The common thinking is that Andy Marte is already penciled in at third base for the 2007 Indians. Tony Lastoria says that may not be the case in this week's edition of 'Minor Happenings'. In addition, Tony summarizes Farm Director John Farrell's weekly radio interview, and also supplies us with all the latest news from all of the Indians minor league affiliates.

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 spoke about a few players and topics from the Farm Director Meetings this week.

On the Farm Director Meetings: The farm directors from every organization meet every year at this time to finalize the rosters for the Arizona Fall League (AFL). Also, the meetings provide an opportunity to address the growth in Latin American countries and numerous labor laws. Several updates are provided from the commissioner's office to keep them abreast of several challenges with things like steroids, etc. Farrell mentioned the new steroid policy is working, in that only 0.4% of all players tested have tested positive, whereas in 2004 under the old policy 8.8% of all players tested were positive.

On Tom Mastny: He has done nothing but win and put up consistent numbers at every stop

on the minor league ladder. Coming into this season, in his two year minor league career he had a 26-8 record and 2.24 ERA (75 appearances, 55 starts). The Indians acquired him in a December 2004 trade when they sent utility infielder John McDonald to the Toronto Blue Jays. The Indians converted him to a reliever during last season, and he has adapted well to the role. He generates a lot of swing and misses with his fastball because of the good deception he creates with his delivery and arm action. He has a somewhat unorthodox delivery, and is very mature. His length (he is 6'6") allows him to get good leverage on hitters, and his pitch selection is very good.

On Ryan Garko: He has always been a very confident offensive player. He was in the midst of a bad season at Buffalo this year average-wise (.248), but the HRs (15) and RBIs (59) were there. He also has a track record of being a very good hitter, having hit .303 with 19 HRs and 77 RBIs at Buffalo in 2005, and in his 2 ½ year minor league career coming into this season owned a career .310 average and 45 HRs with 195 RBIs. His time in Buffalo the last two years has been dominated by him focusing on the position change from catcher to first base. A big reason he had some trouble with the batting average this year at Buffalo is he was trying to get lift on the ball to hit more home runs, which resulted in a negative effect on his swing mechanics.

On Andrew Brown: Right now, it is important to get a good gauge on him since he is out of options next season (note: then why did they wait so long to call him up?). He has tremendous velocity on his fastball, but his breaking ball is average. Earlier in the season, he went through some delivery adjustments because of some bad habits he had developed in Spring Training. His poor control and performance early in the season most likely is a result of getting accustomed to these adjustments.

On September callups: The organization has yet to determine who will be recalled or added to the 40-man roster this September. At the beginning of the season the Indians earmarked several players on who would get a September opportunity. They will call up a catcher and some pitchers, with some getting a few starts to get an additional look at them.

On the current callups: The organization has a strong belief in their young players, and they know the farm system is going to provide good young players to help create an impact with the major league team. Even though the Indians season has turned sour, there is some sense of

gratification with the current situation as it has provided a great opportunity to evaluate so many young players at the big league level. The insight being provided for 2007 with these players is something that could not have happened in a contending season.

Crazy for Kouzmanoff

Going into this season, it seemed a forgone conclusion that recently acquired mega-3B prospect Andy Marte was penciled in as the everyday 3B for the Indians in 2007. Well, that is why you write these things in with a pencil.

Marte most certainly will still get strong consideration for the everyday job in 2007, but it now appears he will have to earn it as hot hitting 3B prospect Kevin Kouzmanoff likely will battle for the everyday gig in Spring Training. Kouzmanoff will be added to the 40-man roster this offseason to protect him from the Rule 5 Draft, and being on the 40-man and already in AAA and performing well puts him right in the plans for 2007. Both Marte (1) and Kouzmanoff (3) will have options remaining next year, so neither should have a leg up on the other in that regard.

