Tony and the Indians are both getting ready to head north for the quickly approaching start of the 2008 season. But before they do, T's wrapping things up for us today with a final installment of The Winter Haven Notebook. These columns have been chock full of excellent first hand info on the Tribe and their prospects and today's piece is no exception. Tony hits on young slugger Chris Nash, talks about cuts, projects the minor league starting rotations, and much more in today's column.

Nash Looking To Be A Smash In ‘08

Indians first base prospect Chris Nash is about the nicest young man you will ever meet. Very soft-spoken, but extremely confident at the same time, he is a young power hitting first baseman on the rise in the Indians system.

If fans do not know about him yet, they better take notice now, because he is one of those preseason candidates tabbed to have a breakout year this season.

Of course, a lot of fans probably do not know much of Nash yet because he played last season in the Gulf Coast League (GCL). Games in the GCL draw very little, in fact you probably would find a bigger crowd down the road at a local Little League game.

There is no media or fans in the GCL, and really the atmosphere when the games are played is that of a glorified practice.

"It is kind of hard to play out there at 12 o'clock every day," recalled Nash on his GCL experience from last season. "There are no fans out here, and sometimes you have a doubleheader. There is just no energy, and it just feels

like a practice game to you."

It was a brutal stretch for Nash. He came to Winter Haven in February for the start of minor league spring training, stayed behind in extended spring training, and played in the GCL once games started in June. Nash finally got to leave Winter Haven when the Indians called him up to Mahoning Valley in August.

Nash was selected in the 24th round of the 2006 Draft out of Johnson County Community College (KS), but was hurt and signed late so last year was his debut season in the Indians organization. Nash finished the season hitting .303 with 20 doubles, 1 triple, 3 home runs, 33 RBI, and an .806 OPS in 63 combined games in the GCL and at Mahoning Valley. For his first year in the system, he really had a good season.

"I was pleased actually," responded Nash about his 2007 season. "That adjustment coming from college to pro ball, it took me a little while to get started.

After awhile I felt comfortable playing down here [in the Gulf Coast League].

At the end of the season I was fortunate to get moved up to Mahoning Valley and continued to play well up there.

So making that adjustment was really easy for me.

Now, I am looking forward to having a good year this year and keeping it going."

Nash is a very big kid at 21 years of age (6'5" 230 lbs). For a guy his size he did not hit many home runs last year, but he did pile up a lot of doubles (20 in 63 games).

The feeling with Nash and the Indians is those doubles will start to translate to home runs this year now that he has become more accustomed to using wood bats and made the adjustment to pro ball.

Nash had limited experience with wood before signing as he used them in the Northwoods League when he played for the Duluth Huskies (.278 avg, 2 HR, 14 RBI in 56 games).

His big frame, strength, and size at a young age make him very projectable to be a big power hitter. He is so big and athletic, that he was actually recruited in high school by Division-1 colleges as a tight end. But, one problem Nash had last year was not getting good leverage with his legs or using his lower half really well. Once he learns how to use his lower half and get better leverage with his front side and not come off the ball, the expected power explosion should come.

"The only adjustment I have made this year is widening my base and trying to get a little more leverage with my front foot," said Nash. "But, I did not really do as much this offseason as I did last year when I made some big adjustments.

I came up before I got injured and was in a good spot."

The injury Nash is speaking of is a strained latissimus dorsi muscle, which he hurt earlier in camp while trying to learn a new throwing motion.

"I had strained my lat about five or six days ago just changing my arm movement as they wanted me to change from sidearm to straight over the top," said Nash. "By doing that it put a lot of strain on muscles I had not used a lot before in the past.

I am supposed to be healthy and back ready to go by next Wednesday."

As a first baseman, the first question that comes to mind is why it would be so important for the Indians to overhaul his throwing technique. Throwing the baseball would seem to be the last thing you would be worried about for a first baseman, but apparently the Indians felt the correction was necessary because of the problems Nash had with throws to second base.

"With my arm angle, my ball was tailing a little bit when I was throwing to second base," responded Nash. "And so the more I get over the top the straighter the ball will be. That's why I made the adjustment."

Nash likely will not see any game action before camp breaks, but should be able to start taking batting practice before he heads out to Single-A Lake County this coming Saturday. He likely will still be bothered by the sore back muscle when the season starts, so it is possible the Indians give him a week or two off at first base and just have him in the Lake County lineup as the designated hitter until he is 100% ready to go.

While Nash says his goal is to get to Akron by the end of the year, if he stays healthy and performs well he most likely will get a late season callup to Kinston. With so many good first basemen above him in the system, he will be roadblocked somewhat until the position clears up in the upper levels over the course of the season and next offseason.

No matter what happens, though, Nash is excited at the prospects of a breakout season.

Notebook

- This just in: Nick Weglarz is pretty good. In fact, I'll make the proclamation now that by seasons end he will be one of the top five to ten hitting prospects in all of baseball and the #1 or #2 prospect in the Indians system. Yesterday, Lake County and Kinston got to play on the big league field because the minor league fields were under water. Weglarz ended up going 2-for-2 with a double, home run and walk.

