Tony has now made visits to five of the Indians six minor league affiliates, and the material he has produced as a result has been nothing short of fantastic. And this week's "Minor Happenings" column is no exception. Tony had another chance to speak with Farm Director Ross Atkins, spoke with Ben Francisco, and gives us updates on Adam Miller and Cliff Lee in this week's piece ...

"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, from private sources connected to the Indians organization, as well as from club officials from the team itself.

Just a quick update, I recently completed my fifth stop on my minor league road trip last weekend when I visited Triple-A Buffalo. I will have a recap of the visit this coming Tuesday, as well as a couple of articles on some of the players I was able to talk to at length like Aaron Laffey, Ryan Mulhern, and Brian Barton. The Laffey piece will post tomorrow (Friday), and Barton and Mulhern should both post sometime over the weekend.

Also, this past Tuesday I posted my recap of my visit to Winter Haven to see the rookie-level GCL Indians in action
.

And, I still have player features on Robbie Alcombrack and Jason Smit which I plan on posting, but delayed them in order to get the recent Buffalo player interviews up much quicker since they are more time sensitive pieces.

I head to Kinston next weekend to finish off the tour, and in addition to recapping the visit with pictures and video, I plan to interview as many players as I can. Any suggestions on who you would like me to talk or what questions you would like me to ask the players, please e-mail me at tlastoria@theclevelandfan.com .

TheClevelandFan.com Minor League Player Of The Week

(*for games from August 9 through August 15)*

Nick Weglarz (Outfielder - Lake County)
.440 AVG (11-25), 7 R, 6 2B, 3 HR, 11 RBI, 5 BB

Lake County outfielder Nick Weglarz had a great week this past week hitting well over .400 and piling up nine extra base hits in only 25 at bats. Weglarz is one of the biggest stories of the year in the Indians minor league system, as his power

combined with his advanced approach at the plate at just 19 years of age in a full-season Single-A league have Indians officials excited about him . Weglarz is one of the best power prospects to come out of Canada in awhile, and his size and raw power have often had him compared to fellow countryman Justin Morneau.

He has some flaws in his swing that need to be tinkered along the way, but his long arms and good bat speed generate tremendous power.

He is a below average runner and lacks much athleticism, and played first base up until he was drafted by the Indians. After they drafted him, the Indians immediately moved him to the outfield where he still has a lot of work to do out there, which going forward will be a primary focus of the organization in getting him up to par defensively. Also, her e are two videos of Weglarz at the plate:
Video 1
(1 min, 25 sec) and
Video 2
(1 min, 9 sec).

Honorable Mentions:

Matt Whitney (1B - Kinston): .400 AVG (14-35), 11 R, 4 2B, 4 HR, 11 RBI, 3 BB
Ben Francisco (OF - Buffalo): .387 AVG (12-31), 7 R, 2 2B, 1 3B, 1 HR, 4 RBI, 4 BB, 2 SB
Jim Deters (RHP - Kinston): 2-0, 0.90 ERA, 10 IP, 6 H, 1 R, 5 BB, 6 K
Bobby Brownlie (RHP - Akron): 0-1, 2.13 ERA, 12.2 IP, 10 H, 3 R, 5 BB, 11 K
Aaron Laffey (LHP - Buffalo): 1-0, 2.25 ERA, 8 IP, 4 H, 2 ER, 1 BB, 8 K

Previous Winners:

8/2 to 8/8: Josh Rodriguez (SS - Kinston)

7/20 to 8/1: Jeremy Sowers (LHP - Buffalo)
7/12 to 7/19: Todd Martin (1B - Mahoning Valley)
7/5 to 7/11: Todd Martin (1B - Mahoning Valley)
6/28 to 7/4: Rodney Choy Foo (IF - Akron)
6/21 to 6/27: Reid Santos (LHP - Akron)
6/15 to 6/20: John Van Every (Outfielder - Buffalo)
6/8 to 6/14: Chris Gimenez (Utility - Kinston)
6/1 to 6/7: Aaron Laffey (LHP - Buffalo)
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)

Director's Cuts

Indians Farm Director Ross Atkins is in Buffalo this week, and commented on some of the players in the system:

On Adam Miller: He looked great in his simulation game on Tuesday throwing two innings facing live hitters. His velocity was up to 95 MPH. His pitches were crisp, and his arm was clean and aggressive.

