Adam Miller is one of the top pitching prospects in all of baseball, and is absolutely blazing his way through the Indians farm system. Miller could be in the rotation by this time next summer, and his recent hot streak is one of many topics Lastoria hits on in this weeks edition of Minor Happenings ... the best Indians minor league column on the world wide web. Enjoy.

Minor Happenings" covers the important developments and news in the Indians farm system over the course of the past week. Information in this report is collected from the various news outlets that cover each team, some national news, and in some cases from private sources connected to the Indians organization.

Director's Cuts

Indians Farm Director John Farrell was in Myrtle Beach this week to take in action at Kinston. He had some comments on current and former Kinston players:

On Chuck Lofgren: He is a physical starting pitcher at 6'3" 220 pounds. As a 20-year old he has great composure on the mound, and has a good three-pitch mix lead by a 91-93 MPH fastball. Farrell has been most impressed with Lofgren's consistency from start to start, and feels this is a direct result of Lofgren's commitment to routine and being very mature for his age. Lofgren still needs some refinement with his delivery, and he needs to work on being more efficient with his pitches since his pitch counts get high by the middle innings of games. Also, he needs to work more on finishing off hitters. (Note: these reasons are why he will finish the year in Kinston.)

On Trevor Crowe: He was activated from the Akron disabled list this past week. He is a very energetic and explosive player who has an engine that never stops. He is a prototypical top of the order hitter in that he gets on base and steals bases. He hasn't gone more than two games without reaching base, and has more walks (54) than strikeouts (53). After taking him with the 1st pick in the 2005 draft, he has been as advertised and will move very quickly to the major league level.

On Wyatt Toregas: Toregas is the best defensive catcher in the Indians system (Baseball America ranked him the best defensive catcher in the Carolina League). Since he is up for roster protection at season's end, the Indians wanted to give him a full half season of game activity at the AA level to help in their evaluations of him. He is very good at shutting down a running game as his throws to 2B clock at 1.85 seconds, which is well above average for a catcher. He has a compact build and is quick twitched (whatever that means).

On Eider Torres: He is a top of the order hitter that the Indians are working on developing more patience at the plate so he can get on base more. One of his main problems at the plate is he expands his zone too much. He is a burner and has very good range at 2B, and is versatile enough to play SS. Currently, he projects as a utility player in the major leagues.

On Javi Herrera: With the progression of catcher Wyatt Toregas, Herrera was sent down to Kinston. Since his return, he has regained confidence with his bat and become more aggressive at the plate. The Indians have simplified his approach at the plate and let him work more to his strength as a pull hitter.

The Indians Savior?

For the Indians ever to become a serious post-season threat, they will probably need to find a front of the rotation starter. The likelihood of that happening via free agency is pretty much a pipedream, so such a pitcher will have to come from the farm system. 21-year old fireballer

Adam Miller might be the guy, and he may be ready to join the Indians rotation sometime next year (2007). Miller continued to sizzle this week, throwing a complete game 4-hit shutout , and struckout 11 batters for the third straight game. In his last 7 starts, he is 6-0 with a ridiculous 0.40 ERA (2 ER in 45.2 IP), and in those 45.2 IP has only allowed 29 hits and surrendered 12 walks while striking out 52. Reportedly, the reason for Miller's resurgence is the development of his changeup, which is making his 95-97 MPH fastball and hard-biting 87 MPH slider practically un-hittable. On the season, he is now 13-5 with a 2.81 ERA, along with a healthy 1.12 WHIP and 139 strikeouts in 134.2 IP. Also, he ranks #1 in the Eastern League in wins and strikeouts, and #5 in ERA and #8 in WHIP. He arguably is the best pitcher in the league.

Cream of the Crop

The Indians have some dynamite pitching on the way. Two of their best pitching prospects are right-hander Adam Miller and left-hander Chuck Lofgren, and both are probably 1-2 in the ranking of pitching prospects at this point after the graduation of Jeremy Sowers. As noted above, Miller has simply dominated AA. As for Lofgren, he continues to roll along as well. On the year he is 15-5 with a 2.35 ERA, and has a 1.15 WHIP with 115 strikeouts in 122.1 IP. Like Miller, he has dominated his league as he ranks #1 in the Carolina League in wins, ERA and strikeouts, and is #2 in WHIP. Heck, had Sowers remained in Buffalo (where he was dominating), the Indians would have had the best pitcher in the league for each of their top three farm teams. That's impressive, and (knock on wood) a sign of good things to come with the starting pitching staff.

