Tony is back with Part 2 of 2 recapping hsi trip to Winter Haven and Myrtle Beach to see the GCL and Kinston clubs. Yesterday he touched on the GCL club, and today it is all about Kinston. Tons of great stuff here with comments by Indians Farm Director Ross Atkins and Kinston pitching coach Greg Hibbard on several players, and in addition to that some updates on the likes of Jared Goedert, Carlos Santana, Vinnie Pestano, Michael Finocchi, and even die-hard Indians fan Bob Leber who is the visiting clubhouse manager for the Myrtle Beach Pelicans. Enjoy!

*"Minor Happenings" covers the important developments and news in the Indians farm system. While most of the information in this report is from my own research and through interviews I have conducted with organizational personnel, some information in this report is collected and summarized from the various news outlets that cover each team.*

Here is part two of two of my recap from my trip to Winter Haven to see the Gulf Coast League team and to Myrtle Beach to see Kinston. The GCL recap posted yesterday, and sometime this weekend a regular edition of *Minor Happenings* should post recapping the news and notes from the past week.

In addition to these two recaps, be on the lookout for feature pieces on left-hander Chris Jones, outfielder Bo Greenwell, and catcher Matt McBride which should all post soon.

If you missed the reminder yesterday, my first attempt at a radio show will commence tonight from 9:00 PM to 10:00 PM EST. The show can be heard on BlogTalkRadio.com by clicking here. When you go to the link you should see *The Cleveland Fan Live* upcoming shows and you should see mine on there.

I'll be partnered up with Paul Cousineau , who is a widely popular writer on

TheClevelandFan.com as well. For the first few episodes we will likely split time on the major league team and the prospects. Also, I am home today sick with the flu and had to cancel a trip to Akron to see some players.

I still plan to do the show, but if my condition worsens someone else may fill in.

In any case, these are just test shows still and I have nil radio experience, so please keep that in mind when listening for the first several episodes.

**Santana Strums Along In Kinston**

One of the really neat things about visiting Myrtle Beach to see Kinston was to get a firsthand look at the prized catching prospect Carlos Santana that the Indians acquired from the Dodgers in the Casey Blake trade. Unfortunately, the game I decided to see last

Tuesday he was given the night off so I did not get a chance to see him play live. That said, I arrived early enough at the ballpark to talk to him and also see him take batting practice.

He speaks little English, but one of the things that immediately stood out in communicating with him was his willingness and persistence to talk to me without an interpreter.

Based on first impressions, he is an extremely confident person, is very likable, and is very committed to picking up the English language.

When asked about how it felt to be traded and if there was any adjustment involved in going to a new team Santana grinned and said, "It feels good. It is the same game. The biggest difference is the stadiums are a lot bigger than the California League."

Yes, the parks in the Carolina League are notably bigger than those in the California League, which is why the Carolina League is notoriously considered a pitching league and the California League a hitting league. Some scoffed at the numbers Santana put up in the bandboxes littered around the California League where prior to being acquired by the Indians he hit .323 with 14 HR, 96 RBI and a .993 OPS in 99 games. To date, Santana has shown those numbers can stand up anywhere and has not skipped a beat at Kinston as he is hitting .367 with 3 HR, 7 RBI and a 1.041 OPS in 15 games.

When watching him take batting practice the ball just explodes off his bat. Of all the players who took batting practice that day, you could certainly tell the difference when he and Beau Mills were in the cage as the ball just comes off of their bats much differently than the other

players. Santana is not a very big guy as he only stands at 5'11" tall, but he is built like a rock and is very strong in his arms and wrists.

As he continues to grow into his body, the weight and more power will surely come, and he may even grow a few inches.

Kinston manager Chris Tremie mentioned that Santana has been as advertised as a hitter, but what he was really impressed with so far was his arm strength behind the plate. They will continue to work with him to develop him behind the plate in receiving the ball, calling games, blocking balls, and throwing out runners, and at the moment there are absolutely no plans to move him out from behind the plate.

