Tony previewed the Lake County Captains for us yesterday. Later this week he'll look at Buffalo and Kinston. And today ... he tells Indians fans everything they could possibky want to know about the 2008 version of the AA Akron Aeros. The Aeros have reached the title game in three straight seasons and will feature many of the Indians upper tier prospects. All just about 45 minutes away from Cleveland with a beautiful ballpark!

The minor league previews roll on, this time with a stop in Akron to preview what is in store for Aeros fans this season. In case you missed it, we previewed Lake County yesterday.

The Aeros enter the 2008 season coming off three straight Eastern League Championship Series appearances, but after winning it all in 2005 they now have been the runner-up two years in a row. In fact, when you add in their championship season from 2003, they have been in the league finals in four of the last five seasons.

Akron has enjoyed a lot of team success the past few years mainly because of the revolving door of great hitting and pitching prospects that pass through every year. It will be much the same this year, as several of the Indians top prospects on the mound and in the batters box will be littered up and down the Akron roster. In fact, because of a logjam of pitchers, first basemen and outfielder at the major league and Triple-A level, several top performers from last year at these positions will return to Akron in 2008.

Some of the best hitters in the Indians farm system will be on display every night with the likes of Trevor Crowe, Wes Hodges, Josh Rodriguez, and Matt Whitney. The top left-handed starter in the system Chuck Lofgren will return, and newcomer lefty David Huff is the next big pitching prospect on the rise in the Indians system. Also, in the bullpen there should be talented relievers aplenty with arms like Sung-Wei Tseng, Jeff Stevens, and Randy Newsom.

It should be a lot of fun for fans at Canal Park this year as they get to experience another winning team as well as see some of the players grow and develop into the Cleveland Indians' stars of tomorrow.

Minor League Affiliates

Buffalo Bisons (AAA)
Akron Aeros (AA)
Kinston Indians (High A)
Lake County Captains (Low A)
Mahoning Valley Scrappers (Short Season A)
GCL Indians (Rookie)

Coaching Staff

Manager: Mike Sarbaugh
1st season as Akron manager, 19th season in Indians organization

Hitting Coach: Lee May Jr.
2nd season as Akron hitting coach, 5th season in Indians organization

Pitching Coach: Tony Arnold
1st season as Akron pitching coach, 16th season in Indians organization

Roster and Rotation

Pitchers (12):
TJ Burton (RHP)
Bubbie Buzachero (RHP)
Kevin Dixon (RHP)
Ryan Edell (LHP)
Frank Herrmann (RHP)
David Huff (LHP)
Chuck Lofgren (LHP)
JD Martin (RHP)
Randy Newsom (RHP)
Shawn Nottingham (LHP)
Jeff Stevens (RHP)
Sung-Wei Tseng (RHP)

Catchers (2):
Armando Camacaro
Chris Gimenez

Infielders (6):
Michael Aubrey
Brandon Chaves
Chris De La Cruz
Wes Hodges
Josh Rodrigues

Matt Whitney

Outfielders (4):
Jose Constanza
Trevor Crowe
Ryan Goleski
Nathan Panther

Rotation:
Chuck Lofgren
David Huff
Frank Herrmann
Ryan Edell
Kevin Dixon

* Left-handed pitcher Scott Lewis is out for two to three months with a strained lat muscle. Outfielder Stephen Head is still recovering from offseason labrum surgery and is expected to be in Akron by mid-April.

Players to Watch

Chuck Lofgren - Left-handed Pitcher
Age: 22 Height: 6'4" Weight: 215 Bats: Left Throws: Left