Kouzmanoff has a combined .384 average and .675 slugging percentage at Akron and Buffalo, and both marks lead all the minors. In only 302 at bats, in addition to the high average, Kouzmanoff has blasted 20 HRs and has 65 RBIs. While he doesn't walk much (30), he also doesn't strikeout much either (43). Buffalo manager Torey Lovullo recently commented that one of his biggest strengths as a hitter is he knows his hitting lanes and understands how pitchers are working him. He has a smooth, consistent swing, uses the entire field, and doesn't get big with his swing and pull off the ball (could a good comp be Kevin Youkilis from Boston?).

It will be interesting to see how the Indians handle the Kouzmanoff/Marte situation this winter. Whether or not they give Kouzmanoff an honest shot to win the job in Spring Training, or if they use one as trade bait this offseason to land bullpen help and/or a veteran, big bat in the outfield remains to be seen.

Indians Tabbed Trade Deadline Winners

At least that is what *Baseball America's* Jim Callis believes. In a recent article, Callis states the Indians came away as the biggest winners in the recent July 31st trade deadline sweepstakes, and said "for the cost of a first-base platoon and a declining closer, Cleveland came away with three possible everyday big leaguers." On the three prospects the Indians obtained, Callis considers SS Asdrubal Cabrera a "defensive wiz", catcher Max Ramirez a potential "standout offensively and defensively", and mentions Shin-Sin Choo could become the everyday right-fielder.

So, He IS Human Afterall

After going a ridiculous 6-0 with a 0.40 ERA and 52 strikeouts in 45.2 IP in his last seven starts, Miller came back to Earth in his last start Wednesday. Well, somewhat. Miller struggled early on with his fastball command and ended up pitching only 6 innings while giving up 3 runs and striking out 3. He also took the loss in the game, his first since June 26th. Had he won the game, it would have been his 14th victory on the season and would have tied him with Paul Byrd (1992) for most victories in a season in Aeros history. While by Miller's standards of late this is a "bad" outing, it still was a quality start.

Also, according to Farrell, Miller likely will not be called up for a cup of coffee with the Indians in September. There had been some speculation that since he'll be added to the 40-man roster this offseason that he might get a spot start or two in September with the parent club. Coming off an injury in 2005, the Indians want to get him through the year healthy while limiting his innings pitched.

Confirmed: Crowe to 2B

All the speculation the past two months was confirmed this week as the Indians officially announced that hot outfield prospect Trevor Crowe will move to 2B. The former No. 1 pick in 2005 is expected to start playing 2B during Akron's next homestand since several roving instructors will be present. The idea is to expose him some to 2B the last 20 or so games of the regular season, return him to the outfield and play CF in the playoffs, and then play full-time at 2B in the AFL.

He'll likely get 50-60 games of playing time at 2B in the AFL, which could be enough for the Indians to make a decision on whether the position change will be permanent before the start of next season. If Crowe can make the switch, he would fill a huge void in the system at 2B, and could be an option at 2B for the Indians sometime in 2007.

Staying At Catcher?

Accordingly to Assistant GM Chris Antonetti in a report from the Akron Beacon Journal this week, recently acquired catching prospect Max Ramirez is still being evaluated at the catching position. Antonetti went on to say that the organization is using the rest of this season to get a feel for Ramirez's abilities as a catcher, and then in upcoming seasons they will continue to evaluate his arm strength and defense behind the plate. Antonetti feels Ramirez has an advanced, mature approach at the plate, and because of his offensive abilities the organization wants to find out what position may suit him best long-term (he is a converted 3B).

Also, of note, Ramirez left last Saturday's game with an injured left wrist after a collision at home plate. Ramirez had the wrist x-rayed after the game, and they came back negative. He missed three games and returned to the Captains lineup as the DH on Wednesday.

Opportunity Knockers

The success up and down the Indians minor leagues this season in the outfield has been outstanding. While players like Brad Snyder and Trevor Crowe got most of the pub going into the season, others like Ryan Goleski, Brian Barton and Jordan Brown have jumped into the outfield scene.

