"Minor Happenings" covers the important developments and news in the Indians farm system. 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. This week, Tony takes his usual stroll through all levels of the Indians farm system for us ... compling one of the most thorough Indians related pieces on the web. Enjoy!

"Minor Happenings" covers the important developments and news in the Indians farm system. 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.

For those wondering where *Minor Happenings* was yesterday, there is this thing called the NBA Finals that started. With the Cavaliers in it, we ran a lot of articles leading up to the start of the Finals, and with Game 1 on Thursday, *Minor Happenings* was pushed back a day (rightfully so).

With Game 4 and Game 7 (if necessary) scheduled the next two Thursday's (June 14 and June 21), *Minor Happenings* will post on Friday the next few weeks as long as there is a game on Thursday.

TheClevelandFan.com Minor League Player Of The Week

(for games from May 31 through June 7)

Aaron Laffey (Left-handed pitcher - Buffalo)
2-0, 1.38 ERA, 2 starts, 13 IP, 12 H, 2 ER, 1 BB, 11 K

This award really could have gone to any of the quartet of Akron hitters who are all hot right now in Brian Barton, John Van Every, Asdrubal Cabrera, and Jordan Brown. Or, to the streaking Ben Francisco in Buffalo. But, left-hander Aaron Laffey's turnaround in Buffalo with two excellent starts was more than

[illegible] Laffey is now 6-4 with a 3.76 ERA.

Buffalo's pitching staff is in shambles right now, as the quality five-man staff they started the year with has been plagued by the injury bug and promotion to Cleveland. Adam Miller, Brian Slocum, and Rafael Perez all anchored the Buffalo rotation to start the season, but with Miller and Slocum out due to injury and Perez promoted to Cleveland, someone had to step in and step up.

That person was Laffey, as he struggled initially, but has since settled in. Initially, I thought he would only be up in Buffalo for a short cup of coffee, but even without the injuries and promotions to the staff I now think he would have been called up and fit into the rotation anyway. The Indians have a lot of tough roster decisions to make this offseason with several good players who will be up for roster protection from the Rule 5 Draft, and Laffey is one of them. So, the Indians want to get a good, long look at Laffey in Buffalo.

Honorable Mention:

Jordan Brown (1B - Akron): .467 AVG (14-30), 3 2B, 9 RBI, 3 BB, SB
Brian Barton (OF - Akron): .407 AVG (11-27), 1 HR, 5 RBI, SB
Asdrubal Cabrera (SS - Akron): .393 AVG (11-28), 3 2B, 6 RBI, 4 BB, 3 SB
John Van Every (OF - Akron): .448 AVG (13-29), 3 2B, 3B, HR, 7 RBI, SB
Ben Francisco (OF - Buffalo): .429 AVG (12-28), 2B, 2 HR, 5 RBI, 3 BB
Michael Aubrey (1B - Kinston): .478 AVG (11-23), 2 2B, 3 HR, 4 RBI, 4 BB

Previous Winners:

5/24 to 5/31: Josh Rodriguez (SS - Kinston)
5/17 to 5/23: Shawn Nottingham (LHP - Akron)
5/10 to 5/16: Matt Whitney (1B - Lake County)
5/3 to 5/9: Chuck Lofgren (LHP - Akron)

4/26 to 5/2: Adam Miller (RHP - Buffalo)
4/19 to 4/25: Shawn Nottingham (LHP - Akron)
4/12 to 4/18: Jason Stanford (LHP - Buffalo)
4/5 to 4/11: Matt McBride (C - Lake County)

TheClevelandFan.com Player Of The Month

(for the month of May)

Jared Goedert (Third Baseman - Lake County)
.368 AVG (35 for 95), 6 2B, 8 HR, 34 RBI, 14 BB, 15 Ks, 1.136 OPS

Last month, Goedert took home the prize as the Player of the Month for April, hitting .357 with 8 HR, 17 RBI, and a 1.263 OPS. Well, Goedert takes home the hardware again, and in doing so shows just how dominant he has been during his two month stint in Lake County compared to all the other players in the Indians system. I feel like every week I am giving this kid praise, but it is deserved as he has really been a man amongst boys as far as production goes.