				WHIP
2007 Akron/Buffalo	12	8	4.58	26
Career	34	18	3.48	79

Lofgren was projected to go much higher in the 2004 Draft, but fell due to signability concerns, and the Indians eventually selected him in the 4th round out of Junipero Serra High School (CA). Lofgren is as legit as it gets, and is one of the top ten left-handed pitching prospects in all the minors. Lofgren is a physical starting pitcher who has a good four-pitch mix led by a fastball

than ranges from 90-93 MPH but tops out ay 95 MPH. In addition to the fastball, Lofgren also throws a slow curveball that tops out at around 75 MPH and a changeup and slider which sit in the low 80s. Several comparisons have been made of Lofgren to a young Al Leiter as his stuff, presence and approach are nearly identical. Lofgren is a competitor on the mound, and likes to attack hitters on the inside part of the plate with his fastball. He is very good at changing speeds and mixing his pitches. Lofgren's aptitude is off the charts and he is also grounded ego-wise. As a young pitcher pitching at an advanced level last season, Lofgren displayed great mound presence and his combination of athleticism and power on the mound is exciting. While he did not match his outstanding statistical season from 2006 when he won 17 games and had a sub-3.00 ERA at Kinston, he adapted well to Double-A at a young age. He should not be in Akron long as he is expected to be the first starter called up to Buffalo once a spot in the rotation opens up there.

Wes Hodges - Third Baseman

Age: 23 Height: 6'2" Weight: 180 Bats: Right Throws: Right

2007 Kinston	.288	104	393	60
Career	.288	104	393	60

Hodges was drafted in the 2nd round of the 2006 Draft out of Georgia Tech, but did not play in 2006 with the Indians since he was still mending from a stress fracture in his foot. Hodges is a player who was born to hit who is a very disciplined hitter with great bat-to-ball ability, and has a nice line drive stroke with good power potential to all fields. Hodges handles fastballs well, and he has to go through the growing period with the changeups and breaking balls and making the adjustments. He should be able to as his aptitude is off the charts as he has an unbelievable ability to make adjustments. As a defender, Hodges does it all with good hands, a strong arm and very good range at third base. The Indians like his athleticism at third base, and combined with his very advanced and professional bat feel he is a rare find. While Hodges work ethic is second to none, and he is still adapting to the everyday grind of professional baseball and learning to be more consistent. With Kevin Kouzmanoff being sent packing to San Diego in the Josh Barfield trade last offseason, and Andy Marte struggling to stay in Cleveland, Hodges is the top third base prospect in the system. If he can stay healthy and on the field he will move through the system quickly, and is someone who could push for a major league job as soon as late-2008. There is no one above him at Buffalo blocking him, so if he impresses the first half of the season at Akron he could move to Buffalo by mid-season.

Josh Rodriguez - Shortstop

Age: 23 Height: 6'0" Weight: 185 Bats: Right Throws: Right

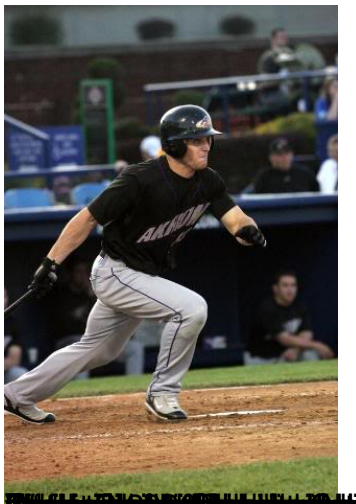
2007 Kinston	.262	133	493	84
Career	.263	178	650	110

The Indians took Rodriguez with their second of four picks in the second round of the 2006 Draft out of Rice University. Going into his draft year, Rodriguez was considered the top shortstop available in preseason draft rankings, but his draft stock plummeted somewhat when he suffered a serious elbow injury in the fall of 2005. Last year, Rodriguez was just the second player in Kinston history to put up at least 20 home runs and 20 stolen bases in a season (John Nunnally in 1994). Rodriguez is a patient hitter with gap power who drives the ball well, and has some thunder in his bat. He is a great athlete with a knack for hitting, and in his first full season of professional baseball was driving the ball out of the park in a pitchers park in Kinston. The ball jumps off his bat, and according to scouts his power is for real where they believe he could reproduce his 20-20 (HR and SB) in the majors eventually. Rodriguez is not a big kid, but he has above average bat speed and is an extra base hit machine who can stuff a stat sheet. Rodriguez has an excellent throwing arm, and is versatile enough to play anywhere in the infield and even some outfield. He impressed scouts in the Carolina League last year with his defensive abilities, showing good projection as a quality defensive shortstop in the majors with plus arm strength and good lateral range to his left and right. With the need in the system for quality, impact middle infielders and with no one in Buffalo blocking him, if he performs well at Akron this year he could see time at Buffalo at some point this season.