Way To Go, Chuck!

Speaking of Lofgren, in picking up his 15th victory the other night, he is now tied for the modern-day Kinston record of 15 victories. Brian Slocum had held the modern day record after he put up 15 wins in 2004. The overall franchise record for victories is 19, which was set by Frank Bork in 1962 for the Kinston Eagles. Unless Lofgren were to win all of his remaining starts, it is not likely he'll eclipse that mark. In any case, Lofgren's win total is the most since Kinston became affiliated with Kinston in 1987

The "Other" Wildcat

Former University of Arizona Wildcat outfielder Trevor Crowe gets most of the pub these days, but another former Wildcat teammate and fellow outfielder Jordan Brown might be having one of the quietest, good seasons in the Indians system. While Crowe was drafted in the 1st round of the 2005 Amateur Draft, Brown was selected a few rounds later in the 4th round of the same draft. After a very slow start, Brown is hitting .283/.345/.460 with 12 HRs and 73 RBIs. With Crowe, Brian Barton, Ryan Goleski, Ben Francisco, John Drennen and Brown all playing well in the outfield this year, this position has become the strength of the organization, even after a subpar season from top OF prospect Brad Snyder.

Baseball America Tools Rankings

Baseball America just completed their annual "tools" rankings, a ranked list of players considered the best in the league at certain aspects of the game. The players were selected after a polling of league managers and speaking with scouts. Here are the Indians that made it:

International League (AAA):

Best Pitching Prospect: Jeremy Sowers
Best Control: Jeremy Sowers
Best Defensive Third Baseman: Andy Marte
Best Manager Prospect: Torey Lovullo

Eastern League (AA):

Best Defensive Second Baseman: Eider Torres

Best Manager Prospect: Tim Bogar

Carolina League (A+):

Best Batting Prospect: Trevor Crowe
Best Strike Zone Judgement: Tevor Crowe
Most Exciting Player: Trevor Crowe

Best Pitching Prospect: Chuck Lofgren
Best Control: Scott Lewis
Best Defensive Catcher: Wyatt Toregas

The Forgotten Man

In the midst of all the callups from Buffalo the past month, one player most fans (and the Indians themselves) may have forgotten about is OF Jason Dubois. On the year at Buffalo, Dubois is hitting .265/.333/.496 with 20 HRs and 80 RBIs. Dubois is out of options after the season, and pretty much has no shot of making the team next year which means he'll have to be traded or be released by the end of Spring Training next year. He will be a September callup when rosters expand from 25 to 40 players, and might get a decent amount of playing time in order to showcase him for a potential deal. Low-market teams like the Royals, Pirates, Devil Rays, etc are teams that may be willing to give Dubois a shot as an everyday player, especially with his proven power and run producing abilities in the minors.

Catching On

After being demoted from Akron to Kinston, catcher Javi Herrera seems to have found his stroke. In 34 games at Kinston, the 6'1" 200 pound receiver is hitting .364/.481/.505 with 1 HR and 22 RBIs. Herrera

struggled earlier in the year at Akron, hitting only .207/.274/.313 before being sent down on June 22nd. At that point, the Indians had seen enough and felt a move was necessary to move the cold-hitting Herrera down to Kinston and promote hot-hitting catcher Wyatt Toregas from Kinston to Akron. Herrera took the demotion in stride, and has started to play like the 2003 2nd round draft pick the Indians envisioned him to be. His recent hot streak at Kinston is the best he has hit over an extended period of games in the four years he has been in the Indians system

Closer Auditions

Not only are the Indians experimenting with players like Fausto Carmona and Jason Davis at closer at the big league level, but several players in the minors are now being tested in the high-pressure relief role. At Buffalo, right-handed reliever Andrew Brown has been moved to closer, and at Akron left-handed pitcher Tony Sipp is closing out games. Since being installed as the everyday closer at the end of July in Buffalo, in his last 6 appearances Brown is 0-0 with a 0.00 ERA and 3 for 3 in save opportunities, and has only given up 3 hits and walked 1 batter while striking out 5 in 6 IP. As for Sipp, he has recently moved into the role and shared it with right-hander Jim Ed Warden. On the season, Sipp is 3-2 with 2 saves and a 3.35 ERA with an impressive 64 strikeouts in 48.1 IP. Sipp should get many more closer opportunities as the Aeros season winds down and they move into the playoffs.