There were other players like Ben Francisco (Buffalo), Max Ramirez (Kinston), and Shawn Nottingham (
Akron
) who all received consideration. But, even though all three of those players were clearly the Player of the Month for their teams in May, Goedert still clearly distanced himself with Nintendo-like numbers for the month. His home run, RBI, and OPS numbers were far superior to those of Ben Francisco and Max Ramirez.

With such an impressive start to the season, Goedert was moved to second base about two weeks ago. According to Indians officials, he has had some trouble adjusting to the much shorter throws to first base, and his feet are kind of heavy, but overall he has played okay and adapted well to the new position. He has shown some good agility, and his strong arm will help on plays up the middle and turning double plays.

Recently, in addition to the position change, Goedert was moved up to advanced

Class-A Kinston where he will face much tougher pitching in the pitcher friendly Carolina League. He got off to a rough start, going 0-for-11 in his first three games, but is 7-for-17 since and hitting .250 (7-for-28). Of note, his high walk rate seems to have followed him as even in just 35 plate appearances he already has seven walks.

Honorable Mentions:

Max Ramirez (C - Kinston): .313, 5 HR, 23 RBI, 1.005
Ben Francisco (OF - Buffalo): .366, 4 HR, 19 RBI, .953 OPS
Shawn Nottingham (LHP - Akron): 3-1, 2.48 ERA, 6 starts, 40 IP, .228 BAA
John Van Every (OF - Akron): .329, 2 HR, 12 RBI, .962 OPS
Brad Snyder (OF - Buffalo): .300, 5 HR, 16 RBI, .923 OPS
Jason Denham (OF - Lake County): .325, 1 HR, 15 RBI, 4 SB, .873 OPS

Previous Winners:

April: Jared Goedert (3B - Lake County)

Director's Cuts

Indians Farm Director Ross Atkins and the rest of the Indians scouting and player development staff prepared for and took in the draft on Thursday. All the focus was on the 2007 MLB First-Year Player

Draft, and Atkins offered a little insight into what the new draft picks have in store for them once they are signed.

Atkins commented that when figuring out what affiliate newly signed draft picks will be sent to, he and his staff will consult Scouting Director John Mirabelli and his staff for recommendations. Typically, the NY-Penn League (Mahoning Valley Scrappers) is where college draft picks start, and the Gulf Coast League (GCL Indians) is where high

school and Latin players are assigned.

Players that are considered more polished could start in Single-A Lake County.

Once players are assigned to their teams, Atkins and his staff visit Mah oning
Valley
and the GCL to visit with each player to let them know where they stand fundamentally and what the team wants them to focus on improving or changing.

Also, this gives Atkins and his staff an important opportunity to let them know who the Indians are and what they stand for.

Fantastic Francisco

Francisco had an MVP season in Buffalo last year, but looked like he would be lost in the Rule 5 Draft until the Indians used their last position player slot on the 40-man roster for him last offseason. This may turn out to be one of the best,

unheralded decisions this organization has made in the last few years, as Francisco surely would have been gobbled up in the Rule 5 Draft, and most likely would have stuck with the team that drafted him given his advanced approach and major league readiness.

As Jimmy Walker would say, Francisco has been "dyn-o-mite!" this year. To date, in 50 games he is hitting

.360 with 6 HR, 32 RBI, 10 stolen bases, and has a .943 OPS. He is also in the midst of a noteworthy 19-game hitting streak. Francisco leads the International League in hitting with his .360 average, which is 27 points higher than the second place hitter.

If Francisco were to win a batting title, he would be the first player to do so since
Buffalo
became affiliated with
Cleveland
in 1995.

While Franklin Gutierrez did perform well in Buffalo this year, Francisco has still been the better performer, and arguably has been so the last several years, yet Gutierrez has always gotten the pub and chance to play in Cleveland. At some point, Francisco will get an extended look in
Cleveland
, and if given a legit chance to play, I believe he'll be a much welcomed addition to the outfield.

