Extended spring training can vary a little from team to team, but for every team it is exactly as it is termed. It is an extension of spring training. Commonly referred to as “extended” or "EST", it is very much like regular spring training with the daily routine filled with drills, workouts and scrimmages with the big difference being that they are the only people at the facility.

Gone is the hustle and bustle of spring training with every player, coach, and front office executive in the organization bouncing around the complex for six weeks from mid-February to the first week of April. All that is left is around 30-35 players and a handful of coaches who continue to go about their business, but feel like they are playing on a deserted island isolated from the rest of the organization.

The feeling of isolation is definitely evident to those who are left behind in extended. The ticket office where patrons would normally buy tickets during spring training is all closed up. The hustle and bustle of the fans and media that follow the major league team from February through March is gone. The administration buildings are mostly locked up, and there is no front office. There are no fans, concession stands, or scoreboards. There is no press box, and no media is present. The only people there besides the players are a few coaches, instructors, and usually one trainer who pulls double duty as the “front office” guy. Seriously, if you need to get in contact with a player or coach in Indians extended spring training, the trainer is the contact the team usually gives out.

There is just nothing there and the complex is in a state of hibernation until the next spring when the fans and big league team returns. All is quiet except for the minor league clubhouse and practice fields that house the players and coaches who have stayed behind in extended spring

training.

According to former Indians Minor League Infield Coordinator Ted Kubiak, who is now the manager for Low-A Lake County but was the manager last year for the extended spring training and Arizona League Indians team, he says the main focus of extended spring training is on continuing to nurture some of the players who may have some shortcomings or are still young and adjusting to the professional game.

“We are here to make them professionals and make them understand the game,” said Kubiak in an interview last year. “We help them to understand the work involved and every little thing that is connected with the professional game. They all have their own personal issues, which we need to be concerned about. One of their biggest things is learning how to play the game and do the same thing day in and day out. To be regimented and be disciplined, and know we are asking them to do the same thing everyday.”

For many players, extended spring training feels like a long prison sentence. They report to minor league camp usually the first week of March, and with roughly 150 to 170 players vying for just 100 roster spots on full season affiliates in Triple-A Columbus, Double-A Akron, High-A Kinston, and Low-A Lake County, some players are released while the rest are left behind in extended spring training. After the major league and full season minor league clubs break camp at the end of March, the 40-60 players who are not assigned to one of those teams are left behind in extended spring training for two and a half months as they await short season leagues to start up in mid-June. When all is said and done they end up spending just over three months in spring training when you combine the time in extended and regular spring training.

Living through extended spring training can really put a player’s mental toughness to the test. Having to stick around in extended spring training when the big league club and minor league full-season clubs break camp at the end of March can leave a lot of players feeling lonely, left out, and questioning their future.

“It depends on the guy,” said Kubiak. “Sometimes it is not fair, but it is just the game and way it works. In the long run, they still have a uniform. While it is hard [on the players] and they may not think they should be here, it is justified more times than not for a lot of reasons. I always tell them you are not going to be short-changed, and if you show the ability you are going to be moved [up].”

A majority of the players are from the last draft or two who are not ready for a full season roster and are waiting for short season leagues to start in June. These players were not assigned to a full season team for various reasons, but mostly because the organization considers them not ready technically, physically or mentally to handle the rigors and competition a full season league presents. Most of these players are young and often from foreign countries or are high school kids in the United States who were recently signed. With the foreign players, since they are new to the United States, leaving them behind helps them in their transition to being stateside for the first time as well as continuing to receive regular baseball instruction. Also,

these players take two hours of English classes a week, and even take some classes on American culture.

Other players left behind in extended are more advanced players who are there to get special one-on-one attention to work on a new pitch, straighten out their delivery, or make some major adjustments with their hitting mechanics. Some players stick around in extended because they are rehabbing injuries, while others are older minor leaguers who are near the end of the line who are nothing more than depth options for the full season teams.

Since most of the players are new, the Indians spend a lot of time with them in extended spring training working on bunt plays, signs, pick off moves, situational hitting, pitching mechanics, and so on. For the pitchers, they take part in pitcher fielding practice – commonly referred to as PFPs – ad nauseam. Players are there to refine their game, work on developing routines, and also to adapt to life as a professional baseball player.

Games take place on the practice fields of the Indians spring training complex, the two fields used by the major league club in spring training for practice as well as the ones the minor leaguers play afternoon games on in spring training. The games are open to the public and free to attend, but the games are very raw and usually the rules are tweaked some in order to not overextend a pitcher's pitch count if an inning gets out of hand. There are no official statistics or standings kept, although teams do keep stats internally, chart pitches, and record video of pitchers and hitters to send back to the home office for review.

The players do have every Sunday off, but Monday through Saturday their itinerary generally follows the timeline outlined below:

• 6:30am – Wake up
• 7:00 to 7:30 – Breakfast in clubhouse
• 7:30 to 7:45 – Report to field for stretching
• 7:45 to 8:45 – Specialized instruction and drills.
• 8:45 to 9:00 – Group warmup
• 9:00 to 10:30 – Defensive drills, throwing and hitting.
• 10:30 am – Intrasquad game

On days they go on the road to play another organization – which is not often in extended spring training - the morning workouts are tweaked and they time it up so they arrive at the visiting ballpark (no more than 15-20 minutes away) about an hour before the 10:30am game. On some days they play a doubleheader with the other organization if they have enough players. After their game, they eat lunch and go back to the clubhouse to lift weights or do some extra work, cool down, shower, and then head home. Players are usually walking out of the clubhouse door and back to their apartments by 2:00 or 3:00pm.

Players eat together in the clubhouse for two meals a day, and as many as four to five of them share the same apartment in order to spread around the cost of rent and utilities and make it more affordable. The Indians do not provide housing or pay for their food and utilities, so it is up to the players to make those housing arrangements themselves and pay their bills. With little

money at their disposal and not much to do in the area, players mostly just hang out in their apartments when they break for the day. Maybe once a week they go out to eat, or they pass the time going golfing or taking in a sporting event.

The biggest benefit of extended spring training for these players is the increased instruction, plus things are much slower-paced than they would be on a full season team so it allows them a better chance to focus on the task at hand. Everything is very instruction oriented with players continually working on things they have been given to improve. It is more about the process and showing improvement, and not really the actual results on the field.

This year's edition of extended spring training currently has about six weeks left now as short-season leagues are less than two months away from starting. Once short season leagues begin in the middle of June, some players will remain in Goodyear to play on the new rookie-level Arizona League team while others will be assigned to short-season Single-A Mahoning Valley.

Extended spring training is professional baseball in its rawest form. In a lot of ways, it is much like what Bill Murray's character experienced in the movie "Groundhog Day". Each player is always ready for whatever happens next as they could be moved up to a full season team at any minute. In the end, they are there to do their time, improve and move to the next level so they can continue their dream of being a major league baseball player.

Follow Tony and the Indians Prospect Insider on Twitter @tlastoria . His new book the 2010 Cleveland Indians Top 100 Prospects & More is also available for purchase on Amazon.com or his site .