This past week, we hit the midpoint in the minor league baseball season. And with that, Tony Lastoria took the time to take a look back at the first half of the season and see what players in the Indians organization have surprised, and who have been a disappointment so far this season. There have been many more surprises than disappointments to date, but one of the disappointments (Trevor Crowe) has been of disasterous proportions. Lastoria chimes in with his latest on the Indians farm system.

This past week, we hit the midpoint in the minor league baseball season. And with that, it is time to take a look back at the first half of the season and see who has surprised and disappointed so far this season.

Now, you won't see the likes of Max Ramirez, Wes Hodges, Adam Miller, Brian Barton, Asdrubal Cabrera, and others on the list of surprises. Due to their lofty prospect status, these players were expected to perform going into the season. The criteria here for a "surprise" is more in regard to players who came out of nowhere to have an outstanding first half, be it an obscure prospect or someone enjoying a rebirth. With the disappointments, the criteria is that the player had to be either a pretty high draft pick recently, or had high prospect rankings placed on them recently.

(all stats are through games played June 22)

## Five Surprises

### 1. Jared Goedert (2B - Kinston)

*.333 AVG, 11 2B, 16 HR, 56 RBI, 42 BB, 38 K, 1.071 OPS*

[redacted]

**2. John Van Every (OF - Buffalo)**

*.352 AVG, 14 2B, 6 3B, 8 HR, 38 RBI, 27 BB, 59 K, 5 SB, 1.063 OPS*

Van Every has always been a solid player in the Indians farm system as he entered this season with a career .248 batting average and .820 OPS, but this year he has taken his game to another level. He has always had good pop in his bat as he hit 21 and 27 home runs for Akron in 2004 and 2005 respectively, and he was considered one of the top defensive outfielders in the Indians system. But, the one thing that always held him back was his approach at the plate in making consistent contact and showing better plate discipline, which he is now doing. Van Every hit .344 with 4 HR, 34 RBI, and a .999 OPS in 44 games at Akron this year, was promoted to Buffalo two weeks ago, and has not skipped a beat and is hitting .387 with 4 HR, 4 RBI and a 1.364 OPS in 12 games at Buffalo so far. He is an excellent defensive outfielder, hits left-handed, and could soon be an

option for the Indians in the outfield with lefties David Dellucci and Shin-Soo Choo sidelined at least until August with injuries.

## 3. Matt Whitney (1B - Lake County)

*.305 AVG, 18 2B, 16 HR, 59 RBI, 28 BB, 56 K, .926 OPS*

At one time, going into the 2003 season, Matt Whitney was one of the Indians biggest prospects. A powerful, productive bat that had some scouts thinking "Manny Ramirez" potential after his impressive debut as an 18-year old in the Indians system at Burlington in 2002 when he hit .286 with 10 HR and 33 RBI in 45 games. Unfortunately, a freak leg injury in spring training 2003 seriously sidetracked his career to where he missed the entire 2003 season, and spent all of the last three years in 2004 through 2006 working his way back. After hitting .256, .242, and .205 the last three years and totaling only 21 home runs in 225 games, the Indians moved Whitney from third base to first base this year, and started him back a level in Lake County. Those two decisions have paid huge dividends as Whitney is back and producing at a level scouts always felt he could, but seemed unattainable after his serious leg injury. Whitney should be on the move to advanced Single-A Kinston soon, perhaps as soon as first baseman Beau Mills is called up from short-season Single-A Mahoning Valley.

## 4. Frank Herrmann (RHP - Kinston)

*5-1, 13 starts, 3.13 ERA, 74.2 IP, 76 H, 10 BB, 43 K, .265 BAA*

The Indians found a hidden gem with undrafted free agent outfielder Brian Barton in 2004, and it appears that lightning can strike twice as Frank Herrmann is another player the Indians signed as an undrafted free agent, this time in 2005. In his first professional season in 2006, Herrmann went 4-6 with a 3.90 ERA in 26 starts for Single-A Lake County, and has certainly used last year's success as a stepping stone into this season. Herrman is an intelligent pitcher - he was an economics major at Harvard - and takes a good gameplan to the mound on how to attack hitters. He features a low-90s fastball with a hard curveball and changeup that has good movement, and the key to his success is his bulldog mentality where he goes right after hitters by pitching to contact and throwing strikes. He was named to the Carolina League All Star team this year, and could get some innings at Akron at some point this year.

## 5. Chris Gimenez (UT - Kinston)

*.281 AVG, 7 2B, 1 3B, 15 HR, 39 RBI, 37 BB, 34 K, 1.004 OPS*

Gimenez overcame a serious staph infection to his right leg which actually ended up putting him in the hospital and he was literally minutes away from having the leg amputated, his baseball career ended, and his life severely altered. The staph infection in 2005 and a thumb injury in 2006 sidetracked him to where he put up two disappointing seasons offensively in 2005 and 2006 at Lake County hitting a combined .244 with 24 home runs and 106 RBIs in 203 games. Two years later, Gimenez is now 100% healthy and starting to make some noise at advanced Single-A Kinston. He has settled in nicely into a utility role, playing catcher, outfield, third base and first base. He is Mr. Versatile, and the Indians version of Casey Blake in the minors. A player who is not a star, but can play many positions, is productive, and is a good guy.