Stepping On The Soapbox

You know, I can understand why the Indians called up outfielder Franklin Gutierrez over Ben Francisco, which mainly had the reasoning centering around Gutierrez's option clock running out after this year, while Francisco's just started this year. So, the Indians want a last look at Gutierrez to see what they have before they potentially have to

release or trade him this offseason.

That said, a big reason why we still know very little about Gutierrez even with time about to expire is because he just has not been a good player. We've seen him in Cleveland in different spurts the last three years, and each time he leaves me less than impressed. He is what he is, a fourth outfielder with some speed and good defense.

But with Francisco, I see something else. I see a confident player who can help this team now. A player who possesses the same skill set as Gutierrez, but even though he is older than Gutierrez may have more upside. Francisco may be one of those guys who gets a late shot, a la Brian Giles, and goes on to have a solid career in the big leagues. We won't know until we give him a shot though.

Okay, I'm off the soapbox.

Brown Not Sweating Aubrey

Akron first baseman Jordan Brown is putting up another solid season. Brown was the Carolina League MVP last year at

Kinston
, but even so seemed to go into this season under the radar somewhat.

This year at
Akron
he has quickly proved

that last season was legit, and he now is someone to seriously start considering as a top prospect in the Indians system.

On the season Brown is hitting .329 with 3 HR, 30 RBI, 10 stolen bases, and has a .862 OPS. Also of note, he has a 24:20 walk to strikeout ratio in 210 at bats.

Brown is starting to prove the Wally Joyner comparisons coming out of college as legit as he may just have average power for a first baseman, but he consistently puts the bat on the ball and drives the ball into the gaps (15 doubles).

Currently, in the Eastern League, Brown is 3
rd
in the hitting (.329), 9
th
in RBIs (30), 6
th
in doubes (15), and 11
th

in OPS (.862).

With Kinston first baseman Michael Aubrey likely on his way to Akron
soon, Brown knows that he'll likely be on the move

soon as well, but to the outfield and not Triple-A Buffalo. Last year, for he first time in his college and professional career he played the outfield, and it looks like when Aubrey arrives he will rotate between first base, the outfield, and designated hitter.

Aubrey should be on the move very soon, as he is hitting .400 (20-50) with 5 2B, 5 HR and 11 RBI in
Kinston
.

There is also a chance that Aubrey will skip Akron when he is promoted and go right to
Buffalo
.

Aubrey is another player the Indians have to make a decision on quickly as this offseason they will need to decide whether to keep him on the 40-man roster or use his spot for someone else.

So, if he stays healthy he will probably get a long look this year

at some point in
Buffalo
.

Pena Settling In At Lake County

It took awhile, but outfielder Roman Pena finally appears to be settling in at Lake County. Pena's timing could not be any better, as with infielder Jared Goedert being called up to Kinston, someone needs to pick up the slack with Goedert no

longer around to carry the Captains offense. Pena is hitting .278 (57-208) with 5 HR, 38 RBI and a .826 OPS on the season.

In the last 10 games, he is hitting .389 with 1 HR and 6 RBI, and has now reached base in 28 straight games.

Pena was drafted out of high school in the 9th round of the 2005 Draft, and after not playing professionally in 2005 he made his professional debut last year with the GCL Indians. In 205 combined at bats in the GCL and

Lake County, Pena hit .302 with 7 HRs and 26 RBIs.

Pena, 20, is an exciting left-handed hitter who has line-drive power to all fields.

He has average range in the outfield, but has a very strong arm due to his experience as a pitcher in high school where he consistently clocked around 85-88 MPH.

With his power arm and electric bat, he projects as a prototype major league right fielder.

Crowe Struggles Continue

Akron outfielder Trevor Crowe continues to plod through his nightmare of a season. He has shown small signs of pulling

out of the offensive funk he has been in all year, but to date he is still hitting only .189 (38-201). Crowe was sidelined a few games this week with a jammed finger that was injured while diving for a foul on Sunday.

He returned to the lineup on Thursday and went 0-4 at the plate.

With Aubrey possibly moving up to Akron soon, and Jordan Brown getting some playing time in the outfield, is it possible Crowe could be sent down to Kinston? I think so. Cr
owe is fine physically and the problem clearly is mental, so a move down to Kinston may help give him a fresh start.