Brown is having a very good, yet quiet, season. In his first year in the Indians system, Brown has put together a nice season at High Class-A Kinston. When outfielders Crowe, Goleski and Barton were promoted to Akron earlier in the year, the K-Tribe needed someone to take the reigns as the focal point of the offense, and Brown has delivered. To date, the 22-year old Brown is hitting .292/.355/.486 with 15 HRs and 83 RBIs.

Also, Goleski bounced back from a horrendous 2005 season and is hitting a combined .314 with 24 HRs and 98 RBIs in only 389 at bats this year at Kinston and Akron. Barton is proving that his 2005 campaign was no fluke, as he is hitting a combined .317 with 18 HRs and 72 RBIs along with 37 steals in only 391 at bats this year at Kinston and Akron.

Head of the Class

Kinston 1B Stephen Head has not had an impressive season with the batting average (.230), but he has performed well in the run production department with 14 HRs and 67 RBIs. Also, his plate discipline has been solid, as he boasts a 49:66 walk to strikeout ratio. Currently, Head is in the midst of a 37 consecutive game on-base streak. In reaching base in 37 consecutive games, he passed Lynchburg's Brian Bixler (36-game streak) as the longest streak in the Carolina League this year.

Buffalo Stampede

Buffalo's recent resurgence has them in the thick of the International League's wildcard race. In going 19-9 in their last 28 games, the Bisons (67-59) have closed the gap and are only 4 games behind wildcard leading Rochester. The Bisons have only 17 games left, but a key 4-game series the last week of the season against Rochester still gives the Bisons a chance. Amazingly, the Bisons have played well the last month even after key contributors like Jeremy Sowers, Ryan Garko, Andy Marte, Andrew Brown, Tom Mastny, Joe Inglett, and Franklin Gutierrez were plucked from the roster by the parent club.

The Bisons have been paced by excellent starting pitching performances, namely from Brian Slocum (6-2, 2.86 ERA) and Jeremy Guthrie (7-5, 3.09 ERA). Last week, Slocum took a no-hitter into the 7th inning of a game, and ended up going 6.2 innings giving up 2 hits and 2 unearned runs while striking out 8. Guthrie followed that performance up with a complete game, giving up 1 run on 5 hits and striking out 6.

Other Playoff Races

A little over two weeks remain in the minor league regular season. Here is a quick rundown of where each of the other affiliates stand:

- *Akron* (76-48) is in 1st place by 6 games in the Eastern League's Southern Division.

- *Kinston* (30-24, 77-47 overall) is in 2nd place and 4 games back in the Carolina League's Southern Division.

- *Lake County* (29-23) is in 2nd place and 7 games back in the South Atlantic League's Northern Division.

- *Mahoning Valley* (30-26) is in 1st place by 0.5 games in the NY-Penn League's Pinckney Division.

- *Burlington* (28-26) is in 3rd place and 3.5 games back in the Appalachian League's East Division.

Of note, Kinston already qualified for the playoffs due to their first half title. Kinston is still playing for something, though, as winning both halves would give Kinston an all-home series to open the playoffs against a wild-card team.

Brandon Phillips Trade Revisited

Well, maybe Jeff Stevens is worth more than a bag of balls afterall. The 22-year old right-handed pitcher acquired as the infamous player to be named later in the Brandon Phillips trade had been very impressive of late at Lake County before he was bombed Thursday night. Prior to Thursday night's game, he carried a string of 21.1 straight shutout innings into the game. The key to Stevens success has been very good command of his fastball, which has made his secondary pitches (curve and changeup) more effective. Stevens ran into trouble Thursday night, getting bombed to the tune of 7 runs in 4.2 IP. Even after the bad outing, in 12 starts at Lake County, Stevens is 6-2 with a 4.01 ERA and 1.11 WHIP to go along with 54 strikeouts in 58.1 IP.