**Honorable Mention:** Ryan Mulhern (1B - Buffalo), Reid Santos (LHP - Akron), Jensen Lewis (RHP - Buffalo), Aaron Laffey (LHP - Buffalo)

# Five Disappointments

## 1. Trevor Crowe (OF - Akron)

*.195 AVG, 9 2B, 1 3B, 1 HR, 24 RBI, 32 BB, 44 K, 13 SB, .544 OPS*

It goes without saying the biggest story in the Indians farm system this year is Trevor Crowe's disaster of a season. In just about every publication Crowe was listed as the Indians #2 or #3 prospect, and I even listed him as the #2 prospect in the system this past offseason. After a very good 2006 campaign where Crowe hit .286 with 5 HR, 44 RBI, 45 stolen bases, and a .798 OPS, he has fallen flat on his face this year and it is tough to figure out why. His strikeout rate is actually better this year where he is striking out once in every 5.6 at bats, whereas last year he struckout once every 5.3 at bats. His walk-rate is down to once every 7.7 at bats this year compared

to once every 5.6 at bats last year, and when he gets on base, he still steals bases at a considerable rate. So, he seems healthy and overall still shows good plate discipline. The problem may be that we glossed over his problems last year at Akron when he hit .234 with 1 HR, 13 RBI, and had a .643 OPS in 39 games. Many, including your truly, tossed the poor performance aside because he was experimenting with a position change at second base and also was coming back from a bad ankle sprain. But, Crowe is healthy this year and back in the outfield yet his numbers at Akron this year practically mirror his numbers at Akron last year. It may be time to take a step back with Crowe, re-evaluate, and send him to Kinston to get his bat going again.

## 2. Ryan Goleski (OF- Akron)

*.261 AVG, 9 2B, 3 3B, 2 HR, 30 RBI, 34 BB, 52 K, 6 SB, .706 OPS*

Last year, Goleski was my runner-up for Minor League Offensive Player of the Year to Kevin Kouzmanoff. He hit .306 with 27 HR, 106 RBI and a .948 OPS in 125 combined games at Kinston and Akron. He was left unprotected in the Rule 5 Draft this past offseason, and was selected by the Oakland A's, but eventually was returned to the Indians when he did not make their opening day roster. Since his return to the Indians, Goleski just looks lost and disinterested. He was pretty vocal about his displeasure of having to come back to the Indians organization when Oakland returned him at the end of spring training, and while he has downplayed it since, it obviously has affected his play this year. He also injured his wrist in the offseason, and one has to wonder if he is still injured since his power has simply evaporated. In fairness to Goleski, he has picked up his play of late as he is

hitting .302 with a .942 OPS in June, but the home run stroke is still missing.

## 3. Juan Lara (LHP - Buffalo)

1-2, 1 save, 29 games, 5.74 ERA, 31.1 IP, 32 H, 21 BB, 28 K, .260 BAA

Lara had a breakthrough season last year at Akron and Buffalo, going 5-3 with 8 saves and a 2.77 ERA in 53 combined relief appearances at Akron and Buffalo. Also, Lara was impressive in his short stint in Cleveland last year, going 0-0 with a 1.80 ERA in 9 appearances. But, this year Lara has been very wild and inconsistent, which goes all the way back to spring training. While he put up a great 0.73 ERA in spring training, that number was very deceptive in that he gave up 16 hits and 4 walks in just 12.1 innings of work (1.65 WHIP). This year at Buffalo, he is basically walking two batters every three innings, and has a WHIP of 1.70. Also, lefties are

hitting .308 off of him at Buffalo. With the Indians need for a second left-hander in the bullpen to emerge, Lara picked a bad time to perform poorly. Thankfully, left-hander Rafael Perez has been up to the challenge and stepped in to fill the second left-hander void in the bullpen.

## 4. Brad Snyder (OF - Buffalo)

*.239 AVG, 11 2B, 1 3B, 7 HR, 24 RBI, 21 BB, 63 K, 7 SB, .742 OPS*

I have been one of the biggest Snyder fans the past few years, as I love his all around game with power, defense, speed, athleticism, and hustle. But, Snyder's once promising professional career is quickly starting to go south. While it is still a little early to completely cast him aside, it appears that his development ceiling may have been reached, or close to it. Last year at Akron, Snyder hit .270 with 18 HR, 72 RBI, 20 stolen bases and a .796 OPS,

but he struckout at an alarming rate setting a team record with 158 strikeouts. Going into this season, I expected a bounce back season from Snyder, especially with improvement in the strikeout department, but that has not happened as his strikeout issues have carried over into this year. His strikeout rate last year was once every 3.3 at bats, but he has actually gotten worse where this year he his strikeout rate has increased to once every 2.9 at bats. On top of that, his power and batting average have slipped considerably. With so many roster decisions looming this offseason, Snyder may end up being a 40-man roster casualty this offseason and lost on waivers.

## 5. J.D. Martin (RHP - Akron)

*2-3, 9 starts, 4.25 ERA, 42.1 IP, 42 H, 16 BB, 23 K, .259 BAA*

Martin or any of the other players listed below in the

"dishonorable mention" section could fill the #5 spot on this list, but Martin is here because of his prospect ranking and also his very ordinary numbers this year. Martin was sensational at Akron in 2005 going 3-1 with a 2.38 ERA in 10 starts before he was sidelined with an elbow injury and underwent Tommy John surgery. He came back late in the year last season, and in 14 combined appearances at Mahoning Valley, Lake County and Kinston, Martin went 1-2 with a 2.03 ERA and in 44.1 IP allowed only 30 hits and 5 walks while striking out 40. It looked like the J.D. Martin of old was back, and that this year he was primed for a breakout year. So far, this doesn't seem to be the case. Maybe I expected too much from him performance-wise, but it cannot be argued that he still has health issues. Martin has been on the Akron disabled list since June 1st with a right elbow strain and is not expected to be back at least until the start of July.

**Dishonorable Mention:** Jose Constanza (OF - Kinston), Joshua Rodriguez (SS - Kinston), Wyatt Toregas (C - Akron), Eddie Mujica (RHP - Buffalo), Tony Sipp (LHP - Buffalo)