It's a lot different striding to the plate seeing .189 than say .300 or so with a few early hits in Kinston.

Something in the Water?

Buffalo's Sean Smith, Akron's Shawn Nottingham, and Ki
nston
's David Huff have arguably been the Indians most consistent pitchers to date in the farm system.

All were having outstanding years, and then in a strange coincidence they were all knocked around this week.

For the week, look at these horrid numbers:

[illegible]

staff need someone to step up since the rotations have been ravaged with injuries and promotions.

Rivas For Utility?

Back in Spring Training, Indians utility infielder Mike Rouse absolutely smoked the competition and won the Indians utility man gig. But, since then, Rouse has struggled in Cleveland as he is only hitting .122 with 0 HR and 2 RBI in 41 at bats.

To be fair, Rouse does not get regular playing time, so it is hard to stay sharp. Plus, he is probably the best shortstop option of any of the utility player options in the Indians farm system ready to play now.

But, with Luis Rivas tearing it up at Buffalo, it may be time to consider a switch.

At Triple-A Buffalo, Rivas is hitting .299 with 7 HR, 27 RBI, 8 stolen bases and an .846 OPS.

He also just had a 23-game on-base streak stopped on Thursday.

Rivas is a veteran and may fit more with the Indians as this season progresses and the pennant races heat up.

If the Indians do opt for Rivas, they will likely lose Rouse as he is out of options and he would have to clear waivers in order to be sent to the minors.

But, we are talking about Mike Rouse.

Who cares.

Utility players are a dime a dozen, so if someone else wants to pick him up, so be it.

Two Relievers At The Crossroads

Right-handed relievers Jake Dittler and Bubbie Buzachero both had their issues last year, and for

different reasons. These issues left them at a crossroads with the Indians organization.

Dittler's problems were on the mound, as in Buffalo
last

year he went 5-12 with a 4.70 ERA and his once promising career looked to be in doubt.

While Buzachero had a great year on the mound in the Akron bullpen last year going 8-3 with 4 saves and a 2.79 ERA, his problems were more in the clubhouse. After a late season scuffle between him and second baseman Eider Torres left Torres with a broken jaw, Buzachero was sent home and did not hear a word from the Indians about his status with the organization until they contacted him to get ready to come to spring training.

[illegible] go

, Buzachero is 4-2 with 2 saves and a 3.67 ERA.

He has also made a couple of spot starts recently to save a Buffalo starting staff riddled with injuries, and has pitched well.

Westbrook On The Mend

Indians right-handed starter Jake Westbrook made his first rehab appearance on Friday night, and the results were mixed. While he came away healthy and got his work in, he was also knocked around to the tune of five runs on seven hits in just

1.1 innings pitched (47 pitches). Westbrook is on a rehab assignment for the strained

abdominal muscle he suffered the first week of May. He threw a bullpen session on Tuesday, and will make his next rehab start in Akron today (Friday) where he is scheduled to be ramped up to 60 pitches. The Indians feel he needs a few more starts, and will not activate him until he gets up to a 90-95 pitch count. He probably will not be activated for at least another ten days.

Left-hander Chuck Lofgren was scheduled to start today (Friday), but with Westbrook starting Lofgren was bumped from his start. The Indians want to keep Lofgren on his regular turn, so they moved him up to
Buffalo
where he will make a spot start today.

SAL All-Stars And Awards

Earlier this week, the South Atlantic League (SAL) announced that five Lake County

players were named to the All-Star

game to be played on June 19th 2007 at State Mutual Stadium in Rome , Georgia . The All-Stars: Josh Tomlin (RHP), Hector Rondon (RHP), Matt Whitney (1B), and Matt McBride (C). McBride and Whitney were voted in as starters, and former Lake County third baseman Jared Goedert was also selected, but will be unable to participate since he was promoted to Kinston .

Also, right-hander Jeanmar Gomez was

named the SAL Pitcher of the Week for the week of May 28th through June 3rd. The 19-year old out of Venezuela went 2-0 with an ERA of 0.00 for the week, pitching 13 innings without allowing a run on eight hits, two walks and seven strikeouts. On the year, he is 5-5 with a 5.46 ERA.

