With minor leage play winding down, this is the final full installment of "Minor Happenings" this season from Tony ... who has done an amazing job with the column this season. Tony will check in next week with a shorter version, updating how Akron and Kinston did in the playoffs, and then also give out his "Tony Awards" the Thursday after that. This week's column is superb as usual, as Tony begins to wrap things up on what was a great season for the entire Indians organization.

"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.

This is the final true installment of Minor Happenings this season, as all the affiliates except three have wrapped up play for the season. Next week will be a much shorter edition covering mostly how Akron and Kinston did in the playoffs, as well as any news on potential fall/winter league placement for players, the Player of the Month for August, and a season wrapup for Mahoning Valley. Then, on the following Thursday (9/20), I'll wrap things up with my Second Annual Tony Awards (check out my 2006 Awards to see what I am talking about).

Also, I have several Kinston player articles in the pipeline which should post now until the end of the month. So, even though the season may finish, I have some articles coming in the next few weeks on players like John Drennen, Josh Rodriguez, Chris Giminez, Wes Hodges, Jared Goedert, and Frank Herrmann. I spoke to all of these players at length during my recent trip to Kinston. I will also have a Kinston recap hopefully next week as long as I can get all the rest of the video uploaded (I have roughly 25-30 video clips, of which about ten need to be uploaded still).

If you missed it, check out the article on Matt Whitney this past Saturday.

Last, the end of the minor league season is upon us, but not here at TheClevelandFan.com. I'll have my Top Prospect List sometime in late November, early December which at the moment I plan to expand to 50 or so players.

Checkout the
2006 Top Prospect List
for a taste of what is in store.

Also, this "offseason" look for some potential exciting improvements to the site with the way the minor league information is collected and presented.

More on all of this later.

TheClevelandFan.com Minor League Player Of The Week

(for games from August 31 to September 5)

Stephen Head (Outfield - Akron)
.476 AVG (10-21), 5 R, 4 2B, 2 HR, 9 RBI, 4 BB

Akron right-fielder Stephen Head finished his 2007 season with a bang. Head was called up from Kinston in early August, and in his first 16 games he struggled, hitting just .226 with 1 HR and 9 RBI. In his last ten games, however, Head hit .361 with 2 HR and 9 RBI at Akron. Head finished the year hitting .256 with 16 HR, 79 RBI and a .768 OPS in 128 combined games in Kinston in Akron, and the solid season is a nice rebound from his 2006 campaign in Kinston where he hit .235 with 14 HR, 73 RBI and a .696 OPS.

Head was recently moved to the outfield due to a logjam of prospects at first base in the upper levels of the system that prevented him from being moved up. With Ryan Mulhern in Buffalo, and Jordan Brown and Michael Aubrey in Akron, there was no room for Head at first base.

He has done a good job adapting to the new position in-season, and if the Indians liked what they saw from him in the outfield at Akron the past month he likely will be sent to Instructional League and possibly a winter league to continue to develop as an outfielder.

Next year, Jordan Brown will be in Buffalo and the status of Michael Aubrey and Ryan Mulhern is up in the air for next year (roster issues).

In any case, Head should start the 2008 season in Akron, but whether he continues to stick in the outfield or gets to play first base again probably depends on what happens to Mulhern and Aubrey this offseason.

Honorable Mentions:

Chris Giminez (Utility - Kinston): .467 AVG (7-15), 8 R, 4 2B, 1 HR, 6 RBI, 5 BB
Jordan Brown (1B - Akron): .409 AVG (9-22), 5 R, 3 2B, 1 HR, 3 RBI, 3 BB
Shin-Soo Choo (OF - Buffalo): .353 AVG (6-17), 5 R, 3 2B, 2 HR, 4 RBI, 2 BB, 1 SB
Adam White (OF - Mahoning Valley): .424 AVG (14-33), 5 R, 1 2B, 1 3B, 1 HR, 5 RBI, 1 BB
Josh Tomlin (RHP - Kinston): 1-0, 0.00 ERA, 7.2 IP, 4 H, 0 ER, 1 BB, 8 K
Chuck Lofgren (LHP - Akron): 1-0, 0.00 ERA, 7 IP, 4 H, 0 ER, 2 BB, 4 K
Jeanmar Gomez (RHP - Lake County): 0-0, 0.00 ERA, 6 IP, 4 H, 0 ER, 3 BB, 5 K