On The Mend

1B Michael Aubrey has started rehabbing from the right knee strain he suffered at the end of

May. The fact he couldn't start any weight bearing exercises on a knee strain for over two-months is all you need to know about Aubrey these days. The man has been a china doll since being drafted by the Indians in the 1st round of the 2003 draft, and probably most resembles the character Samuel Jackson played in M. Night Shyamalan's "Unbreakable." In any case, if all goes well he is expected to start seeing game action again this fall in the Florida Instructional League and Arizona Fall League…. Akron 1B Ryan Mulhern was placed on the disabled list a week ago with a bruised right knee, but was activated this past Friday.

A Change for Slocum

The Indians recently abandoned experimenting with Slocum as a reliever, at least for the time being, and moved him back into the Buffalo starting rotation after the All-Star break. Since returning to the starting rotation he has been outstanding, as in his 6 starts since the break he is 5-0 with a 1.95 ERA, and only allowed 27 hits and 10 walks in 32.1 IP while striking out 26 batters. The move of Slocum back to the starting rotation may be a result of a need in 2007 for starting depth at Buffalo for the Indians. With pitchers like Jason Stanford and Jeremy Guthrie out of options and not likely to stick with the team, Slocum and Adam Miller could become two of the top three starting pitching options the Indians turn to next year in the event an injury befalls a starter.

Keeping It Real

Right-handed pitcher Jensen Lewis, drafted in the 3rd round of the 2005 draft, was promoted to Akron this past week. Lewis was 7-6 with a 3.99 ERA at Kinston, and made a spot start for Akron a month ago. Lewis was quoted in the Kinston Free Press after the callup as saying: *"It's been a whirlwind, living out of a suitcase, per se. But I wouldn't trade it. I've talked to a lot of friends who have jobs and have sent out resumes and are looking for apartments everywhere. I'm looking at my situation like, 'I play a game every day. I get to sleep in. I get a couple of days off in between to sit in the stands and chart some games. I get to travel to a lot of places and play ball.' It's a dream. It's fantastic."*

Hopefully Lewis remembers this if he ever makes the major leagues, as a lot of players forget this once the $$$ starts rolling in.

Playoff Outlook

With roughly three weeks to go, several Indians affiliates are battling for playoff berths:

- Buffalo, at 62-57, is 6 games out of first place in the North Division of the International League, and also 6 games in back of the wildcard

- At Akron, barring a late season collapse, they should make the Eastern League playoffs and have a chance to defend their 2005 League Championship. At 72-45, they lead the Southern Division by 5.5 games.

- Kinston already qualified for the Carolina League playoffs with their first half title in the Southern Division, but it should be noted in the second half season they are 26-21 and 3 games out of 1st.

- The Lake County Captains have a decent shot at making the playoffs in the South Atlantic League. Currently, they are 26-19 and 4 games out of 1st.

- Mahoning Valley (28-23) is in 1st place of the NY-Penn League's Pinckney Division by 1.5 games.

- Burlington (26-24) is two games out of 1st in the Appalachian League's East Division.

Parting Shots

2006 Supplemental 1st round draft pick David Huff made his debut with Mahoning Valley on Friday night, only pitching 1.1 innings. The rust showed as he walked 3 and gave up 1 hit and allowed 1 run….Prior to blowing a save on Wednesday night, side-arming Akron Jim Ed Warden had put together an impressive string of outings. In 32 previous appearances, Warden was 3-1 with 7 saves and a 1.88 ERA….Adam Miller was named Eastern League Player of the Month….Buffalo made an improbably comeback Tuesday night, scoring 7 runs in the bottom of the 9th to win 12-9. It was the biggest 9th inning comeback in Dunn Tire Park history…. Left-hander Tom Cowley was promoted from Lake County to fill Jensen Lewis's spot in the rotation….Infielder Jake Gautreau was activated off the disabled list when 1B Ryan Garko was called up to Cleveland. Gautreau had been on the disabled list since July 20th with a left calf strain….Outfielder Jon Van Every was promoted to Buffalo…..Outfielder Ryan Goleski is hitting .314 with 23 HRs and 92 RBIs on the season….Outfielder Brian Barton is hitting .323 with 18 HRs, 71 RBIs and 37 stolen bases on the year.