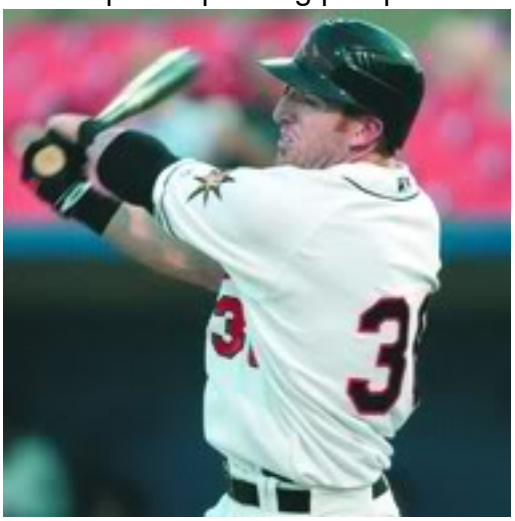
In this weeks edition of Minor Happenings, Tony chronicles the amazing comeback of Kinston outfielder Jordan Brown (pictured), who was named league MVP this week. He also hits on the transition of Fausto Carmona back to a starter, and the development of Chuck Lofgren and Adam Miller, the Indians two prized pitching prospects. This IS the best Indians minor league column in existence.



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 is currently in Buffalo watching the Bisons wrap-up their season, and chimed in on a few Tribe players this week:

On Fausto Carmona: Had a good first start the other night for Buffalo. As the start went along, he got better. His first inning he was erratic and he became frustrated, which resulted in him over-throwing. It was a microcosm of his problems he had in the bullpen at Cleveland the past month. As the rhythm of the game went along, though, Carmona settled in and regained his fastball command. The idea for now is to get him back into the starting rotation, and at Buffalo extend his outings, get him to relax, and regain some confidence before he gets called up and is inserted into the Indians starting rotation. The Indians believe that shutting him down is not the best course of action to take, and believe that continued activity and pitching more innings will

help him the most in getting out of his current funk. Carmona is expected to make several starts in September for the Indians, and then continue pitching in winter ball to accumulate another 40-50 innings. The Indians want to keep working on him since he has several fundamental flaws and has developed some bad habits of late which need to be corrected.

On Kevin Kouzmanoff: His success at the plate this season and previous seasons all comes back to two things: good pitch recognition and a short compact swing. Kouzmanoff has shown the ability to consistently square up the ball and repeat his swing path, and with his short swing is able to wait back longer on pitches. He is a very smart hitter and has a good plan at the plate and can recognize pitches very well. He has four home runs this year on 3-0 counts.

On Asdrubal Cabrera: After hitting him near the bottom of the lineup the past few weeks to let him get comfortable with his new team, the Indians recently moved him up to the #2 hole in the lineup. The Indians feel this is his ideal spot in the order as he is a switch-hitter that possesses good bat control for a 20-year old. The Indians have seen quick returns with the move, as he is more relaxed at the plate and patient, and has displayed a more confident approach.

On Matt Miller: Even though Miller is not a prospect, Farrell still commented on Miller's progress on his return from injury. At this point, Miller is not all the way back yet. With all the downtime he has had this season, he needs several more outings to increase his arm strength. His motion is fluid, and there have been no forced movements in his delivery, which is a good sign. Also, his breaking ball has good shape to it.

Carolina MVP's

From out of nowhere, Kinston outfielder Jordan Brown won the league MVP award. The award caps an amazing turnaround for Brown, as back on May 6 th he was only hitting .232 with 0 HRs and 9 RBIs in 28 games. But, as other stalwarts in the lineup like Ryan Goleski, Trevor Crowe and Brian Barton left after being promoted to Akron, Brown seemed to take it upon himself to fill the huge void left by those players. On the season, Brown is hitting .293 with 15 HRs and 87 RBIs (which lead the league). He also has seven triples and a .478 slugging

percentage, which also lead the league, and he is third in hits with 135. Brown is the first Kinston player to win the MVP award since Victor Martinez won it in 2001.

Also, lefty Chuck Lofgren was named the Carolina League Pitcher of the Year, thereby giving the Indians a clean sweep in the individual player awards. Brown, Lofgren and Brian Barton were also named post-season All-Stars.

Record Breakers

Kinston left-hander Chuck Lofgren and Akron right-hander Adam Miller are the cream of the crop as far as pitching prospects go in the Indians farm system, and this season they have done nothing but cement their position at the top. Lofgren pitched six innings of two-hit baseball earlier in the week to set a Kinston modern-day franchise record for victories by a pitcher in a season with 16. The old record was 15, set by Brian Slocum in 2004. The 16 wins by Lofgren are the most since Kinston became affiliated with the Indians in 1987, and the most since Frank Bork won 19 games for Kinston in 1962. On the year, the 6’3” lefty is 16-5 with a 2.42 ERA with 103 hits and 122 strikeouts in 134 IP.