Trevor Crowe - Outfielder

Age: 24 Height: 6'0" Weight: 190 Bats: Switch Throws: Right

2007 Akron	.259	133	518	87
Career	.266	293	1134	187



David Huff - Left-handed Pitcher

Age: 23 Height: 6'2" Weight: 190 Bats: Left Throws: Left

				WHIP
2007 Kinston	4	2	2.71	11
Career	4	3	3.08	15

Huff was a supplemental 1st round pick and the first player the Indians selected in the 2006 Draft out of UCLA. Coming out of college, Huff was often compared to Tom Glavine, Barry Zito and Jeremy Sowers. Huff is a strike-thrower who has excellent command of his pitches. His fastball consistently clocks in at 88-91 MPH, and his changeup is a plus pitch and ranked one of the best in the country coming into the draft. While he does not overpower hitters, he has unbelievable confidence in his fastball, and commands it well working it to both sides of the plate and to the corners on all four quadrants. He has the best fastball command in the entire system, and is a very polished pitcher. He is aggressive and attacks hitters, and he has a great, athletic delivery which deceives hitters and he repeats it well. He is a pitcher you like to watch pitch because he moves the ball around in and out, gets the breaking ball and changeup over and knows how to use them. After experiencing soreness on the back of his elbow in late May, Huff was shutdown and it was discovered that he had a strained ligament in his throwing elbow. Huff made up for some of the lost work by pitching in the Arizona Fall League (AFL) this offseason where he went 1-1 with a 6.06 ERA in seven games and posted 15 strikeouts in 16.1 innings pitched. It should be noted the ERA is ballooned by two bad outings, as overall he was outstanding and scouts raved about him in his other appearances.

Jeffrey Stevens - Right-handed Pitcher

Age: 24 Height: 6'1" Weight: 220 Bats: Right Throws: Right

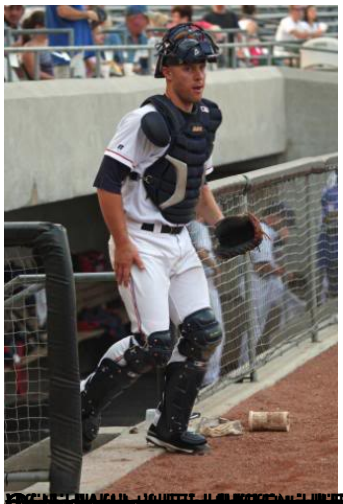
				HIP
2007 Kinston/Akron	6	3	2.81	49
Career	19	14	3.58	92

Stevens has the distinction of being the infamous player to be named later the Indians received when they traded Brandon Phillips to the Cincinnati Reds on April 7, 2006. Stevens was drafted by Cincinnati in the 6th round of the 2005 Draft out of Loyola Marymount University. Stevens had a breakthrough season last year, and if not for Jensen Lewis and Aaron Laffey would have been the pitcher in the system to make the biggest stride by season's end. Last year, Stevens went through spring training expecting to be a starter, but when camp broke he was shipped to Kinston and put in the bullpen. The move to the bullpen saw him take off, and the Indians are excited about his progress and his future in the bullpen. Stevens saw an increase in velocity when he moved to the bullpen and his fastball is very reminiscent of Rafael Betancourt's where it is consistently 92-93 MPH and occasionally will hit 95 MPH, but it gets in on batters quickly. He has four quality pitches and commands them well. His fastball has some life to it, and he compliments it with a good changeup and his breaking ball has improved a lot since first coming into the organization. His breaking ball has seen much improvement, and has been described as having the drop and movement of a "whiffle ball". He is a great competitor and goes right after guys, and he also throws strikes. He has the stuff and makeup to be a backend reliever. Stevens is expected to get a shot in Cleveland at some point this year, and would have started the season in Buffalo if not for the logjam of relievers up there. He likely will not be in Akron for long.

