After a well deserved couple week vacation, Lastoria is back, and with a venegance. In his most recent edition of Minor Happenings, Tony takes us through was has been happening down on the farm. And most notably with the Indians prized prospect Andy Marte, who is ON FIRE as of late, and could be looking at a promotion shortly.

Just a quick note, this piece has been absent from this site the last two weeks because I was on vacation. A lot happened the past few weeks, so the format for Happenings this week will be changed a little to accommodate all the news from the past few weeks. Next week, the breakdowns for each affiliate and the news for each will return.

Director's Cuts

Indians Farm Director John Farrell is presently in Winter Haven watching the debut of the Indians new minor league affiliate in the Gulf Coast League (GCL). He feels the addition of the new affiliate in the GCL will help the Latin players who are coming into the US for the first time. The new league adds a strategic ladder to the development of their Latin players where they don't have to start them in Burlington when players tend to be 3-4 years older.

Farrell also talked about players recently called up from Buffalo to the Indians and some who will be here soon:

On Rafael Perez: When the Indians first signed Perez, they viewed his future in the major leagues as a left-handed reliever in the bullpen. His arm slot and 3/4 delivery creates uneasiness for left-handed hitters where they can't dig in against him. Over the past few seasons he has performed well as a starter, so the door is not closed on him being a starter in the major leagues, but for now his need is in the bullpen.

On Eddie Mujica: The addition of a split-finger to his pitching repertoire helped his development immensely. Mujica has outstanding fastball command, and to right-handed hitters he is very consistent throwing strikes down and away. He is fearless, and the Indians love his personality late in games in the way he attacks hitters. (Farrell didn't say it, but for those unfamiliar with Mujica, he is a closer option for the Indians in the near future.)

On Jeremy Sowers: He will make his Indians debut on Sunday. What makes Sowers so special is his intelligence and game awareness. He won't blow you away with his stuff, but as situations arise where he needs to bear down he is able to internalize the situation and slow the game down by becoming much more efficient with his pitch selection and location.

On Joe Inglett: Farrell described him as a hard-nosed, energetic, blue-collar type player. Inglett is a great teammate and great success story since a lot of people told him he would never make it because of his lack of size, physical abilities and that he did not have one tool that stood out. He is a career .300 hitter in the minors, and can play anywhere in the field except catcher.

On Andy Marte: Farrell mentioned that the reason for his turnaround of late may be due to a few adjustments they made to his stance. Marte's stance was emulating Andruw Jones from Atlanta, which was not a good fit for him. They

adjusted the balance in his step since he was throwing his weight on his heels and pulling his lead shoulder out which resulted in a bad bat path. They also moved his hands up. Another reason, though, that Marte might be performing better quite simply might be he is finally relaxing and not trying to impress with every swing. Because he is more relaxed, his natural abilities at the plate are starting to show.

Player of the Week

Andy Marte (3B-Buffalo): .333 avg (14-42), 2B, 8 HRs, 16 RBIs

Since no Player of the Week honors were given out the previous two weeks in the weekend Minor Recaps, this is a special Player of the Week award to note Marte's recent hot streak. Through Tuesday, in the previous 11 games, Marte had homered in 8 of them. His Bisons' record 5 consecutive game home run streak was snapped on Tuesday night when he went 1-4 without a home run.

For the first two months of the season, Marte was an extreme disappointment for the Indians and their fans. At the end of May, he only had 3 HRs and barely over 10 RBIs and was hitting under .250 with an OPS in the low to mid .600's. In a nutshell, he was awful. But with the arrival of June, Marte has taken off. With his recent hot streak, he has somewhat caught up with where he was expected to be at this point in the season with the HRs and RBIs. Still, his plate discipline and batting average and OPS need improvement, although all have improved dramatically the past three weeks. Currently, Marte is hitting .268 with 11 HRs, 31 RBIs and a .785 OPS on the season.

Player's of the Month (June)

Ryan Goleski (OF- Kinston/Akron) and Kevin Kouzmanoff (3B- Akron)

Both Kouzmanoff and Goleski had an outstanding May. Kouzmanoff hit .440 with 6 HRs and 26 RBIs for the month at Akron, while Goleski hit .426 with 8 HRs and 37 RBIs at Kinston. Goleski's play resulted in a promotion to Akron at the end of May, and Kouzmanoff would have been promoted if Andy Marte was not blocking him at Buffalo.

What Next?

After the Indians made a slew of roster moves on Tuesday, who might be the next options to turn to at Buffalo? Recently, outfielder Franklin Gutierrez was called up when Casey Blake went on the disabled list (DL). And, on Tuesday Jason Johnson was designated for assignment and Jeremy Guthrie optioned to Buffalo, while utility player Joe Inglett and reliever Eddie Mujica were added to the roster. Jeremy Sowers will be added to the roster for Sunday's game, but it is not known who will be removed from the roster to make room for him (best guess is Ramon Vazquez).