"I want to hit all the time and I do good hitting and bring more offensively to catching," said Santana. "I am trying something new at catcher, and catching is more different. This is my second year playing catcher. Last year I started to get comfortable, and now I am getting more comfortable and love catching."

**Director's Cuts**

Indians Farm Director Ross Atkins was with Kinston this week and offered up some comments on the players there as well as a comment on helium prospect Abner Abreu (3B) in the Gulf Coast League:

*On Abner Abreu:* "He has [ten] home runs already, so he is on pace for a 30+ home run season at 18 years old. He is very young,

very strong, and is relatively versatile. We are not sure if he is going to be an infielder or an outfielder, but we are going to try and exhaust infield at this point.
He probably has some of the best raw power in our organization.

When you see him it is even more fun because he is only 185 pounds still.

He has a big frame to grow into and a lot of strength to come.

He is playing in major league ballparks [in the GCL], and with [ten] home runs through a 100-some at bats the quick math says that is well above average power."

*On Carlos Santana:* "It's fun to read about these guys and follow them for a couple weeks throughout the [trade] discussions, and then see it come to life when you get your hands on them and get to see them play and talk to the individuals. Santana has really been incredible, and he really stands out in the Carolina League.

He loves to throw the ball behind the plate, he throws behind runners and he already has thrown out a few runners.

He is at least an average or above average receiver.

He has a great passion for catching and loves to take charge, and really that is exceptional to see from a guy who is just learning a second language.

You can tell he is a leader and he doesn't have to do it with words as - quite frankly - at this point he can't.

Offensively he is really impressive.

He has power, discipline and a great feel for the bat.

There are just some guys who find the sweet part of the bat more often and he is one of them. He is just a true hitter and really a promising piece we have added to the system.

He is lean and is not a huge guy, but he is very athletic with a lot of strength.

He is a guy who is somewhat traditional and from here I'd say he goes to Double-A next year, plays in Triple-A, and at that point we will determine where we are as a major league team.

I think he is probably two years away from being considered a major league ready player."

*On Hector Rondon:* "You know, Rondon is a guy that just turned 20-years old and is up to 96 MPH. He loves to compete with the fastball on the plate almost too much. We are challenging him to throw more changeups and use his secondary pitches more, and that is usually a good sign when we have to do that because a lot of young pitchers will try to start to learn how to manipulate the ball that they need to throw more breaking balls and changeups and that usually stems from not having confidence in their fastball. Hector clearly has confidence in his fastball. It is a very good fastball and he still has tons of projection, is still growing, and has not reached his ceiling yet.

Statistically he is one of the top five pitchers in the league, probably one of the best pitchers in the league at 19-20 years old."

*On Beau Mills:* "You know Beau has had a really great year, he really has and he expects more out of himself. He has had a .900 OPS year and he has hit a bunch of home runs and is playing a great first base.

He has done everything we have expected of him, and I think there is even more offense in there.

We just want to make sure that he has made all the adjustments he needs to make before he gets that promotion.

He is already advancing at a relatively good clip, so there is not a ton of pressure to get him out of Kinston."

*On Niuman Romero:* "He has been a pleasant surprise that's for sure. Anyone who has had that kind of increase in their production is a nice surprise.

I think it is a couple of things with Niuman.

One is his maturity from a human standpoint in growing up and respecting what it means to be consistent as a human being and to come to the park with the same energy everyday.

And then his physical maturation.

Those two things occurring at the same time have created more offensive production.

He has always been a consistent defensive player, and I think now he just has more confidence in his bat."

*On Carlos Rivero:* "He may have more power potential than any of our young hitters. He really hits the ball a long way in batting practice and doesn't have to generate his power.

He just has some natural strength in his bat and he plays a premium position and does it pretty well.

He just turned 20 years old, and really when you watch the major league shortstops around the game he is easy to project as a future major league shortstop."

*On Kelvin De La Cruz:* "He had one tough outing [so far in Kinston], but he has competed well. He hasn't had the best support behind him as I think in one game he had some tough breaks defensively. He has plus secondary pitches and is a 6'5" left-handed pitcher in this league.