Adam Miller continues to cruise along in the Akron rotation. In his final start of the regular season, last night Miller went 6 innings and allowed 1 run on 4 hits and struckout 7. It was Miller’s 15 th win of the year, which passed Paul Byrd's 1992 franchise record of 14 wins in a season. Also, the single-season team record for strikeouts of 149, which was set by Travis Driskill in 1996, was crushed by Miller (161). Miller ends the season with a 15-6 record and 2.75 ERA, to go along with 133 hits and 161 strikeouts in 158.1 IP.

Miller and Lofgren should be the Game 1 starters for their teams when the playoffs start next week.

Speaking of Playoffs

Akron and Kinston are in. Lake County and Buffalo are out. Mahoning Valley (35-34) is in a battle and will likely take it down to the wire as they are 3 games out of 1st. With 7 games remaining, they do sort of control their own destiny as 4 of the 7 games are against the two teams ahead of them.

Kinston will travel to Salem for Game 1 of the best-of three Carolina League Division Series on Sept. 6th, and then Game 2 and 3 will be in Kinston on Sept. 7th and 8th. Akron's opponent is not known at this time, but they also should start on Sept 6th.

Buffalo and Lake County were officially eliminated from playoff consideration from their respective leagues this past week. With the Bisons missing the playoffs this year, it is just the third time in 12 years as a Cleveland Indians affiliate Buffalo has failed to reach the postseason. Also, the Bisons two-year reign from 2004-2005 atop the International League North Division came to an end. For the Captains, since their amazing debut season in 2003 season when they went 97-43, they have failed to make the playoffs in each of the last three seasons.

Fire and Ice

At one time this season, CF/2B Trevor Crowe was blistering hot with the bat and OF Brad Snyder in a deep freeze. Over the past month, the two have seen their season's take drastic turns as now Snyder is on fire and Crowe ice cold.

In the past 10 games, Snyder is hitting a blistering .441 (15 for 34) with 3 HRs and 8 RBIs, and in August is hitting .314 (32 for 102) with 9 HRs and 20 RBIs. Crowe on the other hand is hitting

.158 with 0 HRs and 5 RBIs in his last 10 games. Apparantly, the ankle injury Crowe suffered may still be bothering him as he is only hitting .218 (24 for 110) with 1 HR and 10 RBIs in August.

Early Reports on Crowe at 2B: Not Good

Crowe made his debut at 2B about a week ago, but has bounced between CF and 2B since the Indians plan on only exposing Crowe to 2B during the remainder of the regular season, but also want to keep him sharp in CF for the playoffs. The going has been tough for Crowe early on at 2B as in the 5 games he has played at 2B, he has made 5 errors. According to Akron officials, a big reason for Crowe's early problems with the position switch is he is over-thinking and not reacting, and sitting back waiting for balls rather than being aggressive and charging them. Crowe played 6 games at 2B in college, but mostly has played the outfield since his sophomore season in high school. Farrell has repeatedly mentioned that if it is found that the position switch is hindering Crowe's path to the big leagues, they will scrap the experiment. He'll go back to CF for the playoffs, but return to 2B full-time in the Arizona Fall League this winter.

Broussard Trade Finalized

Not only did the Indians receive Shin-Soo Choo for Ben Broussard from Seattle, but the Indians also received the infamous player to be named later (PTBNL) in the deal. Late last week, we finally received that player: left-handed pitcher Shawn Nottingham.

Nottingham is an intriguing pickup in the trade. At first glance, he looks like trade filler, but when looking further it appears the Indians acquired some potential left-handed relief pitching down the road. Nottingham was drafted in the 13 th round of the 2003 draft by Seattle right out of high school (Jackson HS in Canton, OH). Nottingham does not possess a very good fastball (85-89 MPH), but does have a very good changeup and hammers the strike zone. Also, Nottingham is full of moxie and has very good poise on the mound, which is why he may be a good bullpen option down the road.

Prior to the trade, Nottingham ranked first in the California League (a hitter's league) in innings pitched (135.2), fourth in strikeouts (118), and 5th in ERA (4.17). In one appearance with Kinston, Nottingham has no decisions with a 2.25 ERA (4 IP, 6 hits, 0 walks, 2 Ks).

Dubois Honored

Buffalo outfielder Jason Dubois was named to the International League post-season All-Star team this week. Dubois has been somewhat of a forgotten man for the Indians, even after the recent roster purge and callups of several Buffalo players. He has played the entire season with Buffalo, and is hitting .276 with 22 HRs and 84 RBIs on the year, and leads the Bisons in just about every noteworthy offensive category. If he somehow manages to drive in 6 runs this weekend and gets to 90 RBIs, he would become only the 6th Bison in history to reach the 90 RBI mark.

Goodbye Burlington

Rookie level Burlington finished their season on Wednesday night with a rainout that will not be made up. The short-season rookie level Indians finished the year with a 34-33 record and in 3rd place, six games out of first of the East Division in the Appalachian League.