It was very encouraging, and he will

throw another simulation game today (Thursday) and hopefully be activated soon.

On Aaron Laffey: You always wonder how guys will handle the transition coming back from the major leagues because there is a lot of emotion factored in and he handled it exceptionally well.

He was better than his line as he was dominant on Tuesday night.

He pitched with three pitches, and he fields his position arguably as well as any pitcher in baseball.

He really was impressive, and would have performed well had he been at the major league level.

His stuff was crisp, and the transition up and down has not phased him which says a lot about his makeup.

On September callups: Mark Shapiro, Chris Antonetti, and Eric Wedge will get together and make the decisions based on one criteria only, which is who helps this team in September to win games. There will be no decisions based on player development or exposure, it will be all about who is best in helping compliment the team now.

Almost Miller Time

Buffalo right-hander Adam Miller was shut down in late-July for two weeks with an elbow strain.

Recently, Miller has resumed throwing off a mound and reportedly looks to be healthy and ready to be activated soon and return to game action.

Miller first threw a 40-pitch bullpen session last Thursday in Akron with Indians training staff present, and Indians trainer Lonnie Soloff commented that he "tolerated it well". Mill er went down to Buffalo and threw another bullpen session on Saturday, throwing 35 pitches and

again reports were that he was not sharp but looked okay.

Then, on Tuesday he threw a simulated game to live batters, and the velocity was there (95 MPH) and he was using all his pitches effectively. As noted above by Atkins, he looks set to return, and could rejoin the Buffalo pitching staff very soon.

It is not known for certain if he will pitch out of the bullpen or return to the starting rotation.

Seeing how he has been shutdown for awhile, and he may be on a tight pitch count, it certainly seems possible that he finishes the year in the bullpen.

Francisco Treated To The Big Show

During my weekend visit to Buffalo last weekend, I had a chance to talk to several players. One player who I had a chance to talk to, albeit rather briefly, was outfielder Ben Francisco.

Francisco is having another strong season with Buffalo, as he is hitting .327 with 8 HR, 40 RBI,

20 stolen bases and an .871 OPS on the season. He is also in the midst of a 14-game hitting streak, where during the streak that started on August 2nd he is hitting .390 (23-59), and his .327 average ranks first in the International League.

Francisco also stole his 20th base on Tuesday night giving him back to back 20 stolen base seasons, which is the first time it had been done since Dave Roberts did it back in 1999 and 2000.

Francisco made his major league debut earlier in the year, and in his five week stint in Cleveland which covered most of July, Francisco played well and was certainly on cloud nine. "It was awesome, and a dream come true," said Francisco about the experience in Cleveland.

""It was something special, and I often think about it."

Francisco has little to prove in Buffalo, but understands why he is back again. He also acknowledges that there are still some things he can work on to be better prepared to face major league pitching.

" I need to get more at bats, and try to get better," said Francisco.

"Everyday you can learn something out there, and I'd also like to improve my defense and base-running."

With the Indians ready for the stretch run in September, Francisco will certainly be a September callup when rosters expand on September 1st. Francisco knows full well how he can help the team. "My versatility," noted Francisco. "I think I can do a little bit of everything as there is not one thing you can say I can't really do.

Just being able to play defense in all three [outfield] spots, and being able to have good at bats, and be abe to run."

Whitney Gets To 100

Congratulations to Kinston first baseman Matt Whitney as he passed the 100 RBI mark this week. It has been a magical

The Sensational Laffey

Left-hander Aaron Laffey made a good first impression at the major league level, making two starts that showed how much promise this kid has and why the organization is raving about him.