He is hard not to like, and he has shown a ton of ability with three average pitches.

His fastball command is not there yet, but he is still competing here which I don't recall ever watching that occur in this league.

That is very impressive."

## Finocchi Battles Through Unhealthy Season

Coming into this season, Kinston right-hander Michael Finocchi was one of the most highly regarded relief pitching prospects in the system. Featuring a power sinking fastball that sits around 92-94 MPH and complementing it with a hard slider and changeup, he has the potential to be a late inning reliever who gets hitters to pound the ball into the ground.

Last year in 45 combined games

between Kinston and Akron he was 5-3 with a 3.27 ERA, and his ability to keep the ball in the park in 176 career innings pitched was sensational as he only allowed two home runs coming into this season.

Unfortunately for Finocchi, he broke his ankle in a non-baseball incident this past winter and it derailed his 2008 season where he spent the first half of the season in Winter Haven rehabbing.

He was expected to start the year in Akron, so he also took a step back in his progress in being sent to Kinston in order to ensure he is completely healthy.

In 18 appearances out of the bullpen in Kinston he is 1-1 with a 5.56 ERA with only nine strikeouts in 22.1 innings.

His numbers are way off from his career norms, and most notably he has allowed a whopping six home runs in those 22.1 innings.

Clearly he is not all the way back from his ankle injury. Unable to drive off hi right foot, his velocity has dipped considerably.

"I definitely don't have the velocity that I used to have as I am sitting 88-89 MPH where last year I was 92-94 MPH," said Finocchi. "It's getting there. It is still kind of weak in a certain area, but we are still working on it just trying to get it better."

A drop in velocity of 4-5 MPH on a fastball is tough for any pitcher to overcome, especially a sinker-baller who often relies on the speed and torque on the pitch to get more downward movement.

"Last year I just relied on my sinkerball," said Finocchi. "I would just pound the zone and throw it down the middle and it would go to both sides of the plate.

[You don't know where it will go] and it is my out pitch.

I don't have it right now so I have to throw my slider and changeup a little more effectively.

It moves, but I don't see it moving as much.

It is a little bit flatter, but also at four MPH faster you kind of get away with a lot of things that I can't get away with now.

If I throw it down the pipe now it is going to hit, when before at 93-94 I might get a swing and miss or [get them to roll over on it]."

In some ways, even though the numbers have been horrific, the injury may be a blessing for Finocchi since with the loss of velocity he has had to learn how to pitch and not just throw.

"I have pretty much had to learn to just go out and pitch," said Finocchi. "It has definitely made my offspeed pitch a little bit better as I have had to throw that more for strikes to make my fastball more effective."

For now, Finocchi plans to battle through these last three weeks of the season as best as he can and then spend the off-season working hard to come back 100% next year.

"I'll probably end up going to Instructs to get healthy and get some innings," said Finocchi. "I'll definitely work my ass off this off-season to get this thing better. It is going to be a long off-season.

They'll probably send me to get some innings somewhere since I have only been here for half a season."

**Coaches Corner: Greg Hibbard**

I had a chance to sit down and have a good, long talk with Kinston pitching coach Greg Hibbard during my visit to Myrtle Beach last week. Hibbard loves where he is at in Kinston because he feels it is a real good level to develop pitchers. He considers it to be a lot of fun to see them apply things they talk about and the successes and failures that result from his instruction and talks.

This is Hibbard's sixth tour of duty as a pitching coach in the Indians system, with previous stops in Mahoning Valley (2003), Kinston (2004), Akron (2005, 2007), and Buffalo (2006). He played twelve years professionally, six of them at the major league level.

His best season was with the Cubs in 1993 when he won 15 games, and in his career he posted a 57-50 record with a 4.05 ERA.

Here is what he had to say about a few of the pitchers on his staff:

*On Hector Rondon:* "He has worked through a few things as far as trying to solidify his delivery a little bit. At times he gets a little sloppy with his delivery, but he has an ability to attack hitters and he has learned things about his secondary pitches.

His slider has come a long way and is becoming more of a weapon where before it was more show.