Previous Winners:

8/23 to 8/30: Brandon Pinckney (SS - Akron)
8/16 to 8/22: Ryan Goleski (OF - Akron)
8/9 to 8/15: Nick Weglarz (OF - Lake County)
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 Director of Player Personnel Ross Atkins chimed in this week on Akron first baseman Jordan Brown's MVP award, and also Kinston manager Mike Sarbaugh:

Akron Takes Game One

Akron won Game One of their Eastern League Southern Division Series last night 12-9. The victory wrestles away homefield advantage from Erie, and now puts Akron in the driver's seat in the best-of-five series.

Outfielder Stephen Head lead the way going 2-for-6 with a home run and four RBI.

Ryan Goleski chipped in with a key two-run home run, and league MVP Jordan Brown went 3-for-6 on the night with an RBI.

Akron is in the Eastern League playoffs as a wildcard team, while the Erie SeaWolves are the Southern Division champion. The Game Two starter tonight will be right-hander Jake Dittler and he will go up against Erie's Burke Badenhop. Dittler went 6-1 for Akron in 20 games (nine starts), including 1-0 against Erie in four games (one start).

Badenhop made only three starts with Erie since being called up from Single A, but has made them count going 2-0 with a 1.45 ERA.

Nothing is confirmed yet, but it is expected that Jeremy Sowers will pitch Game Three.

Here is the schedule for the remaining games of the series:

Eastern League Southern Division Series

Game Two: Thursday, September 6 at 7:05 p.m. in Erie
Game Three: Friday, September 7 at 7:05 p.m. in Akron
Game Four: Saturday, September 8 at 7:05 p.m. in Akron (if necessary)

Game Five: Sunday, September 9 at 7:05 p.m. in Erie (if necessary)

Kinston Faces Elimination

Kinston lost Game One of the Carolina League Southern Division Series last night, getting stomped 10-3. With the series only being a best-of-three, Kinston's backs are now against the proverbial wall as they must win tonight and tomorrow at home to win the series and keep their championship dreams alive. Kinston won the first and second half Southern Division titles, and by virtue of their feat all three games in the series are at home.

Right-hander Frank Herrmann (11-5, 4.01 ERA) gets the start for Kinston tonight.

The winner of the best-of-three series will face either Frederick or Wilmington from the Northern Division in the best-of-five Mills Cup Championship Series. The matchup with Salem in the first round is a rematch of last year's playoffs when Kinston swept Salem in two games en route to a Carolina League Championship. Kinston was 12-8 against Salem this season, including a 7-3 record at Grainger Stadium.

In the 21 seasons as a Cleveland affiliate, Kinston is appearing in the playoffs for the 16th year and their 11th appearance in the last 13 years.

In the previous 15 playoff appearances, Kinston has advanced to the Mills Cup Championship Series 11 times, winning it all five times.

Here is the remaining playoff schedule:

Southern Division Series

Game Two: Thursday, September 6th at 7:00 p.m. in Kinston.
Game Three: Friday, September 7th at 7:00 p.m. in Kinston (if necessary)

Mills Cup Championship Series

Game One: Saturday, September 8th, Southern Division Champion at Northern Division Champion.
Game Two: Sunday, September 9th, Southern Division Champion at Northern Division

Champion.
Game Three: Monday, September 10th, Northern Division Champion at Southern Division Champion.
Game Four: Tuesday, September 11th, Northern Division Champion at Southern Division Champion (if necessary).
Game Five: Wednesday, September 12th, Northern Division Champion at Southern Division Champion (if necessary).

Brown Wins Back-To-Back MVPs

Akron first baseman Jordan Brown was named the Eastern League's Most Valuable Player late last week. Brown finished the season hitting .333 with 11 HR, 76 RBI, and a .906 OPS. He also piled up 36 doubles, and showed his outstanding plate discipline with 63 walks to his 56 strikeouts.

His .333 batting average won him a league batting title, and he also finished

first in the league in hits (161), sixth in runs (85), fourth in doubles (36), ninth in RBI (76), third in on-base percentage (.421), eleventh in slugging percentage (.484), and fifth in OPS (.906).