With the exodus of so much talent from Buffalo to Cleveland in the last week, very few options remain at Buffalo. Still awaiting a callup: 1B Ryan Garko, C Kelly Shoppach, RP Andrew Brown, 3B Andy Marte, OF Jason Dubois, and OF Ben Francisco. Of those players, only Francisco is currently not on the 40-man roster. When the Indians finally decide to pull the plug on the 2006 season, and turn their attention toward getting a headstart on getting ready for 2007, all of these players

will be up auditioning for jobs next year.

To make room for these players, the Indians will need to trade or release some of the veterans like Eduardo Perez, Aaron Boone, Ronnie Belliard, Todd Hollandsworth, Tim Laker, and Guillermo Mota. Perez would be attractive to a playoff contending team looking for a right-handed bat off the bench, and his departure would allow Ryan Garko to assume Perez's duties in the platoon with Broussard. Also, reportedly the Padres have interest in Boone (he could also be released), so his departure would make room for Marte. Role players like Tim Laker, Todd Hollandsworth, and Guillermo Mota would be released to get Brown, Shoppach, Dubois and Francisco some playing time.

For Brandon Phillips We Get….

Jeff Stevens.

He was the player to be named later we ended up receiving from Cincinnati in the trade we completed with them back at the end of Spring Training. While the trade itself was one of Indians GM Mark Shapiro's worst moves ever, what we got is about what Brandon Phillips was worth back when the trade was agreed upon. Obviously, the Brandon Phillips the first 2 1/2 months in Cincinnati is worth a heck of a lot more than the Brandon Phillips we sent packing to Cincinnati in a trade at the end of Spring Training.

In Stevens, they obtained a decent pitching prospect. The 22-year old won't blow anyone away with his high 80s to 91 MPH fastball, but does have four quality pitchers and commands them well. And thus the book on the Brandon Phillips

chapter in Indians history closes.

Single A Minor League All-Stars

The Indians had several players recently selected as All-Stars from Lake County and Kinston in their respective leagues. Kinston sent six players to the Carolina League-California League All-Star game: SP Scott Lewis, SP Charles Lofgren, SP Joe Ness, C Wyatt Toregas, OF Trevor Crowe, and OF Brian Barton. The one player missing here is Goleski as he would have been a lock, but due to his promotion to Akron, he was not eligible for the All-Star game.

Lake County sent three players to the South Atlantic League All-Star game: RP Matt Davis, 2B Matt Fornasiere, and OF John Drennen. Had Lake County not been the host city for the event, it is likely they may not have had any All-Stars.

Short-Season Leagues Kickoff

The short-season minor league affiliates at Mahoning Valley, Burlington and the Gulf Coast League started play this week. The Indians now how seven affiliates in action: Buffalo (AAA), Akron (AA), Kinston (A+), Lake County (A-), Mahoning Valley, Burlington, and the Gulf Coast League team. Mahoning Valley is typically made up of college players selected from the current and previous years draft and players on rehab assignments, while Burlington is usually made up of high school players taken in the current and previous years draft. As noted above, the GCL team will largely be filled with players graduating from the Dominican League.

No Move For Crowe?

The Indians are still wavering on moving Crowe to 2B. It seems the organization is split on the choice, but since the Indians were able to acquire three potential 2B prospects with their first six picks in the just completed June Amateur Draft, it is possible a move to 2B for Crowe will be scrapped for the time being.

It should be noted that Baseball America recently stated that Trevor Crowe looks to be in line for a callup to Akron very soon, and quite possibly when he comes off the DL.

Injury Update

Some notable injuries have occurred in the last few weeks. The only thing that seems to stop Kevin Kouzmanoff of late is injuries. He has been plagued with injuries the last two seasons, and currently is on the disabled list (DL) in Akron as a result of a strained hamstring. He should be back in 7 to 10 days…..Trevor Crowe was put on the DL with a strained oblique and should be back soon….Kinston right-hander Chris Niesel went on the DL with a fractured right elbow….Catcher Wyatt Toregas was on the DL with a contusion of his left shin, but recently returned and was called up to Akron. Javier Herrera was demoted to Kinston….Top pitching prospects Nick Pesco and JD Martin are in Mahoning Valley on a rehab assignment. Martin is one of the best pitchers in the Indians system, and is recovering from Tommy John surgery.

Quick Shots

Prior to Kouzmanoff going on the DL with the hamstring strain, there was talk of getting him some work in the outfield. Apparently, the Indians are trying to make him more versatile and find a way to get him up to Buffalo where he belongs….Kinston set franchise record for fist half wins by going 47-23. In doing so, they won the Southern Division in the Carolina League for the first half season and automatically quality for the playoffs at the end of the season…..Akron outfielder Jon Van Every was recently promoted to Buffalo.