In his second at bat, while he was in the on-deck circle he turned to Kinston manager Chris Tremie and smiled and said "I'm taking this one out."

Tremie playfully responded and said, "Do it.

Don't say it.

Do it."

Weglarz turned to right field and said, "See that Carraba's sign over the right field wall?

I'm hitting it."

Tremie responded, "Tell you what, if you hit that Beef O'Brady's sign deep over the right-center wall, I'll buy you dinner."

Nick smiled and walked to the plate.

A few pitches later, on a 3-2 count, Weglarz blasted a home run that landed OVER the Beef O'Brady's sign.

The right fielder never moved, and the ball had to of gone at least 450 feet.

As Weglarz rounded third base and smiled at Tremie, Tremie responded, "Well, you didn't hit the sign."

After the inning, when right-hander Paolo Espino came in, he turned to the pitching coach and said, "I threw a good pitch, low and away and he still got me."

One of the coaches responded and said, "That's why we are all happy Weglarz is on our team."

Great stuff.

- Right-hander Steven Wright has been bothered by shin splints for most of camp. While he has thrown some in scrimmages, yesterday was the first time he pitched in live game action.

Wright is expected to start the season in the Kinston rotation.

- Left-hander and highly regard 2007 Draft pick Chris Jones has been sidelined in camp with an undisclosed arm injury. He has not thrown all camp, not even playing catch. Jones was expected to start the year in extended spring anyway, so he still has a few months before short season games start, but still the injury is concerning.

- I have made several mentions of expected cuts in camp coming down the pipeline any day. Well, from what I have learned, the reason there have not been many cuts so far this late in camp is the Indians did not bring enough players to camp this year.

Last year, there was a mass exodus of players mostly because the system was being trimmed

down from seven to six affiliates.

In 2006, the Indians added the Gulf Coast League (GCL) rookie level team, but still had Burlington as a rookie level team as well.

At the end of the year they pulled out of Burlington, and the GCL team remained as the lone rookie level team.

As a result, last spring training there was something like 25-35 players cut.

There still should be some cuts this spring, but now it looks like only a handful will be cut, and they may not happen until the very end of camp.

- Here is how the starting rotations in Kinston and Lake County look to be shaping up: Paolo Espino, Hector Rondon, Jeanmar Gomez, and Steven Wright should be in the Kinston starting rotation.

Who fills the remaining spot is unknown at this time, but it could be any of Josh Tomlin, Jim Deters, Sung-Wei Tseng, Kevin Dixon, Ryan Edell, Carlton Smith, and Frank Herrmann.

At Lake County, their starting rotation will be fronted by Kelvin De La Cruz, Ryan Miller, Santo Frias, and Ryan Morris.

Who fills the final spot is unknown, but it looks like it could be any of Mike Eisenberg, Heath Taylor, Joanniel Montero, or a few others.

- Possible assignments for Kinston: Jared Head and Brian Juhl look like they will open the season at Kinston as a catching tandem, where Head often plays other positions to keep him sharp and useful as a super utility player. Matt McBride would have started in Kinston as the catcher had he not had shoulder surgery in the offseason.

Beau Mills and Todd Martin will play first base, with Mills splitting time at third base.

When Mills is not playing third base it appears that Jared Goedert may play there and also split time at second base.

Adam Davis should also be there playing second, and Carlos Rivero will be at shortstop.

The outfield should be Nick Weglarz in left field, Jason Denham in center field, and Cirilo Cumberbatch in right field.

- Possible assignments for Lake County: Adam White will be in center field, Mark Thompson at shortstop, Jeff Hehr at third base, Chris Nash and Dustin Relini at first base, and likely Doug Pickens and Alex Castillo catching at Lake County (Alcombrack probably starts in Mahoning Valley). Second base and the two corner outfield positions appear to be up for grabs, but one outfield spot should be filled by Matt Brown.

Matt Willard could end up at shortstop or even second base.

Boy, it is sad to say goodbye to Winter Haven. Not because it will be the last time I am down here (well, I'll be here in July to see the GCL team), but also to go back to that great weather in Cleveland, OH. From 80+ degrees and sunny to 30-some degrees and snowy.

Lovely.

Anyway, I had plans to talk to so many other players in camp like Frank Herrmann, Bo Greenwell, Heath Taylor, Robbie Alcombrack, Randy Newsom, and many others, but ran out of time and just never sync up a time to catch up with them after agreeing to talk to them. No worries though, I am sure when I make my visits to the affiliates this year I will track them all down at that point and it will be much easier to nail them down for an interview.

Just a reminder, I plan to have some sort of photo gallery at the end of this week that I will post.

I have tons and tons of good pictures to share, and I also have a whole slew of video to upload and show for guys like Mike Pontius, Kelvin De La Cruz, Kyle Landis, Erik Stiller, Dan Cevette, Adam White, Jeff Hehr, Doug Pickens, Nick Weglarz, Brian Juhl, Matt Brown, Robbie Alcombrack, and more.

I hope everyone enjoyed the daily reports of the happenings in minor league camp, and I had a blast sitting back and seeing these kids get ready for the start of a new season. We are only about ten days from the start of the minor league season, and I can't wait.