This is Brown's second straight MVP-season, as he won the Carolina League MVP Award in 2006 while he played at advanced Single-A Kinston. Brown's back-to-back MVP seasons are only rivaled by Victor Martinez, as he won the Carolina League MVP in 2001 and the Eastern League MVP in 2002 in successive years just like Brown.

Brown was also named the Eastern League's Rookie of the Year, and is now the fifth player since 1996 to win both the Rookie of the Year award and the MVP in the same season. The other four players were Ryan Howard (2004), Marlon Byrd (2001), Calvin Pickering (1998) and Vladimir Geurrero (1996).

Brown was also named the Eastern League Player of the Week for the week ending April 29th, was a midseason and postseason Eastern League All-Star, and was tabbed by Baseball America as the "Best Batting Prospect" and as having the "Best Strike Zone Judgment" in the Eastern League.

Brown has really established himself as a top hitting prospect this season. His sweet swing and approach at the plate has drawn many comparisons to the likes of Sean Casey, Mark Grace and John Olerud, players who never hit for a lot of power but hit for a high average and piled up doubles. Brown

played mostly first base this year, but did play some outfield and also played in the outfield all of 2006 in Kinston, so when he moves up to Triple-A Buffalo next season he will have the flexibility to play either first base or left field.

The Frisco Kid Wins Another Batting Title

Buffalo outfielder Ben Francisco won the International League's 2007 Batting Title by hitting .318 (120-377) for the season. Francisco missed about six weeks of Buffalo's season as he was called up to Cleveland on three separate occasions, but by league rule he qualified for the title as he had more than enough at bats. League rule mandates that hitters must have 2.7 plate appearances per team game to have their batting average qualify among the league's best.

This is actually not new territory for Francisco, as in 2002 he won the NY-Penn League Batting Title when he hit .349 for short-season Single-A Mahoning Valley. Francisco is the first Buffalo player to win a league batting title since Mark Ryal hit .334 in 1990.

Francisco was consistent all season where he never had a bad month as he hit .319 in April (19 games), .366 in May (25 games), .284 in June (17 games), .and 320 in August (31 games). He only played in three games in July because he was in Cleveland for the entire month before being optioned out the last few days of the month when the Indians acquired Kenny Lofton in a trade.

Francisco was also named as an International League postseason All-Star, and his 120 hits were second on the team only to Ryan Mulhern (138) and his 40 multi-hit games were tied for first with Mulhern.

Class Move For Stanny

On Friday night, left-hander Jason Stanford made what looked to be his final start of the season for Buffalo, going five innings and giving up two runs on three hits and five walks. Stanford also struckout three batters in the game, but it left him one strikeout short of

No Postseason For Buffalo and Mahoning Valley

The Triple-A Buffalo Bisons were eliminated from postseason contention on the next to last day of the season. Buffalo

went on a spirited run from mid-August when they were several games back in the wildcard chase, but it was a little too late. The ending left a sour taste in a lot of the player's mouths, as they had led the International League's North Division for more than two months this season, but a 10-18 slump after the All-Star break in July and two blown saves and crushing defeats last week on Wednesday and Thursday in Pawtucket ended up being their undoing.

Single-A (short-season) Mahoning Valley was officially eliminated from playoff contention this past weekend. Mahoning Valley is assured of a second place finish in the Pinckney Division of the New York-Penn League for the fifth time in six

years. Mahoning Valley's season wraps up tomorrow night (Friday), and it will end what has been a really disappointing season from a prospect perspective. None of the college level players have really stood out in the starting rotation except for 2007 10th round pick Heath Taylor, and most of the position players - aside from Todd Martin - have not done much offensively all year. S
ome of the relievers like Garret Rieck, James Brettl and Kyle Landis have been excellent out of the bullpen, and newcomers from the GCL like Kelvin De La Cruz and Chris Nash have done well, but overall it has been a disappointing season in The Valley.

Martin Wins Batting Crown

Taylor-ed Fit

Mahoning Valley left-handed starter Heath Taylor looked to be in line for the NY-Penn League ERA Title going into his last start this past week, but a poor outing eliminated the possibility. Ta ylor needed to pitch seven quality innings to qualify for the ERA title, but ended up throwing only 4.2 innings and was bombed for seven runs on ten hits in his final start of the season. The seven runs he gave up practically doubled the output he allowed coming into the game, as in 11 previous starts he had allowed only eight runs in 52.2 innings pitched. The poor outing ballooned his ERA from 1.37 to 2.35. Even though the final start was not good, the 2007 10th round pick out of Oklahoma University put a good first season in the books going 3-3 with a 2.35 ERA.

