With Akron now finished with the playoffs, the Indians 2008 minor league season has come to a close. And with that another year of Minor Happenings is quickly coming to a close as well. But Tony has no real offseason. He'll be slamming out a series of player features for our front page in the coming weeks, and also has a special season finale edition of Happenings set for next week. In this week's piece, the big news? The Columbus Clippers becoming the Indians new AAA affiliate.

"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.

With Akron now finished with the playoffs, the Indians 2008 minor league season has come to a close. And with that another year of *Minor Happenings* is quickly coming to a close as well. We are still open for business though for a little while longer as a few player features on Frank Herrmann, Neil Wagner, Brian Juhl, Josh Judy and Jonathan Holt will all post in the next week and a half.

Also, a special edition of Happenings will post next week recapping a visit to Mahoning Valley two weeks ago to talk to some coaches and players like Tim Fedroff, Trey Haley, Cord Phelps, and Heath Taylor.

We'll close things out with the year end awards at the end of the month.

Don't forget to check out player features on Kevin Dixon and Chris Jones which posted earlier in the week.

Even though the coverage for this season is wrapping up, I'll have updates on the Fall

Instructional League, winter and fall leagues, and any other news all offseason on my blog . And, we will continue to air our weekly radio show " Smoke Signals " every Thursday from 9:30-10:30pm this offseason and talk about all things Cleveland Indians baseball related.

And don't forget the 2009 Indians Top Prospect book will be coming at the end of the year, a project I will dive right into at the end of this month!

And finally, for those diehards looking for a place to talk Indians minor league prospects and only Indians minor league prospects, I just added a message board to my blog . This was added by popular demand, so feel free to chime in on the players and teams in the Indians system!

Triple-A Affiliate Move To Columbus Finally Official

Well, that didn't take long. Major league teams yesterday were finally allowed to talk to other minor league affiliates about moving minor league operations to their site.

Literally at 12:01 a.m. yesterday the Columbus Clippers General Manager Ken Schnacke left Indians General Manager Mark Shapiro a phone message that the Clippers were very interested in partnering up with the Indians and that they would like to set up a meeting to discuss it. Schnacke drove up to Progressive Field and talked with the Indians, and within about twelve hours after that phone call a marriage between Cleveland and Columbus was consummated.

Major league teams are only permitted to sign two or four year player development contract deals with a minor league host city. The Indians opted for the maximum four year deal which will make Columbus the Indians Triple-A home through 2012, but don't kid yourselves, this is a marriage that is likely to last forever given the unique situation with the proximity of both cities to one another and being in the same state, the strong Indians fanbase existing in Columbus and now expected to grow, and the new state-of-the-art ballpark Huntington Park located in the trendy downtown Arena District that will open this spring.

"Partnering with the Columbus Clipper organization is a tremendous opportunity for the Indians organization to affiliate with a first-class organization in the vibrant capital city located in the heart of our fan base," said Cleveland Indians President Paul Dolan in a statement

released by the team. "It's an exciting time for both organizations, as well as for the baseball fans of Ohio."

Columbus officials are boiling over with excitement now that the Indians are on board. At 1:00 p.m. today Indians President Paul Dolan and Vice President, Baseball Operations Chris Antonetti the Indians held a press conference at Huntington Park to formerly introduce the new partnership.

The move to Columbus was a unique situation, and the option to move to their home state's capital was really the only reason the Indians left Buffalo.

The New York Mets are expected to add Buffalo as their Triple-A affiliate in the coming days, possibly as soon as Monday.

"We would like to thank Bob and Mindy Rich, the entire Buffalo Bisons organization and the Bisons fans for their support the past 14 years," said Dolan. "Our affiliation coincided with the organization's renewed commitment to the foundation of the franchise - its Player Development System - and the Bisons organization played a major role in our success during that time. Today's announcement is a result of a unique opportunity presented the Indians organization. We wish the Rich family and the Bisons organization much success in the future."

The agreement marks the first time the Indians and Columbus Clippers have been affiliated in the 32-year history of the Clippers organization. Columbus had been affiliated with the Washington Nationals the last two seasons (2007-08) after a 28-year relationship with the New York Yankees from 1979-2006. With the addition of the Triple-A Columbus Clippers, the Indians now possess four of their top five minor league affiliates within the State of Ohio (AA Akron, A Lake County, Short-Season A Mahoning Valley). All four of those affiliates are located within a two and a half hour drive from Progressive Field.

Director's Cuts

Indians Farm Director Ross Atkins had some things to share about two heralded prospects left-hander Scott Lewis and outfielder

Matt LaPorta:

On Scott Lewis: "You know what has really been interesting and impressive to watch about him over the last month and a half is he has known he is in the mix, he has known he is being considered [to fill a spot in the big league rotation]. He has watched the other guys come up and then seen a couple of injuries here and there, and all along has been saying 'I am ready' down here.