Chris Gimenez - Catcher

Age: 25 Height: 6'2" Weight: 190 Bats: Right Throws: Right

				RBIS
2007 Kinston/Akron	.264	113	382	76
Career	.261	387	1355	225



Michael Aubrey- First baseman

Age: 25 Height: 6'0" Weight: 195 Bats: Left Throws: Left

2007 Kinston/Akron	.277	65	256	37
Career	.301	243	906	134

Aubrey was a 1st round pick by the Indians in the 2003 Draft out of Tulane University. The question is not whether Aubrey can hit, it is whether he can stay healthy because when he plays he performs. When he is healthy, he is a superior defender and good hitter with gap power. But, staying on the field to put up those numbers has been his problem. Aubrey has endured many long spells on the disabled list with leg and back issues and of the 243 career games played they have come over four and a half seasons (roughly 630 possible games). In 2005, chronic back issues limited Aubrey to just 28 games and his season ended in May. In 2006, for the second straight year, he was lost early in the season when he injured himself sliding into second base and suffered a surface fracture on his right knee joint. Throughout the 2007 season Aubrey was bothered by hamstring and groin issues. The Indians were encouraged with the way Aubrey was able to stay much more healthy and on the field for most of the last three months of the season last year. If Aubrey can find a way to stay healthy, he still may be able to salvage his once promising baseball career and be an impact player. This year might be Aubrey's last chance in the organization (last option year), and because of this he will be pushed up to Buffalo quickly to get him some at bats in Triple-A for the first time in his career.

Frank Herrmann - Right-handed Pitcher
Age: 23 Height: 6'4" Weight: 220 Bats: Left Throws: Right

				WHIP
2007 Kinston	11	5	4.01	26
Career	15	11	3.99	52

An economics major at Harvard, Herrmann went undrafted and was signed by the Indians in August of 2005. Herrmann is a physically imposing pitcher, armed with a power sinking fastball that sits in the low-90s, slurvy breaking ball and decent changeup that has good movement. The key to Herrmann's success is his bulldog mentality and his intelligence in coming up with a good game plan to attack hitters. At times he can be too quick to the plate which can lead to him leaving the ball up in the zone, but he is a consistent strike thrower and he pitches to contact. Herrmann is also very durable, and he saw his velocity increase some last season as he was topping out as high as 93 MPH many times late in the season and averaging 91-92 on the radar gun, whereas in 2006 he only averaged 90 MPH. The Indians felt Herrmann showed a lot of improvement in 2007. When he came into the organization, he was very raw and the Indians had to break him down by completely re-developing his delivery and overhauling his four pitch mix to a more simplified three pitch mix of a fastball, slider and changeup. He was also more a collapse, drop and drive guy when he came into the organization, but the refined delivery got him to stay taller in 2007. Last season at Kinston, the focus was mostly on continuing to refine his delivery and how he attacked hitters. While he is comfortable throwing his changeup to lefties, he continues to work on throwing his changeup in on right-handers. He also worked on throwing his two-seam fastball in on right-handers to get them off the plate.

Matt Whitney - First Baseman
Age: 24 Height: 6'4" Weight: 200 Bats: Right Throws: Right

				RBI
2007 LC/Kin	**.299**	**128**	**512**	**95**
Career	**.258**	**406**	**1521**	**227**

The Rest

Jose Constanza (Outfielder): Constanza was signed as a non-drafted free agent out of the Dominican Republic in June 2003. At Kinston last year, Constanza hit .274 with 2 HR, 34 RBI and 39 stolen bases in 112 games. Constanza has outstanding bat control and bat-to-ball ability, and very good baseball instincts. Constanza projects as a fourth outfielder because of his speed, defense and limited pop in his bat, but he is still fun to watch as he may be one of the most exciting players under 5'10" in minor league baseball.

