It's a big week for minor league news. So much so that Tony is breaking this week's "Minor Happenings" into two parts. Part II will post tomorrow and will have some of the other usual features like the Indians Minor League Player of the Week, a Coaches Corner with Akron Manager Mike Sarbaugh, the Affiliate Notebook, an Infirmary Report, and much more. Today though, Tony wanted the focus mostly on a huge rundown of players from a near 30-minute conversation he had with Farm Director Ross Atkins at the Akron game on Wednesday night.

"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.

Boy, what a week for news. So much news, that this week's Minor Happenings was ridiculously long and it has been broken up into two parts. Part II will post tomorrow and will have some of the other usual features like the Indians Minor League Player of the Week, a Coaches Corner with Akron Manager Mike Sarbaugh, the Affiliate Notebook, an Infirmary Report, and much more.

Today though, I wanted the focus mostly on a huge rundown of players from a near 30-minute conversation I had with Farm Director Ross Atkins at the Akron game on Wednesday night.

Also, in the pipeline I still have articles to come on Chris Gimenez, Jordan Brown, and Josh

Tomlin, so look out for those pieces over the weekend and early next week. I also have a large piece on extended spring training I plan to post.

Finding time to complete all of these pieces while working a regular full time job, carting my kids to gymnastics/baseball/swimming/karate, and visiting the affiliates themselves is tough.....but I will get them out there eventually!

In case you missed them, I had feature articles on Chris Nash and David Huff this past week.

Also, last night on
Smoke Signals we had right-hander Brian Grening
on to talk about how things are going with him and to also give some insight into extended spring training and how he is handling that.

With that, onto the Happenings....

The Return Of The Big Swede

Akron left-hander Chuck Lofgren often goes by the nickname of "The Big Swede", and he pitched every bit of the word big on Saturday throwing six no-hit shutout innings in what easily was his best performance of the young season. It was also probably his

best outing since his great year at High-A Kinston in 2006 where he went 17-5 with a 2.32 ERA.

Lofgren was locked in the entire game, and was largely effective because of the way he changed the eye level with his pitches. He retired the first two batters of the game and then walked a batter and hit another, but got out of the jam in the first inning by striking out the final batter with a high fastball. The strikeout started a string of 16 consecutive batters he would retire in a row before he had to be removed after six innings

for pitch count reasons. When the dust settled, his seven strikeouts in the game were the most he has had in a game in almost a year as he had seven strikeouts last year in a game against Altoona on May 6, 2008.

He was at 85 pitches through six innings, and with most pitchers at Double-A and Triple-A on a strict 90-pitch limit this early in the season, Aeros manager Mike Sarbaugh felt it best to take him out instead of pushing him into another inning where he would likely have to be removed anyway after one or two batters.

The outing was yet another impressive start so far on the young season for Lofgren. In three starts this year, he is now 1-0 with a 1.13 ERA, but more important he has just six walks in 16 innings pitched and is holding opposing hitters to a .111 batting average.

His start on Saturday was a carryover from another stellar outing in his previous start on April 19th where he retired the first 10 batters of the game and took a no-hitter into the fifth inning of that game as well.

His success so far is a byproduct of improved command and him pounding the zone with his fastball, but the other big factor is his much improved confidence.

With each outing his confidence continues to grow, and with that he continues to get better and better.

It also helps that his secondary stuff has been crisp and effective.

Director's Cuts

I went out to Akron on Wednesday night to see the team play, and it was a pleasant surprise to see Indians Farm Director Ross Atkins in the Akron clubhouse before the game. As the game played on, I made my way over to his seat a few rows behind homeplate and took in some of the game action with him for roughly 30 minutes talking about various topics and players.

Here is are the players we touched on:

On Lonnie Chisenhall: "I think since day one of spring training Lonnie has been one of the most exciting pieces of the puzzle this

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

Wax On, Wax Off

As talked about in an article I posted earlier in the week, Triple-A Columbus left-hander David Huff is working with his coaching staff and brother to get back on track after a few minor hiccups in spring training and early in the season. Huff is all business on the

mound, and is also a pretty quiet and somewhat shy guy when off the field.

That said, having had the chance to talk to his brother Tim for a good length of time over a week ago when I was in Columbus, he shared some funny stories about his younger brother that show the fun and creative side of the Indians prized lefty. You see, Dave was very much into Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and the movie The Karate Kid when he was a little tyke.

So much so, he actually
believed
he was
the
Karate Kid.

His brother Tim recalled one of the more classic Karate Kid moments from Dave's childhood.

"This one time he is jumping on the couch and at the time my parents had this beveled glass table, it was a really thick piece of glass," recalled Tim. "And he is jumping and all of a sudden goes head first into the glass and cuts his head wide open.

So we rush him to the emergency room and wait for him to get sutured up.

He comes out with this gauze-like bandana around his head.

Well, he thinks he is now
the
Karate Kid, so he busts through the emergency doors and comes running at my dad and does a flying kick right into his stomach.

Knocked the wind right out of my dad.

Dave could care less about his head or stitches, because he really felt like he was the Karate Kid!"

Now, in fairness to Dave, I actually believed I was Sylvester Stallone as a kid, acting out his parts as Rocky Balboa, John Rambo, and Marion Cobretti from some of his famed 80s movies. I even wrote war stories of me and Rambo as part of a strike force when I was a young teenager, about 100 or so of them (still have them).

And yes, as a kid in the backyard or on the playground even I re-enacted the famous fight scene at the end of The Karate Kid about a thousand or so times where Daniel LaRusso gives the ultimate jerk Johnny Lawrence a swift kick to the chops .

Shoot, at one time I could quote that entire movie and just about any Stallone or Arnold Schwarzenegger move line for line.

Ah, to be young again, full of innocence and with such imagination!

(Something tells me that if/when those guys in the Columbus clubhouse catch wind of this, they'll never let it die. Sorry Dave!)

More Happenings tomorrow in Part II

All photos courtesy or me or the affiliate media departments except Chuck Lofgren photo courtesy of Carl Kline