B-Pro Talks Tribe

Baseball Prospectus minor league talent guru Kevin Goldstein mentioned a few Tribe prospects in a recent chat (thanks to colleague Steve Buffum for the heads-up and for forwarding the chat excerpts). Goldstein considered lefty reliever Tony Sipp and right-handed

reliever Tom Mastny solid relief prospects. Sipp because he has a good fastball and misses bats, and Mastny because he throws strikes, has an assortment of pitches in his arsenal, and his height allows him to get good angles on hitters. The most notable part of the chat was his comment on outfielder Trevor Crowe. Currently, he ranks Crowe as one of the top 7 centerfielders in the minors, but a move to 2B would rank him somewhere between 2nd and 4th at 2B in all the minors (assuming he handles the position adequately from a defensive standpoint).

Mahoning Valley All-Stars

Six Mahoning Valley Scrapper players were selected to the NY-Penn League All-Star game in Aderdeen, MD this past week. Mahoning sent three pitchers to the game: Josh Timlin (5-1, 2.39 ERA), Luis Valdez (6-3, 2.21 ERA), and Neil Wagner (0.75 ERA, 12 saves). Also, infielder Andy Lytle (.302, 0 HR, 17 RBIs, 10 steals), outfielder Jason Denham (.318, 0 HR, 11 RBIs) and catcher Matthew McBride (.313, 3 HRs, 23 RBIs) made the team. Lytle went hitless in two at bats, McBride doubled and scored in his lone at bat, and Denham went hitless in two at bats. On the pitching front, Valdez started the game and went 2 innings without giving up an unearned run on 1 hit, 1 walk and 2 strikeouts. Wagner pitched 1 inning allowing 1 hit, 1 walk and struckout 2. Timlin did not play.

Injury Updates

Kinston SS Brian Finegan is currently on the disabled list with a broken bone in his left foot. He has currently graduated from a hard cast to a walking boot, and is on a strict rehab program with the training staff at Akron. Unfortunately, he won't return to Kinston, even for the playoffs, as his season is over. But, if things go well, he is expected to report to the Florida Instructional League in mid-September and see limited action.

Right-handed pitcher Justin Hoyman, a 2004 2nd round pick from the University of Florida, will not pitch this season. After a very good start at Lake County in 2005 where he was 2-0 with a 3.00 ERA in nine starts, he was shutdown due to a sore shoulder. He had surgery on the shoulder to fix the problem, but will not pitch again until Spring Training.

Players of the Week

Congrats to Kinston pitcher Ryan Knippschild for earning Carolina League Pitcher of the Week honors. In two games last week, Knippschild was 2-0 with a 0.00 ERA. In 7.2 IP he only allowed 2 hits, didn't walk a batter and struckout 8.

Also, Lake County pitcher Jeff Stevens was rewarded for his recent hot pitching as he took home South Atlantic League Pitcher of the Week honors. In two games last week, Stevens was 1-0 with a 0.00 ERA. In 12 IP he only allowed 5 hits and 3 walks, and struckout 14.

Parting Shots

With the recent callup of Andrew Brown to Cleveland, Eddie Mujica is now the closer at Buffalo….Akron 1B Ryan Mulhern returned to full-time action at 1B this past week, and is wearing a brace to protect his bruised right knee….Recently signed 16-year old Australian infielder Jason Smit was named to the Australian Under-19 team They will compete in the upcoming 2006 IBAF Junior World Championships….Catcher Armando Camacaro was called up to Buffalo from Kinston to fill the backup catcher void left after Einar Diaz was traded to the Los Angeles Dodgers for cash…. Right-handed relief pitcher Dan Eisentrager was added to the Lake County roster this week. Eisentrager is recovering from surgery to remove a bone chip in his right elbow…. When Jensen Lewis joined the Akron starting rotation last week, it pushed right-hander Dan Denham to the bullpen….Akron right-handed reliever Scott Roehl was sent back to Kinston in exchange for lefty Reid Santos.