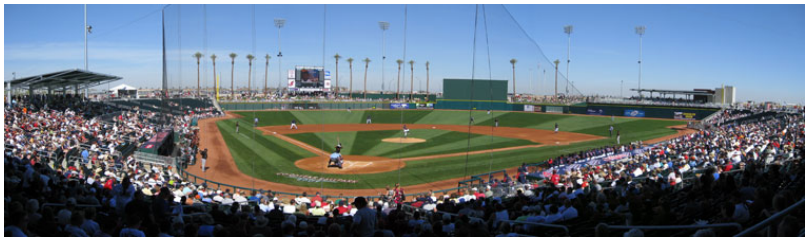

As most Tribe fans expected, the front office has all but confirmed that it will be a quiet offseason at the big league level. Fortunately for Indians fans, that lack of activity does not carry over to the farm system, where there is real, actual baseball being played! A number of Indians prospects are active in offseason leagues, and some of them are playing quite well. Let's take a look around the farm, and see who is setting themselves up for a serious look come springtime.

We'll start in the desert at the Arizona Fall League. The AFL is MLB's premier offseason prospect breeding ground. It's a great way to see top guys from all levels of MLB compete against each other, and every game is an all star game of sorts. Most of the prospects are in either AA or AAA, but there are some A ball guys as well. Now that so many 1st round picks go right up to the signing deadline, several teams send their 1st round pick from the previous June's draft to play. Bryce Harper, the #1 overall pick by the Nationals, was in Arizona playing for the Scottsdale Scorpions. The Indians sent nine prospects to play for the Peoria Javelinas, not including Columbus manager Mike Sarbaugh who was chosen by MLB to be the team's manager. The Javelinas went 20-10 and lost to the Scottsdale Scorpions 3-2 in the AFL championship game. There are few things in baseball that matter less than a team's AFL record, but it's still nice to see our guys have success down there.

Jason Kipnis, 2B: Kipnis had a slow start in AZ, and was under the Mendoza line for much of the season. By his own admission, he was hitting the ball well, they just weren't falling in for hits. He didn't let it get him down though, and closed the season on a hot streak. In his last 9 games in AZ, Kipnis went 16-34 to push his overall line to a healthy .295/.337/.628. The .628

SLG was good for 5th in the AFL, and he tied for the league lead with 11 doubles. He also popped 3 HR, had 3 triples, drove in 19 and stole two bases without being caught. His 17 XBH were the most in the circuit. Kipnis played some 3B in AZ due to the presence of fellow top prospect Dustin Ackley (who was named AFL MV). As he indicated in his blog, he hated every second of it. Don't expect a position switch to the hot corner for Kipnis anytime soon. He was the only Indian selected to the AFL Future Stars Game, where he went 1-1 with a double. He was also the only Indian selected as one of the 20 prospects who "stood out" (whatever that means) in the AFL. Any way you slice it, Kipnis is one of the Indians top-5 prospects and will likely be a consensus top-100 guy in all of baseball when the "experts" release their rankings this winter.

Cord Phelps, 2B/3B: After putting up an impressive season between Akron and Columbus in 2010, Phelps was sent to AZ to see if he could play 3B. Phel

ps played SS, 2B and a little 3B at Stanford, so the Indians wanted to see if he could handle the hot corner to increase his versatility. The reviews of his defense were mixed at best, but he definitely brought his bat with him to the desert. Phelps threw up a .367/.474/.557 with 3 HR and 10 RBI. The batting average was good for 5th in the league, and his OBP was 3rd. His OBP was buoyed by 16 BB in his 19 games played in AZ. Phelps is still seen by most scouts as a utility infielder, but he is a guy who has strong top of the order skills, and I can see him as a solid 2B in the #2 hole of a MLB lineup. He's a switch hitter who hits out of a low crouch from both sides of the plate, and because of this his hands load from a much lower point in his swing than most hitters. Despite the somewhat unorthodox stance, he consistently puts the barrel of the bat on the ball and has surprising pop. Because he doesn't look the part of a top prospect, Phelps will have to continue to prove himself at every level and won't be handed a job at any point in his career. That should be just fine with the infielder from Stanford, who was up to every challenge the Indians threw at him in 2010.

Scott Barnes, SP: Acquired from San Fran in the Ryan Garko trade, Barnes found success in

what is traditionally a hitter's league as the big lefty tied for the league lead in wins with 4 and was 3rd in the league with 28 K. Barnes posted a 3.65 ERA in 24 2/3 innings and was 4-1 in his 7 starts. He gave up a total of 10 ER, 5 of which scored in his first start of the season. The Indians wanted Barnes to work on his new slider in AZ, a pitch he started developing in mid-2010. Clearly it paid off, as Barnes was one of the most impressive pitchers in the Fall League this year with a 4/1 (28/7) K/BB ratio. The 3.65 ERA is especially impressive when you consider that the league ERA was 5.08.

Eric Berger, RP: An 8th round pick in 2008, Berger made 9 appearances out of the bullpen for the Javelinas, giving up just one ER in 11 IP. He struggled a bit with his control, walking 8 but was able to make up for it by missing bats (12 K). He was a starter this year in Akron and Columbus, and should return to that role for the Aeros in 2011.

Brian Price, RP: Price was part of the Victor Martinez trade, and had a solid year in Akron out of the bullpen with a 3.25 ERA and 69 K in 69 1/3 IP. The Indians sent Price to AZ to make up innings that he missed with a minor shoulder injury in April and work on his splitter, a 3rd pitch that he started developing last year. Price started slowly but ended the season strong. He finished the season with a 5.40 ERA in 11 2/3 innings over 9 appearances. Most of the damage was done early though, and in his last 5 outings spanning 7 IP, Price gave up just one ER. He struck out 3, walked 6 and posted a 1.38 GO/FO rate.

Also on the regular roster in Arizona were catcher **Roberto Perez** (.159/.215/.205 line in 44 at-bats), reliever **Chen Lee** (

0-1, 9.00 ERA in 6 innings 7/3 K/BB). Two Indians prospects were on the "taxi squad" (man, that Paul Brown is everywhere!) for the AFL, which means they were only eligible to play on Wednesday or Saturday throughout the season. 3B/C
Adam Abraham
(.222/.378/.306, 9 BB/8 K) and RP
Travis Turek
(5.40 ERA, 3/3 K/BB in 8 1/3 IP) still managed to contribute to the Javelinas 2nd place finish in the AFL.

There are several notable Indians playing down in the Venezuelan Winter League as well. Corner infielder **Jared Goedart** is putting up a .333/.474/.444 line with 11 BB and 11 K for his squad down south...OF **Nick Weglarz** played in 4 games, going 3-12 with 4 BB...INF
Luis Valbuena
can't hit any better in Venezuela than he could in Cleveland; he's posted a .196/.321/.293 line in 92 at bats.

INF/OF **Matt McBride** and RP **Josh Judy** (recently added to the 40-man roster) are playing in the Dominican Winter League. McBride has slugged his way to a .289/.360/.589 line, including 7 HR in 90 AB. Judy has posted a solid 1.64 ERA, struck out 8 and has not walked a batter in 11 innings of relief.