But, the big news was an announcement yesterday that the Indians 21-year relationship with Burlington has come to an end as the Indians will no longer field a team in Burlington nor the Appalachian League. According to a the Burlington Times-News , the major reason the Indians left is a change in the Indians player development philosophy. Since 2002, the organization has used their high draft picks on college players, which meant that most of the top picks would bypass Burlington and start in a higher league (Mahoning Valley). When the Indians started a Gulf Coast League (GCL) team this year, their need for a team in Burlington became

unnecessary since they could send younger players to the GCL.

As for season highlights, SS Jerad Head put together an impressive season hitting .246 with 10 HRs (4th in league) and 52 RBIs (1st in the league). Head signed in August 2005 as an undrafted free agent out of Washburn University (KS), and even though he is old for the league (23), he may be someone to keep an eye on next year when he probably starts at Mahoning Valley or Lake County. In other notable top 10 finishes among league leaders, 1B Felipe Garcia was tied for 9th in HRs (7) and 6th in RBIs (41). 2B Brett Kinning finished 5th in the league in steals (13), and outfielders Corteze Armstrong and Alfred Ard finished tied for 6th in steals (12). Also, left-handed pitcher James Brettl and right-hander Osiris Perez were tied for 7th in wins (5).

Dominican Indians Season Finished

The Dominican Summer League (DSL) Indians qualified for the playoffs after getting a victory in a wild one-game playoff with the DSL Blue Jays. After finishing the season at 44-27 and in a first place tie with the DSL Blue Jays, the Indians were down 3-1 in the 9th inning in the one-game playoff with the Jays. Luis Polonia Jr came through with a clutch two-run single with one out to tie it, and then Isaias Velsquez came through with the game-winner with two outs to lead the Indians to a 4-3 triumph.

The Indians squared off with the DSL Yankees in the opening round of the playoffs (3 game series). The matchup with the Yankees was the 3rd straight year the two have played each other in the postseason, and pitted the previous two league champs against one another (Indians in 2004, Yankees in 2005). The Indians took game one in 10 innings 2-1, but then dropped game two 4-0 and then game three in heartbreaking fashion as the Yankees had a walk-off series ending hit in the 9th to win it 6-5.

Notable player season statistics:

Kelvin Diaz: .382 avg, .473 ob%, 13 2Bs, 1 3B, 9 HRs, 59 RBIs

Luis Polonia Jr: .269 avg, .357 ob%, 4 2Bs, 4 3Bs, 0 HRs, 27 RBIs

Karenson Sanchez: .255 avg, .387 ob%, 9 2Bs, 2 3Bs, 6 HRs, 33 RBIs, 25 stolen bases

Anilis Martinez: 7-0, 2.19 ERA, 70 IP, 74 Ks, 1.07 WHIP

Wilfredo Ramirez: 8-1, 1.98 ERA, 81.2 IP, 70 Ks, 1.05 WHIP

Santos Frias: 4-4, 1.30 ERA, 55.1 IP, 44 Ks, 0.98 WHIP

Various Roster Moves

Right-hander Dan Denham was promoted to Buffalo from Akron….Akron infielder Eider Torres was activated from the Akron disabled list.…Pitcher Michael Finocchi was placed on the Kinston disabled list with right shoulder inflammation, and right-hander Scott Sumner was called up from Burlington to Kinston to replace him…. OF Juan Valdes demoted from Akron to Lake County….SS Ivan Ochoa was placed on the Akron disabled list with a right hamstring strain, and infielder Brandon Pinckney was called up from Kinston to replace him, and infielder Chris De La Cruz was called up from Lake County to replace Pinckney at Kinston.

Parting Shots

Hot hitting 3B prospect Kevin Kouzmanoff has played a few games for Buffalo at 1B recently….Akron suffered their worst loss in franchise history in an 18-0 loss this past week. It was so bad, backup catcher David Wallace was called upon in the 9th inning to pitch….Jason Stanford was forced to leave the game the other night with an apparent right leg injury. No word to date of what happened, and how serious the injury might be, but he obviously was well enough to be on the bench last night and get ejected from the game for chirping at the umpires….Snyder is still on pace to break the Akron single-season strikeout record. To date, with 4 games left, he has 153 strikeouts on the season which is 2 shy of the record set by Jon Van Every Last year (155)….The Indians signed three more picks from the 2006 draft: right-handed pitcher Vincent Pestano (20th round), IF Chris Nash (24th round), and right-handed pitcher Michael Pontius (43rd round)….Buffalo pitcher Jake Dittler's 12 losses are the most by a Buffalo pitcher since the Bisons became affiliated with Cleveland in 1995.

One Final Shot Across the Bow

Ramon Vazquez was placed on the Buffalo disabled list with a right groin strain. The Indians were probably too nice here, as from this corner he looked to be suffering from a severe case of no-talent all year. Seriously, with him on the disabled list and the Bisons season ending on Labor Day, FINALLY this pesky little nat may be gone. (Please?)