magical debut near-100 win debut season in 2003, Lake County has been in a continuous slide the past three years and bottomed out in 2006 because of a lack in talent and eventually finished with a record of 64-74. This year, Lake County is recharged and filled with several of the Indians top draft picks from the 2006 Draft, and also several of their top prospects from their academies in Venezuela and the Dominican Republic. The Captains are very young and talented, but should be a fun team to watch grow this year. Tony checks in with his final minor league preview.

In case you missed them, the Indians affiliates in Triple-A Buffalo , Double-A Akron , and Single-A (advanced) Kinston were previewed earlier this week. I wrap up my minor league previews today with a look at the last of the four full-season minor league affiliates in the Indians system, the Single-A Lake County Captains of the South Atlantic League.

When Classic Park opened in Eastlake, Ohio in 2003 and the Lake County Captains debuted, they took the area by storm by winning just short of 100 games and eventually lost in the South Atlantic League Championship Series to Rome.

Since that magical debut season, however, Captains fans have experienced two non-payoff seasons in 2004 and 2005 where the Captains finished over .500 (73-66 in 2004, and 72-66 in 2005), and then endured what was really a bad team last year that eventually finished 64-74. And that record probably should have been worse than it was considering the talent in Lake County for most of the year was lacking.

What a difference a year makes.

This year, Lake County is recharged and filled with several of the Indians top draft picks from the 2006 Draft, and also several of their top prospects from their academies in Venezuela and the Dominican Republic. In all, eight of the Indians 2006 draft picks will be in Lake County, and another four from the 2005 draft class as well.

And you can see new Farm Director Ross Atkins' new philosophy already taking hold. Atkins is the Indians former Director of Latin Operations, and you can see how he is pushing his Latin players from the academies in the Dominican Republic and Venezuela through the system more aggressively. An unheard of seven Latin players will make their full-season debut with Lake County this year, many of which have little previous experience stateside with the Indians short-season affiliates.

There is a definite change in the talent and makeup of this roster from 2006 to 2007. Last year's team looked like an afterthought and a team completely dismissed by the Indians player development officials. This year, however, the team appears to have promise. They are very young, inexperienced, and still learning, so it remains to be seen how that translates on the field as far as wins go. But one thing is certain: the Captains have talent, and will be a fun team to watch grow this year.

Minor League Affiliates

Buffalo Bisons (AAA)
Akron Aeros (AA)
Kinston Indians (High A)
Lake County Captains (Low A)
Mahoning Valley Scrappers (Short Season A)
GCL Indians (Rookie)

Lake County Captains Coaching Staff

Manager: Chris Tremie
1st season as Lake County manager, 2nd season in Indians organization

Bench Coach: Jim Rickon
3rd season as Lake County coach, 9th season in Indians organization

Pitching Coach: Ruben Niebla
2nd season as Lake County pitching coach, 7th season in Indians organization

Starting Lineup & Rotation

1. Adam Davis 2B
2. Jared Goedert 3B
3. Matt McBride C
4. Matt Whitney 1B
5. Nick Weglarz LF
6. Carlos Rivero SS
7. Roman Pena RF
8. Lucas Montero CF
9. Felipe Garcia DH

#1 Starter: Carlton Smith
#2 Starter: Steven Wright
#3 Starter: Jeanmar Gomez
#4 Starter: Mike Eisenberg
#5 Starter: Hector Rondon

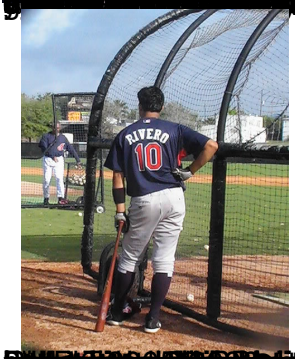
Players to Watch

Matt McBride - Catcher
Age: 21 Height: 6'2" Weight: 215 Bats: Right Throws: Right

The Indians selected McBride with the last of their four second round picks in the 2006 Draft. McBride signed quickly, and was assigned to Mahoning Valley where he showcased the talent that had scouts excited about him going into the draft. McBride finished the year hitting .272/.355/.402 with 4 HRs, 31 RBIs and 5 stolen bases in 52 games. McBride provides a rare combination of defense and offense at the catching position, and he was so impressive that Baseball America tabbed him the third best prospect in the NY-Penn League last year. While he is a big and strong catcher, McBride is also athletic and runs very well for a catcher. His strengths as a player are his catch-and-throw skills, especially his plus arm. But, he also has a very cerebral approach behind the plate, and has shown good leadership qualities. McBride is a very patient hitter with good power potential, and has a very good eye and bat-to-ball ability. McBride's potential as an offensive and defensive catcher led many to believe he was the top catcher available in the 2006 Draft, and to date he has backed that up.

Matt Whitney - First Base
Age: 23 Height: 6'4" Weight: 200 Bats: Right Throws: Right

Indians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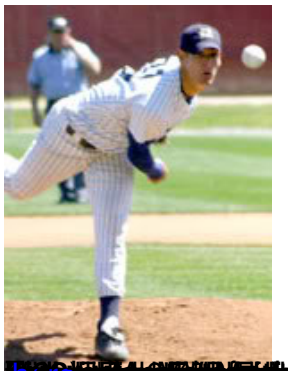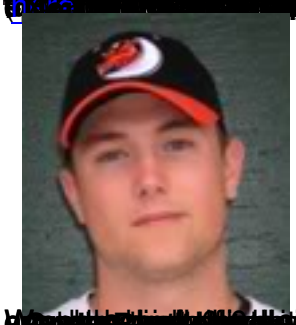
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