2007 MLB Draft Recap

The first few rounds of the 2007 MLB First-Year-Player Draft went down yesterday, and it was a landmark day for baseball as it was the first time the draft was televised. The draft continues today and tomorrow, and next week I will give a brief recap of most of the picks.

Here is a quick listing of the three players the Indians selected yesterday:

Round 1 (#13): Beau Mills 3B/1B Lewis-Clark State (Idaho)
Round 4 (#137): Timothy McFarland LHP AA Stagg School, IL
Round 5 (#167): Jonathan Holt RHP Tampa, FL

Dennis Nosco wrote a great preview for the draft , and will be following up soon with a draft recap.

Denny comes hard, so expect some pretty strong comments why he likes or

dislikes what the Indians did in the draft.

Kinston Magic Number At Seven

The first half of the season is coming to a close in the Single-A leagues, and while Lake County is out of the division race, K
inston
is close to wrapping up the first half title and automatic playoff berth.

First half play in the Carolina League ends on June 17
th

, and with ten games remaining Kinston
(37-22) has a four game lead on

second place
Salem
.

Kinston
just recently rattled off an eight game win streak, and their magic number to clinch is seven.

Affiliate Notebook

Buffalo Notes: Outfielder Shin-Soo Choo had an 11-game hitting streak snapped Thursday, and is now hitting .270 with 1 HR, 20 RBI, 8 stolen bases and a .705 OPS on

the year. ... Buffalo Bisons manager Torey Lovullo has been selected to serve as a coach for the International League team in the Triple-A All-Star Game July 11 in Albuquerque

,

N.M.

. ... Right-hander Cliff Politte is now in extended spring training in Winter Haven

. He is still recovering from rotator cuff surgery on his right shoulder last August, and Friday threw 20 pitches in an extended spring training game. ... First baseman Ryan Mulhern is hitting .319 with 9

HR, 37 RBI and a .946 OPS.

Akron Notes: Infielder Cristo Arnal was up with the Aeros for one game while shortstop Asdrubal Cabrera was away for the birth of his child, and upon Cabrera's return was placed on the inactive list. ... Right-hander J.D. Martin had been in limbo for roughly a week with a right elbow problem, but was finally put on the disabled list with a right elbow strain. The Indians moved right-hander Jim Ed Warden down from Buffalo to take his place on the roster, and moved

left-hander Reid Santos from the bullpen to the starting rotation. ... With left-hander Aaron Laffey being promoted to
Buffalo
and sticking for now, right-hander Joe Ness has been moved into the Akron
rotation. ... Outfielder Jon Van Every has a 13-game hitting streak. ... Outfielder Brian Barton has been hit by a pitch 17 times, and leads the Eastern League in that category.

Kinston Notes: Right-hander

Sung-Wei Tseng was sent to extended spring training this week.

No word as to why, as while he was 0-5 on the year, he had pitched well with a 3.90 ERA in 60 innings pitched.

In his last two starts he did allow nine runs in eleven innings, so maybe there is an arm issue. ... Kinston
reliever Erik Stiller was called up a little over a week ago, and has impressed early.

In five appearances out of the

bullpen he is 2-0 with a 0.00 ERA and has allowed 9 hits, 2 walks and struckout 7 in 9.2 innings pitched. ... Catcher Max Ramirez is hitting .292 with 8 HR, 34 RBI, and a .908 OPS.

Lake County Notes: Right-hander Josh Tomlin is putting together a solid second year in the Indians player development system. A 19th round pick in the 2006 Draft out of Texas Tech, Tomlin is 5-0 with a 2.39 ERA and has only allowed 36 hits and 5 walks while striking out 45 in 43 innings pitched.

Tomlin was called up to Kinston to make a spot start, and may end up staying there after he pitched six innings of one run and three hit ball. ...
Lake
County
has drawn 285 walks as a team, which is 62 more than anyone else in the league. ... First baseman Matt Whitney is hitting .295 with 12 HR, 47 RBI, and an .885 OPS.