He allowed 53 hits and 15 walks while striking out 38 batters in 57.1 innings pitched, and was also named as a NY-Penn League All-Star this season.

Minor League Baseball Gaining Popularity

Minor League Baseball has certainly gone through a boom period in the past few years, which is probably directly attributed to the Internet. With the click of the mouse, player information is now much easier to obtain with stats and player articles in newspapers from around the country and on sites such as this one. While it is not major league baseball, it still is professional baseball. For some like me, it is an enjoyment to watch and follow young men grow as they try to achieve their dream of playing in the majors, all while making peanuts in the minors.

This year, Minor League Baseball set a new attendance record for the fourth consecutive year, as through Labor Day the 175 Minor League Baseball teams that charge admission had drawn a total of 42,636,123 fans, which is over 900,000 more than what was drawn in 2006. The increase should approach one million as some leagues are still playing and wrap up on Friday.

The run of increases started in 2004 when Minor League Baseball drew 39,887,755 fans to surpass a record that had stood since 1949.

In 2005, Minor League Baseball drew 41,333,279 fans, and in 2006 that number jumped to 41,710,357.

Affiliate Notebook

Buffalo Notes (75-67, 3rd place, 8.5 GB): Right-hander Adam Miller finished the season in the Buffalo bullpen, and in six appearances out of the bullpen since being activated from the disabled list on August 19th, Miller was 1-1 with a 2.54 ERA.

In 7.1 innings, he allowed five hits and one walk while striking out ten. ... Third baseman Andy Marte finished the season on a 13-game hitting streak, hitting .391 (18-46) with five doubles, three home runs and 12 RBI during the streak. ... Right-hander Chris Niesel was promoted from Kinston to Buffalo. ... Even though Buffalo missed the playoffs for the first time in back-to-back seasons since their affiliation with the Indians began in 1995, Buffalo did finish with a winning record for the 13th straight season. Here are some notable final season stats: First baseman Ryan Mulhern hit .290 with 16 HR, 76 RBI and an .825 OPS. ... Third baseman Andy Marte hit .267 with 16 HR, 60 RBI and a .766 OPS (96 games). ... Outfielder Jason Cooper hit .251 with 10, 51 RBI and an .829 OPS. ... Right-hander Sean Smith finished the year 9-7 with a 4.25 ERA.

Akron Notes (80-61, 2nd place, 1.5 GB): With Akron making the playoffs this year, this is now the third consecutive season they have qualified for the Eastern League playoffs. ... Left-hander Scott Lewis was placed on the disabled list with elbow soreness, and left-hander Jeremy Sowers was sent down from Buffalo. The Indians set off a firestorm in Erie when they moved Sowers to Akron, as rules do not allow players who played the whole season up a level to be moved down. But, with Lewis out with an injury, and Sowers needing to start to stay stretched out for a potential start in Cleveland down the stretch, the Indians finagled the roster rules and moved him to Akron.

It is not clear whether Sowers will pitch or not as he is the probable Game Three starter tomorrow night (Friday).

More on this next week. ... Left-handed reliever Rich Rundles was moved back to Buffalo, and right-hander Adam Miller was sent down from Buffalo to fill his spot.

Miller will continue to pitch in the bullpen, and the move was made to get him some extra work since he missed time on the Buffalo disabled list a few months this season. ... Catcher Dave Wallace was put on the inactive list this week, while catcher Matt McBride was called up from Lake County to get exposure to postseason baseball. ... Right-hander Eric DuBose was deactivated and sent to the GCL roster, and right-hander Jake Dittler was activated from the disabled list. ... Outfielder Nathan Panther was moved up to Buffalo this week, while outfielder Cirilo Cumberbatch was moved up from Lake County.

Kinston Notes (42-28, 1st place, 87-52 overall): Manager Mike Sarbaugh was named the Carolina League Manager of the Year. Sarbaugh is the ninth manager in 21 years at Kinston to win Carolina League Manager of the Year honors.