Cleveland fans have not seen his best stuff as he was a little erratic, yet he kept his composure and kept his team in the game and ultimately won a start.

Laffey returned to Buffalo this week, and on Tuesday night made his first start since returning and was sensational once again going eight innings and allowing only two runs on four hits and one walk while striking out eight in getting the win. After giving up an RBI double in the first inning he settled in and retired 19 of the next 20 batters he faced, and in all recorded 14 groundball outs. Before being called up to Cleveland, he had a string of seven straight wins followed by four straight no-decisions until Tuesday night. With the win, Laffey now has eight consecutive wins which ties him with Tim Drew (2002) for consecutive wins by a starting pitcher in Buffalo history.

The overall franchise record is nine, set by relief pitchers Jimmy Williams (1996) and Jack Cressend (2004).

J-Rod Stays Hot

Kinston shortstop Josh Rodriguez was TheClevelandFan.com Player of the Week last week after he hit five home runs and

Hodges Remains In Kinston

Kinston third baseman Wes Hodges has had a nice professional debut season, as to date he is hitting .294 with 12 HR, 61 RBI and has an .845 OPS. But, even with the solid numbers and a vacant spot at third base seemingly waiting for him all

year at Akron, Hodges likely will finish the year in Kinston. There was talk of moving him up to Akron around the Carolina League All-Star break in late-June, but the Indians decided against it as they do not want to rush Hodges and they still feel there are some things he can work on in Kinston with hitting coach John Nunnally.

Hodges was stuck in a funk in May, but give Nunnally a lot of credit in getting him out of it by changing his stance and pulling his hands back to increase his reaction time and improve his timing. Nunnally also got Hodges to think down and through the ball to help create more line drives. Hodges work ethic is second to none, and he is adapting to the everyday grind of professional baseball and learning to be more consistent. It is possible he could get a cup of coffee in Akron, but with the season winding down and the playoffs a little less than three weeks away, Hodges will likely stay put in Kinston.

Cliff Notes

On Saturday, Buffalo left-hander Cliff Lee pitched well throwing 3.1 innings and allowing one run on two hits and two walks while striking out four. He only threw 3.1 innings because the Indians mandated Lee be held to a 55-pitch count because

Prior to last night, Lee had not allowed more than two runs in any of his four starts with Buffalo this year (one rehab). In his three starts since being optioned to Buffalo on July 31, Lee had posted a 2.25ERA and twice as many strikeouts (20) than hits allowed (9).

On Wednesday night, however, Lee struggled as he pitched five innings and allowed four runs on four hits and five walks while striking out seven.

Santos Moved To The Pen

Akron left-hander Reid Santos is yet another pitcher in the farm system to be removed from the starting rotation due to a high amount of innings pitched. Santos joins Kinston starters Ryan Edell and Kevin Dixon as pitchers moved from the starting rotation and to the bullpen in the last few weeks because they had piled up a large amount of innings. Santos had been sort of a swing man the past few years moving in and out of the starting rotation, but when he was inserted into the starting rotation at Akron earlier this season he has performed exceptionally well since. As a starter, Santos was 4-2 with a 3.38 ERA in 10 starts, and overall on the year is 8-2 with a 2.58 ERA.

Santos started the year as a setup man in the Aeros bullpen, then moved to the closer's role before finally settling into the starting rotation. Santos' flexibility and great attitude have put him on the Indians radar where he could eventually break in sometime in the next year or two as a left-hander coming out of the bullpen.

Hold The Phone

In an odd sequence of events, Buffalo outfielder Brian Barton was sent down to Akron on

Tuesday, only to be re-called to Buffalo just 24 hours later. Barton never played in Tuesday nights game for Akron, nor even made it to Akron, and was

back in the Buffalo lineup on Wednesday night. The move of Barton down to Akron seemed odd at the time, although it was expected he would help bolster an Akron outfield short on outfielders as second baseman Argenis Reyes had been playing in the outfield with the team.

No word on the reasoning behind this roster move, but Joe Inglett had started in center field on Tuesday night but left the game hurt. It is possible the Indians wanted to get an extensive look at Inglett in the outfield, so sent Barton to Akron to get regular playing time.