When guys know that they are in the mix, and they answer the call a la Aaron Laffey and Jeremy Sowers in the past, it really is impressive and shows that they can handle the pressure.

Scott is an extremely consistent human being, he goes about his business the same way every day, and it has paid off for him."

On Matt LaPorta: "He has pretty much been the best player on the field [in the playoffs], whether we are playing Bowie or Trenton. He has been the best at the plate and the most impressive all around player.

He has really been great in left field.

It is obvious that he is feared as a hitter, and he still finds a way to get his pitch to hit and drive it out of the park.

[In Game 1 against Trenton] the results did not show it, but he had great at bats and was close to putting the team in a better position to win."

Instructional League Opens

The Indians kicked off the Fall Instructional League (FIL) on Wednesday in their new state-of-the-art spring training complex in

Goodyear, Arizona. The player development part of the complex is complete and will be utilized for the next month in the FIL until it concludes on October 17th. The start of the FIL marks the organization's first official activities in the Goodyear complex as they get set for their first spring training there this coming February after 16 years in Winter Haven, Florida.

A total of 58 players makeup the FIL roster, with most of the players being recent 2007 and 2008 draft picks or undrafted free agent signings both domestically and internationally. Many of the veterans on the roster are in the FIL to make up innings or at bats they may have missed this season due to injury, while a lot of the younger players are given the opportunity to play

more games and get a lot of firsthand instruction from the Indians entire player development staff that is on hand.

Right-hander Adam Miller is one of the top players at the new Goodyear facility looking to make up some innings after he missed over half the season due to surgery on his right middle finger. Right now he is still throwing bullpen sessions every few days and then mixing in simulated games to ramp himself up for game action in the FIL and the Dominican Republic which he will report to in mid-October.

Miller is expected to throw around 40 innings this offseason and is on pace for a full recovery from his injury.

I also got word that left-hander Ryan Morris was a last minute edition and he is on his way to Arizona, so he is not listed below. He will not pitch, but will take part in the Strength and Conditioning portion of the FIL. For more on the Fall Instructional League and what it is all about, check out this article posted yesterday on my blog
.

Here is a roster of players and the FIL schedule:

PITCHERS (26) HT WT B/T AGE
Araujo, Elvis 6.04 165 R/R 17
Archer, Christopher 6.02 165 R/R 19
Berger, Eric 6.03 210 L/L 22
Bryson, Rob 6.01 205 R/R 20
Campos, Jose 6.03 175 R/R 18
Cook, Clayton 6.03 175 R/R 18
De La cruz, Kelvin 6.05 187 L/L 20
Flores, Fernando 6.04 220 R/R 17
Frias, Santos 6.03 189 R/R 20
Gomez, Jeanmar 6.03 168 R/R 20
Haley, Curtis 6.03 180 R/R 18
House, Glenn 6.02 215 R/L 18
Jones, Christopher 6.02 165 L/L 19
Lewis, Scott 6.00 185 S/L 24
McFarland, Timothy 6.03 190 L/L 19
Mahalic, Joseph 6.05 205 R/R 19
Miller, Adam 6.04 175 R/R 21
Moncrief, Carlos 6.01 210 L/R 19
Perez, Alexander 6.02 156 R/R 19
Pontius, Michael 6.02 235 R/R 20
Putnam, Zachary 6.02 215 R/R 21
Roberts, David 6.03 210 L/R 21
Rondon, Hector 6.03 165 R/R 20
Sipp, Tony 6.00 185 L/L 25

Taylor, Brandon 5.11 220 L/L 22
Valera, Francisco 6.01 170 R/R 18

CATCHERS (10) HT WT B/T AGE
Abraham, Adam 6.00 210 R/R 21
Castillo, Silvio 6.00 168 R/R 22
Chen, Chun 6.01 200 R/R 19
Davis, Adam 5.09 185 S/R 23
McBride, Matthew 6.02 215 R/R 23
Montero, Moises 6.00 210 R/R 18
Perez, Roberto 6.00 200 R/R 19
Petit, Rolando 6.02 205 S/R 18
Santana, Carlos 5.11 199 S/R 22
Valadez, Michael 6.01 220 R/R 22

INFIELDERS (14) HT WT B/T AGE
Abreu, Abner 6.03 170 R/R 18
Chisenhall, Lonnie 6.01 200 L/R 19
Diaz, Kelvin 6.00 187 R/R 21
Fontanez, Kevin 5.11 170 R/R 18
Goedert, Jared 6.01 180 R/R 23
Mills, Beau 6.03 220 L/R 22
Nash, Christopher 6.04 230 R/R 21
Phelps, Robert 6.02 200 S/R 21
Recknagel, Nathan 6.02 220 R/R 22
Rivas, Ronald 6.02 184 R/R 20
Romero, Niuman 6.00 160 S/R 23
Sanchez, Karexon 5.11 175 S/R 21
Thompson, Mark 5.09 165 R/R 23
Tice, Jeremie 6.00 185 R/R 21

