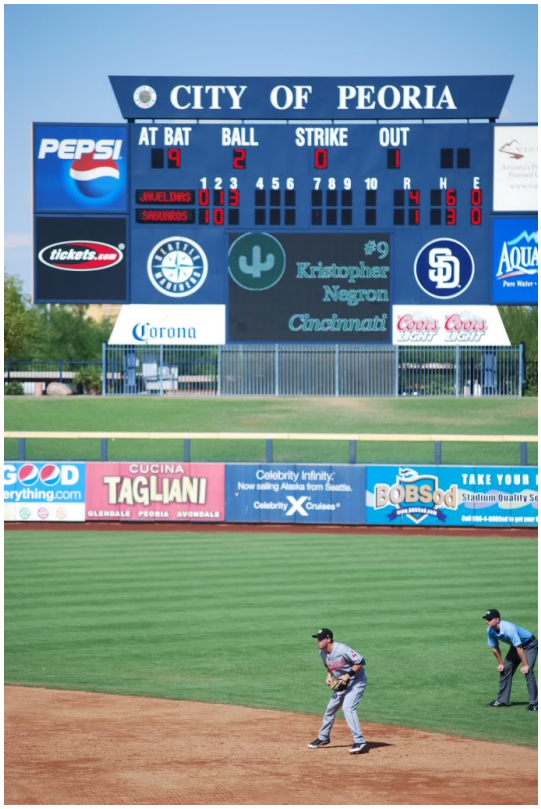

I'm finally settled in back home from my visit last week to Arizona for the Fall Instructional League and Arizona Fall League (AFL). I posted my notebook for the Instructional League this past Friday, but here is my notebook on the AFL to get you caught up to date on what the nine Indians players on the Peoria Javelinas team will be doing out in the AFL:

- If you ever have a chance to attend an AFL game I highly recommend you do it. It's minor league baseball at its best with rosters overflowing with major league talent that will be in the show in the next year or so. The atmosphere is very relaxed and family friendly, and while practically no one attends the games, the few fans who do are always treated to lots of interaction with star players.

- One of the games I was at last week the announced attendance was 227. I was actually surprised it was even that high. While the league has its doors open to the fans, it is not exactly marketed for fans considering every game is at 12:30 p.m. in the afternoon when the kids are in school and most people are working. This league is all about the scouts and top baseball people getting looks at most of the top level prospects in the minors in one setting. About 90% of the people in attendance are scouts or team personnel while the other 10% is made up of diehard fans and autograph seekers.

- Indians manager **Manny Acta** was at the game on Thursday October 14th. He was in street clothes and sat amongst the many scouts behind home plate. He stayed until the very end and then after the game he and another Indians' staffer talked to Javelinas manager Mike Sarbaugh for about 20 minutes in his office. I already mentioned this in the Instructional League notebook, but it is still impressive he was there. I did not see or recognize a big league manager for the other nine teams represented on the field in the two games I saw.

- It's a lot of work for the managers of the six AFL teams as they have very little time to prepare and practice, and on top of that they are getting instructions from five different organizations on how to use their players. Since every organization operates differently, this adds a lot of extra stress for the manager in making sure the workload of all their players is managed appropriately and that they don't put anyone in harm's way. The first practice is five days before the start of the AFL season, so it doesn't lend a lot of time to get to know players. A lot of the players haven't been in games for four to five weeks, and the pitchers need to get built back up so they only work with a lower pitch count so they can get in some innings and still have an opportunity to develop. It's definitely no picnic for the manager.

- Left-hander **Scott Barnes** is the Indians designated starting pitcher for the Javelinas team. With each team being made up of five different organizations, each organization can send a maximum of one starter to the AFL. So far Barnes has looked great as his changeup has been really good and he has thrown some good sliders. For him it is all about fastball command, and that is what he is working on. His numbers have been fantastic so far (0 BB, 11 K, 6.2 IP), and the one blemish is the five runs he allowed in the opener though half those runs came about because of a ball lost in the sun that led to a couple of runs.

- Left-handed pitcher **Eric Berger** is in the AFL to make up for some lost innings at the beginning of the season from an oblique issue he suffered near the end of spring training. He will be pitching out of the bullpen, partly because the Indians want to get a look at him in that role and the other part because each organization can only designate one starter. Since Scott Barnes is starting, that puts the rest of the Indians pitching contingent in the pen. Berger will be a multiple inning guy, and this could be sort of an experiment in the pen to see how his stuff plays. The Indians have an over-abundance of starting pitching options in the upper levels but no left-handed relief options, so this could be the beginning of a role change for him. He will continue to work on his development with his fastball command and secondary stuff.

- Infielder **Cord Phelps** is going to take a stab at playing third base in the AFL. He has exclusively played second base in his two and a half years in the Indians organization, but the Indians are taking a look at him at third base to see if he could be an option there for the big

league team next year and to also see if he can add a little more versatility to his game. He is considered the Javelinas main third baseman and will play there for four to six games a week.

- Second baseman **Jason Kipnis** is the Javelinas primary second baseman. Even though hot shot Mariners second base prospect Dustin Ackley is on the team, Kipnis will get most of the time at second base while Ackley will split his time between second base, first base, and designated hitter. While Kipnis did play third base in the opener last week for a few innings, that was completely out of need and not to get a look at him there.

- Right-handed pitchers **Bryan Price** and **Chen-Chang Lee** are both a part of a deep bullpen on the Javelinas roster. Because teams want to monitor workload, the rosters are ten players larger than the regular 25-man roster you see for most teams in the regular season. Most of these additional ten players are in the bullpen, so Sarbaugh has a lot of bullpen options to sift through which means most pitchers will only go about once every three days. Price will continue learning how to use his stuff and work both sides of the plate with his fastball. Lee has good stuff, but just needs to know how to use it better and work on throwing inside effectively.

- **Roberto Perez** is the backup catcher on the team and will catch at least two games a week, maybe three games. The priority catcher is Ryan Lavarnway from the Red Sox, so he will be catching four to five games a week. Even though Perez may be a few years younger than most of the players and a few levels below them, he is definitely in the AFL to play and keep getting better.

- The two taxi-squad players right-handed pitcher **Travis Turek** and third baseman/catcher **Adam Abraham**
are extra depth on the roster. Both will play, but their opportunities will be limited since the primary focus is on making sure that the priority guys designated at each position get their work in. As a taxi-squad player, Abraham and Turek are only active on Wednesday's and Saturday's. The idea is to have these extra players in order to save a player or two at a certain position and monitor workload. Abraham will be spending most of his time as the bullpen catcher warming up pitchers.

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