In nine games with Buffalo, Barton is hitting .313 with 1 HR, 3 RBI, 1 stolen base and an .856 OPS, and on the season he is hitting .314 with 10 HR, 62 RBI, 21 stolen bases and has an .856 OPS in 115 combined games at Akron and Buffalo.

Desperate For Pitching

With left-handers Aaron Laffey and Jason Stanford joining the Buffalo rotation this week, it was a big shot in the arm to the Indians organization. Right now, because of a rash of injuries and starters being removed from the rotation

throughout the system because of high innings pitched thresholds being reached, the Indians were in dire need of starting pitching at the three highest levels in the system at Buffalo, Akron and Kinston.

With Laffey and Stanford on board in Buffalo, left-hander Eric DuBose was moved down to Akron to fill a much needed starting pitching void left by the ailing Jake Dittler and Joe Ness, along with Reid Santos being moved from the starting rotation to the bullpen because of a high innings pitched count. Dittler had his right shoulder examined by team doctor Mark Schickendantz, and was put on the disabled list with shoulder inflammation.

Ness is on the disabled list with a calf strain, but should return soon.

Right-hander Bobby Brownlie was signed off the scrap heap a few weeks ago and plugged into the rotation.

Former Captains Honored

Captains alumni Ben Francisco and Aaron Laffey will have plaques added to the Walk of Fame located at Classic Park during a pre-game ceremony on opening day next year. The Walk of Fame honors former Captains players and coaches who have made the major leagues, and is located on the walkway in right field at Classic Park.

Francisco and Laffey are the sixth and seventh players to receive plaques, as five players and a former manager currently are already part of the Walk of Fame:

Luis Rivero (manager), Eddie Mujica (RHP), Fausto Carmona (RHP), Rafael Perez (LHP), Juan Lara (LHP), and Kevin Kouzmanoff (3B).

Affiliate Notebook

Buffalo Notes (64-59, 3rd place, 6.5 GB): Right-handed reliever Bubbie Buzachero has 20 inherited runners this season, of which only one has scored. ... Left-handers Aaron Laffey and Jason Stanford were activated by Buffalo. Stanford had been designated for assignment by the Indians, but cleared waivers and accepted an assignment to Buffalo. ... Outfielder Shin-Soo Choo was activated off the disabled list this week after being sidelined for over two months with left elbow inflammation.

To make room for Choo, outfielder Jonathan Van Every was placed on the disabled list with left knee inflammation. ... Utility infielder Mike Rouse cleared waivers, and accepted an assignment to Buffalo where he was activated on Saturday.

Rouse had been designated for assignment when Asdrubal Cabrera was called up to Cleveland. ... Infielder Keith Ginter returned to the lineup Sunday after serving a 10-day suspension from an August 1st incident where he threw a batting tee in the direction of the homeplate umpire after he was ejected. ... Russell Branyan played one game for Buffalo before being shipped out to the Philadelphia Phillies for cash considerations. ... Joe Inglett left Tuesday night's game after getting hit by a pitch in the knee in the fourth inning and is day to day.

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GCL Indians Notes (25-25, 3rd place, 10 GB): In case you missed it, I wrote about right-hander Kyle Harper last weekend and his road to recovery from Tommy John surgery. ... Also, in the pipeline soon are articles on catcher Robbie Alcombrack and infielder Jason Smit, whom I had a chance to speak to in Winter Haven a few weeks back. ... First baseman Chris Nash is hitting .313 with 3 HR, 21 RBI and an .847 OPS.

The 6'4" and 230 pound 20-year old first baseman has 15 doubles, which shows power potential that could emerge as he matures and gets accustomed to wood bats. ... Catcher Robbie Alcombrack is hitting .262 with 7 HR, 22 RBI and a .907 OPS. ... Left-hander John Gaub has been activated, and in two appearances has totaled two innings pitched, one hit, two walks and two strikeouts.