His changeup has improved, and I think the combination of all that with the maturity he has gone through as far as seeing the success he can have with his fastball command and being able to throw his secondary pitches for strikes has allowed him to get more swing and misses with his fastball.

His velocity is more consistent from I think the consistency with his delivery and controlling his effort level.

We are starting to see the 93 and 94s more consistently at the bottom of the zone whereas earlier in the year we'd see those numbers, but they would be underneath and up at the top of the zone and then when he was down in the zone we would see more 88-90 MPH.

I have actually noticed in games when he is into the sixth inning you are starting to see the 93-94s come out more often which is a sign of really grooving into his delivery.

I just really believe the overall program he has gone through over the years has really matured him a lot quicker than we probably thought.

He still has a ways to go as far as where he is going to get to, but it is definitely a bright thing to see."

*On Jeanmar Gomez:* "He is kind of doing the same thing as Rondon. We have had to do some transition things in his delivery, and he has done a good job with adapting and making the adjustments we have been trying to make with him.

Through that process he went through some unsureness about making the adjustments.

He has been professional in his side work, and we are starting to see a more consistent pitcher who is able to keep us in the game for six innings.

You are starting to see a more consistent slider, more consistency to his changeup, and a little bit better fastball command to both sides of the plate."

*On Mike Pontius:* "We saw him on a tract where he had five pretty good outings in a row, and we felt like he had kind of grasped some things with what he was going through.

We are trying to control his effort and emotions a little bit, and trying to get him to know himself a little more as far as when he is in the heat of battle what are the adjustments you need to make.

Like I said, he had had five stints where he was giving us two innings, kept his pitch count to 30, and was not having those 25 pitch innings and walking three guys and getting cornered into throwing fastballs.

Last night was an exception as [Myrtle Beach] swings the bats pretty good.

I felt like he kind of lost his composure somewhat and started overthrowing and then tried to back off and just could not duplicate his release point and ultimately ended up walking four guys.

The good sign is he was back on the mound today and he wanted to get back to that feeling he had a couple outings ago.

We are just trying to get him back on track with some of the things he has told us he is going through.

We have kind of given him some things to work on daily in a throwing program and some flat groundwork on the mound.

He is just trying to duplicate his release point, working downhill, and understanding what the adjustments can be in the middle of a game."

*On Vinnie Pestano:* "When Vinnie first came up I believe he had two outings he was used to having, and then all of a sudden I believe it was the third or fourth outing where he was not himself. He walked two or three guys and was battling through the inning.

Having not seen him a lot I really didn't know what to look for, and he just kind of came up to me and asked me if I am seeing anything.

I said 'what are you struggling with?' just to try and let him talk through what he was going through, and he told me his misses and I told him 'this is what I am seeing'.

He tends to kind of fall off to the third base side, so we did a little side day and worked on finishing his pitches more out front and just being more balanced and landing through the glove.

On that side day he had a very good day and was hitting it opposite arm side and he really felt

some positive things.

Then after a couple outings I went through some video and I just solidified what we had seen and I showed him some pitches where he was falling off and pitches where he was finishing.

I think it kind of gave him a grasp of what he needs to maintain in his delivery."

*On Sung-Wei Tseng:* "He had a few outings when he first got here where he struggled. We kind of did an evaluation thing with [Minor League Pitching Coordinator] Dave Miller and talked about some things we wanted to attack.

Definitely his breaking ball needed to be tighter and we are trying to make it more of a slider, more of a power breaking ball.

Also his fastball command needed to be more down in the zone.

Of late his fastball command has been more down in the zone although not pinpointed to either side, but it has been more down in the zone.

We had tightened up his breaking ball, but it has gotten looser recently for whatever reason I am not sure.

So today it was kind of a maintenance thing to get back to what we talked about three weeks to a month ago and we just solidified the grip, solidified his hand position at release, and just tried to get the rotation back to being more of a slider."