OUTFIELDERS (8) HT WT B/T AGE
Baker, Trent 6.00 175 R/L 18
Drennen, John 5.11 185 L/L 22
Fedroff, Timothy 5.11 190 L/R 21
Montero, Lucas 5.11 180 S/R 23
Palincsar, Timothy 6.03 190 L/R 21
Rucker, Kevin 6.01 185 R/R 18
Weglarz, Nicholas 6.03 215 L/L 20
White, Adam 5.10 190 S/R 23

SCHEDULE
Monday 22-Sep @ SD 12:30 PM
Tuesday 23-Sep
Wednesday 24-Sep KC 12:30 PM
Thursday 25-Sep

Friday 26-Sep @ TEX 12:30 PM
Saturday 27-Sep
Sunday 28-Sep
Monday 29-Sep @ KC 12:30 PM
Tuesday 30-Sep
Wednesday 1-Oct TEX 12:30 PM
Thursday 2-Oct
Friday 3-Oct LAD 12:30 PM
Saturday 4-Oct Intrasquad 10:00 AM
Sunday 5-Oct
Monday 6-Oct @ SEA 12:30 PM
Tuesday 7-Oct
Wednesday 8-Oct KC 12:30 PM
Thursday 9-Oct
Friday 10-Oct SD 12:30 PM
Saturday 11-Oct @ SD 10:00 AM
Sunday 12-Oct
Monday 13-Oct
Tuesday 14-Oct KC 12:30 PM
Wednesday 15-Oct @ KC 12:30 PM
Thursday 16-Oct LAD 12:30 PM
Friday 17-Oct

Mirabelli Talks Prospects

Indians Scouting Director John Mirabelli comments on an assortment of topics from the Arizona Fall League, to Tony Sipp, to David Huff, and so on:

On the Arizona Fall League: "It is a very competitive league where most of the elite prospects go, and one of the best-of-the-best

for minor league non-40 man prospects. It is a great developmental league for all of our guys. I am excited about Wes Hodges and Beau Mills, Sipp and some other pitchers that are going.

It is a great experience.

You are facing the best guys around all of minor league baseball and a very competitive schedule.

You play six days a week, most of the games are during the day when it is hot and humid, and there is some fatigue and tired issues they have to fight through.

For everybody we have sent out there over the years it has really been a plus for them developmentally."

On Tony Sipp: "I think [he could be a player in the major league bullpen next year]. His stuff has come back as he is at 91-93 MPH.

The slider and changeup are in place.

I think - as it is with a lot of these Tommy John guys - the control and command are still not there yet, but that is what the Arizona Fall League is for.

I think he is just a click away to being back to where he was before the injury.

I think he is a guy that could impact our major league bullpen at some time next year.

Luck sometimes plays a factor in scouting.

I think he only pitched six innings his junior year at Clemson, and we happened to be at four of those six innings.

We still weren't quite sure what we had.

We knew we had an athlete with a good arm, a guy who was a little raw on the mound.

So we actually followed him that summer up in the Cape Cod League for a month or so where he got a chance to pitch regularly.

And we saw what he could do up there and it was pretty impressive and that made the decision pretty easy to offer him a contract."

On Carlos Santana: "I think we probably have a little more than we thought we got. We got a switch hitter at a premium position.

He is a very athletic kid who is a converted outfielder/third baseman, so his athleticism is a big plus for him behind the plate.

But he has offense, and offensive upside who is a very aggressive attack the ball kind of hitter that can do some damage.

Plus you have the defensive skill set to stay behind the plate, so all in all you have a pretty impressive package there at a premium position."

On David Huff: "I think the only thing we were surprised by is the injuries he had last year. He had a little forearm problem that set him back in terms of innings, but once he cleared that up he has really been dominating. He has pitched better in Buffalo than he has in Akron.

It is about his stuff, delivery and his command, and he is very close to being a major league ready pitcher.

I think he will be in the mix next year, whether it is in the beginning of the year or sometimes during the year, he gives us viable major league starting depth right now.

A very impressive year for David."

On the Mahoning Valley hitters: "We are excited about the starts some of these guys got off to. They hit the ground running, and that is a tough transition with wood bats, playing every night, and facing the best pitching you have ever faced before. But these guys all held their own and then some. Chisenhall, Phelps, Fedroff and you can even throw Tice in there. I think we have the makings of some good offensive players there."

On Lonnie Chisenhall move to 3B: "I think we are going to look at it in Instructional League this month. He has actually played better at shortstop than we thought he would. He has made some improvements, and obviously having Travis there has helped him a lot with his feet, range and his throwing.

He has had some experience there before and he did play third base at South Carolina so it is not an altogether new position for him.

I think that with the skills and tools that he has it should be an easy transition for him, but I will tell you we are pleasantly surprised with how he has handled shortstop."

Indians Sign Prospect From Taiwan

On Tuesday the Indians announced the signing of right-handed pitcher Chen-Chang Lee. Lee, who turns 22 on October 21st, is an