The previous winners: Mike Hargrove (1987), Brian Graham (1991), Dave Keller (1993), Jack Mull (1996), Joel Skinner (1997), Eric Wedge (1999), Brad Komminsk (2001), and Torey Lovullo (2004). ... Kinston's 87 wins are the sixth most in franchise history and two more than last season.

Their overall record of 87-52 was the third best in all of minor league baseball.

Only San Francisco affiliate Low-A Augusta (89-51) and Milwaukee's Triple-A affiliate Nashville (89-55) finished with better records. ... Catcher Max Ramirez, third baseman Wes Hodges, shortstop Josh Rodriguez and right-handed reliever Scott Roehl were named Carolina League postseason All-Stars. ... Shortstop Josh Rodriguez finished the season with nine triples, which tied a Kinston Indians franchise record.

Also, Rodriguez is just the second player in Kinston history to put up at least 20 home runs and 20 stolen bases in a season.

The only other person do accomplish the feat is current Kinston hitting coach Jon Nunnally, who put up 24 home runs and 23 stolen bases at Kinston in 1994.

Rodriguez also led the Carolina league in runs with 84. ... First baseman Matt Whitney finished the season tied for fourth in home runs (32) among all minor leaguers. ... Kinston right-hander Jim Deters ended the regular season with a 2.24 ERA, which ranked best in the Carolina League. ... Right-handed reliever Scott Roehl won the Carolina League saves title with 24

saves. ... Utility player Jared Head was hit by a franchise-record tying 17 pitches this season (Jeff Depippo 1999). ... Outfielder Nick Weglarz homered in his Kinston debut - his second at bat - over the weekend.

Weglarz was called up from Lake County to play in meaningful games in the postseason.

Lake County Notes (33-35, 5th place, 9.5 GB, 64-74 overall): Left-hander Chris Jones and right-hander Chris Archer were called up from the GCL to Lake County to participate in the final week of the season. The 18-year olds each made one start, with Jones going four innings and allowing three runs on four hits, and Archer went four innings and allowed four runs on five hits. ... Lake County's season is over, and they missed the playoffs for the fourth straight season.

Here are some noteworthy final stats: Outfielder Cirilo Cumberbatch hit .300 with 6 HR, 43 RBI and an .809 OPS. ... Catcher Matt McBride hit .283 with 8 HR, 66 RBI and a .780 OPS. ... Outfielder Nick Weglarz hit .276 with 23 HR, 82 RBI and an .892 OPS. ... Second baseman Adam Davis hit .266 with 6 HR, 41 RBI, 22 stolen bases, and a .747 OPS. ... Shortstop Carlos Rivero hit .261 with 7 HR, 62 RBI and a .702 OPS. ... Right-hander Jeanmar Gomez finished 11-7 with a 4.80 ERA. ... Right-hander Hector Rondon finished 7-10 with a 4.37 ERA. ... Right-hander Carlton Smith finished 11-6 with a 4.22 ERA. ... Right-hander Paolo Espino finished 4-5 with a 3.66 ERA.

Mahoning Valley Notes (37-35, 2nd place, 8 GB): Total attendance was down this year at Eastwood Field, as a total of 129,601 fans strolled through the gates this year.

The total is the lowest turnout for the franchise since becoming affiliated with the Indians in 1999.

While the attendance total is discouraging, there were three rainouts which were not made up which had an affect on the total attendance numbers.

The per game average was 3,704 fans as compared to the per game average of 3,603 in 2006. ... Manager Tim Laker is on personal leave from the team, and first base coach Anthony Medrano will manage the team for the last week of the season. ... Right-handed reliever Kyle Landis appears to be on the verge of the franchise record for lowest ERA (min 10 appearances) in a season.

In 19 games, he is 1-0 with a 0.34 ERA (1 ER in 26.1 IP).

The ERA record is 1.39, set by right-hander Neil Wagner in 2006. ... Right-hander Mike Eisenberg is scheduled to pitch the season finale tomorrow on September 7th, and if he goes at least 6.1 innings he will break the franchise record for most innings pitched in a season.

The current record is 80.1 innings by Blake Allen in 2002. ... Outfielder Adam White is currently tied for the franchise record in stolen bases with 22. ... Right-hander Joanniel Montero had a scoreless innings streak of 14.1 innings halted in the fifth inning last Thursday night. ... Right-hander Garrison Campfield was activated from the disabled list.