Kevin Dixon (Right-handed pitcher): The Indians drafted Dixon in the 5th round of the 2005 Draft out of Minnesota State University. At 6'3" 225 pounds Dixon is big and strong, and his fastball sits in the 91-93 MPH range. He also showcases a plus slider and a decent changeup, and has good command of his pitches. At Kinston last year, in 28 appearances (22 starts) Dixon went 10-4 with a 3.12 ERA.

Ryan Edell (Left-handed pitcher): Edell was taken in the 8th round of the 2005 Draft out of The College of Charleston. Edell missed most of the 2006 season with a sprained ulnar collateral ligament, but came back to have a breakout season in Kinston going 11-6 with a 3.70 ERA in 31 games (17 starts). His fastball only sits around 90-91 MPH, but his bread and butter pitch is a devastating curveball which was rated the best in the 2005 Draft. Edell is versatile enough where he could start or relieve.

Ryan Goleski (Outfielder): The Indians selected Goleski in the 24th round of the 2003 Draft out of Eastern Michigan University. Goleski is a prototypical right-fielder in that he brings power to the plate and has a cannon for an arm. The question with Goleski is whether he can stay consistent, as he put up great numbers in 2004 (28 HR, .895 OPS) and 2006 (27 HR, .948 OPS), but fell off in 2005 (17 HR, .658 OPS) and 2007 (9 HR, .701 OPS). Goleski is another Akron outfielder who probably deserves to be in Buffalo, but for now has to accept being in Akron for the third straight season because of the crowded outfield situation in the Indians system.

J.D. Martin (Right-handed pitcher): John Dale Martin was taken by the Indians in the 1st round of the 2001 Draft out of high school (CA). Martin's fastball consistently ranges from 88-91

MPH, and his true 12-6 curveball is one of the best in the system. 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 returned last year, but was sidelined with a right elbow strain in early June and missed the rest of the season. He finished the year 2-3 with a 4.26 ERA in nine starts.

Randy Newsom (Right-handed pitcher): The Indians received Newsom in July of 2006 as the player to be named later in the Coco Crisp trade from January 2006. In 58 combined appearances at Kinston and Akron last year, Newsom was 4-2 with 18 saves and a 2.80 ERA. Newsom is a side-arm/submarine-style pitcher who is a command-control guy. Newsom does not throw very hard as his fastball sits in the 81-83 MPH range (he actually can throw harder), and compliments his fastball with a changeup and slider. Newsom's submarine style is his ticket to the big leagues, and he could move fast to Buffalo and Cleveland this year.

Shawn Nottingham (Left-handed pitcher): The Indians acquired Nottingham from the Seattle Mariners as the player to be named later in the Ben Broussard for Shin-Soo Choo trade during the 2006 season. Nottingham is a local kid drafted out of Jackson High School in Canton, OH, so the trade to the Cleveland organization has been a homecoming of sorts. Nottingham is a fundamentally sound pitcher with a fastball that sits around 89-91 MPH, and he compliments it with a curveball and changeup. As had been rumored in the offseason, Nottingham will start the year in the bullpen, although he is part of a mix of four to five guys who could swing back and forth from bullpen to starting rotation. Last year at Akron, Nottingham was 9-12 with a 4.77 ERA in 27 starts.

Sung-Wei Tseng (Right-handed pitcher): The Indians signed Tseng out of Taiwan in July of 2006. Last year in Kinston, Tseng was 6-9 with a 4.05 ERA in 26 starts. Tseng has a compact build with above average velocity and good movement on his fastball, which consistently sit in the 91-94 MPH range. Tseng throws five pitches, but his best pitch is a nasty split-fingered fastball which bottoms out well and is considered a swing-and-miss pitch at the major league level. Tseng currently projects as an exciting arm at the backend of the bullpen, which is where he has moved and he will be the long man/swing guy to start the season.

Others: T.J. Burton (RHP), Bubbie Buzachero (RHP), Armando Camacaro (C), Brandon Chaves (2B), Chris De La Cruz (IF), and Nathan Panther (OF).

On Deck

Previews for Buffalo (Thursday) and Kinston (Friday) are still to come.

All photos courtesy of Carl Kline