*On Matt Meyer:* "This is the first year I have had Matt and watched him pitch at any length. At first I had seen the things that were in his player plan and journal entries about the game speeding up on him and he just kind of gets to being a thrower and not a pitcher. We have kind of done some things with mental preparation in his pre-pitch routine after a result he is not happy with. J ust trying to slow his heart rate down and get back into the moment of making one pitch at a time.

I'll give you an example of what will happen.

He'll throw a pitch to his arm side and miss, he'll throw another pitch to his arm side and miss, and then he will walk off the mound toward the catcher and take a nice ten second walk around to the back of the mound, take in two or three deep breaths, relax, visualize the pitch, walk up on the mound, and then he will execute.

Before, what he would have done is he would have thrown the two balls and got right back up on the rubber and thrown it again.

We are just trying to give him some pre-pitch routines that will allow him to slow the game down just a little bit where he can be more in control of his emotions.

He has done a much better job of attacking the zone.

He is not pinpointing or real dominating to either side, but he is more in the strike zone.

We have tightened up his slider a little bit where he is throwing more of a power slider that is in the 81-84 range.

He has been at 91-92 MPH with his fastball velocity, so that seems to be improving.

He is finishing pitches more out front and staying in the glove better instead of trying to spin out toward the third base side.

He definitely has made some improvements this year.

I really see a confident pitcher now where when he comes off the mound he feels he is in control, where earlier in the season it would almost be like making pitches wishing for outs.

Now I see a different guy when he is out there."

**My Cousin Vinnie**

Right-hander Vinnie Pestano has put together a very good season and catapulted himself into a relief pitching prospect to watch going forward. Pestano started the season at Lake County this year, and went 1-1 with 15 saves and a 1.55 ERA in 29

appearances with the Captains. He has now been up with Kinston for a little over a month and his performance has been up and down. Shortly after right-handed closer Luis Perdomo was promoted to Double-A Akron and then shipped out in a trade to St. Louis, Pestano took over the closing duties and has handled them well so far.

In 17 appearances at Kinston, Pestano is 1-1 with 6 saves and a 3.63 ERA.

"The first couple of outings went really well then I got into a little bit of a rough patch, but lately I have been doing a lot better," said Pestano. "For me it is not going to be much about strikeouts and overpowering people, it is going to be about guys putting balls in play. In Lake County I think I may have had one game where I was hit around a little bit. Up here I have given up runs in situations that I have allowed myself to give up runs.

I have put myself in situation to give up runs as I have walked a few guys up here and hit a couple guys.

Base hits are usually coming on a 2-1 or 2-0 fastball count.

I have been fortunate not to be hit around, and I have been pitching well as of late trying to keep the ball down and pounding the zone consistently."

Sometimes an increase in walks is a byproduct of facing more advanced, disciplined hitters at a higher level. The hitters who swung at a borderline pitch a level lower are not as prevalent as you move up the minor league ladder. Pestano mostly blamed his early struggled on just being too excited and trying to do too much after his callup.

"It was mostly me coming out here being fired up and wanting to prove that I kind of belong up here and want to make an impact," said Pestano "Just going out there and getting ahead of myself and getting out of my comfort zone and trying to be someone I am not. Going out there and throwing as hard as I can or put balls by guys, which I am not going to do.

I am going to have success by getting groundballs and keeping people off balance.

I think coming out here I was really amped up, and in doing that I screwed my mechanics up.

Me and Hibby have been working on that a lot lately watching video and getting that figured out.

It was more me than the hitters."

Pestano was on the mound for the final out when Lake County clinched the Northern Division of the South Atlantic League and got to enjoy in the festivities afterward; however, he was promoted within a week of that game so the excitement of winning a division changed to the happiness of being promoted.

"I was in Lake County and helped get them into the playoffs," said Pestano. " So, I want to slam the door shut when I get the ball and help put this team into the playoffs.

Kinston has been one of the premiere teams in this league for awhile and I would like to get in there.

**Goedert's Goal Is Consistency**

Kinston infielder has had a much quieter season this year compared to last year when he broke onto the scene at Lake County and early in the year and hit .364 with 16 HR, 51 RBI and had a 1.191 OPS in 46 games. So far this season Goedert is hitting a

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