The best Indians minor leagues column in existence is back, and this time with several key developments from down on the farm. In the latest version of "Minor Happenings", Tony Lastoria brings us all up to date on what baseball's new collective bargaining agreement means for the Indians and gets us up to speed on the reshuffling in the Indians front office. Lastoria also provides some updates on how our players are performing in winter ball, as well as some interesting new news on a couple of the Indians top prospects.

"Minor Happenings" covers the important developments and news in the Indians farm system. 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.

Well, the season may be over, but the season never ends off the field. With the recent rule changes to the CBA, winter leagues in action, changes to the Indians decision-makers in the farm system, and so on,
Minor Happenings
has returned to get you caught up on all the "happenings" in the Indians player development system.

New CBA Helps Farm Systems

The players and owners recently agreed on a new five year Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA), and there were some changes that directly affect the minor leagues and Amateur Draft. These changes are highlighted below:

Draft Pick Compensation: There was no change in compensation for Type A free agents, as the team that loses a Type A player still gets a 1st or 2nd round pick from the signing club and a compensatory pick between the 1st and 2nd rounds. But, a tweak made to the compensation process for Type B free agents will help teams keep some of their draft picks when they sign a free agent.

Effective immediately, Type B free agents were modified so that teams that lose Type B free agents now only get a sandwich pick between the first and second rounds and no longer receive a pick from the signing club.

Also, for players rated at their position, Type A free agents are now only the top 1-20% (previously 1-30%), Type B free agents are the top 21-40% (previously 31-50%), and Type C free agents were eliminated (previously 51-60%). The changes in the percentages actually will take effect next off-season.

Signing 1st round picks: A new rule has been implemented where if a team is unable to sign a 1st round pick from the current year's draft, that team will get a compensation pick that is virtually the same pick in the following draft. For example: if the Indians took a player 10th overall in 2006, and were unable to sign him, they would get the 11th overall pick in the 2007 Amateur Draft.
This same process holds true for 2nd round picks, and for 3rd round picks the team would receive a pick between the 3rd and 4th rounds.
These changes will provide clubs more leverage in drafting and signing their players since they now have an option to walk away from a player knowing they get that pick back in the following year's draft.
Although, it should be noted, that the following year's compensation pick is not subject to compensation, so if in the example above the Indians 11th overall pick in 2007 went unsigned, they get no compensation for the 2008 Amateur Draft.

Uniform signing date: August 15th is now the final date all non-college senior draft picks from the current year's draft must be signed by before the team loses rights to the player and the player can re-enter the draft the following year. Also, the junior college and draft-and-follow rules have been eliminated.

Rule 5 Draft changes: A significant change to the CBA which directly affects the minor leagues is the update to Rule 5 eligibility where teams have been given one extra year to protect players. This rule change is immediate, and is in effect for the upcoming 2006 Rule 5 Draft. With the new change, players signed at 19 or older now get four years before they become Rule 5 eligible, and players signed at age 18 or younger get five years before they become Rule 5 eligible (previously it was three and four years respectively). The change allows teams to keep their own prospects longer, provides more flexibility with their roster, and helps prevent teams from having to push players onto the 40-man roster before they are ready.

Speaking of the Rule 5 Draft

With the changes to player eligibility, players like Max Ramirez, Asdrubal Cabrera, Scott Lewis, Adam Miller, Wyatt Toregas, and Tony Sipp no longer need to be protected this year as

they are no longer eligible for the draft. With that, the top 10 players in the Indians system that will be available for selection in the Rule 5 draft this year are listed below:

Ryan Goleski OF
Sean Smith RHP
Nick Pesco RHP
Reid Santos LHP
Ben Francisco OF
Ryan Mulhern 1B
JD Martin RHP
Argenis Reyes IF
Jim Ed Warden RHP
Jon Van Every OF

Of that list, only Goleski, Smith, Santos , Francisco and Martin will likely be considered for roster protection. The Indians get a big benefit from the recent rule changes in that previously it looked like Francisco would be the odd man out for roster protection, but now appears to be virtually a lock to be protected along with Martin. Goleski and

Santos
also will get strong consideration, and are likely protected.

Farewell Farrell

In somewhat of a surprise, Indians Director of Player Development John Farrell left the Indians to take a job as the Boston Red Sox pitching coach. Farrell had signed as the Indians Farm Director on November 1, 2001 on Shapiro's first official day on the job as Tribe GM, and held the post for the last five seasons. Prior to joining the Indians, Farrell was an Assistant Coach and Pitching/Recruiter Coordinator for Oklahoma State University for five seasons from 1997-2001.

Prior to the end of the season, there were no rumblings that Farrell would be leaving the Indians, and in a recent radio interview Indians GM Mark Shapiro even admitted he was sort of surprised by Farrell's departure. But, according to Farrell, the lure of getting back into the dugout was too much for him to pass up. Farrell's friendship with Boston Red Sox Manager Terry Francona and Farm Director Mike Hazen carried a lot of weight with his decision to leave and go to

Boston

.

But, something to consider, is Farrell may have left because he was getting the impression that Mark Shapiro was going to be retained as GM after the 2007 season. Shapiro's contract expires after the end of the upcoming 2007 season, and reportedly Farrell and Assistant General Manager Chris Antonetti were the top candidates to replace Shapiro if he left. Considering that Farrell bolted, and some reports are surfacing that the Indians and Shapiro are getting warmer on a contract extension, maybe it shouldn't be such a surprise he left. Farrell probably got the vibe Shapiro will be extended, so he left for another opportunity.

New Guy In Charge

The Indians did not need to go far to find Farrell's successor, as Director of Latin Operations Ross Atkins was named as the new Director of Player Development. Atkins has been with the Indians his entire professional career on and off the field, as he was actually drafted by the Indians in 1995 out of

Wake

Forest
and pitched in the Indians minor league system for five years (1995-1999).
After he retired in 1999, he took on a role as an Indians pitching coach in the Florida Instructional League in 2000 and 2001, and worked hand-in-hand with Danys Baez as a translator and English instructor in 2000 while Baez adapted to the American culture.

His transition to his new role should be relatively smooth because of his prior experience with the player development side within the US . Prior to becoming the Director of Latin Operations in August 2003, Atkins was an assistant under Farrell from 2001-2003, so he has a very good understanding of the job. Under his old role as Director of Latin Operations, Atkins efforts had primarily focused on overseeing the academies in the

Dominican Republic
and

Venezuela
, as well as all budgetary, amateur scouting, and player development activities.

As the Director of Player Development, Atkins will oversee the Indians' six farm teams, as well as the Latin American operations. Additionally, in his new role Atkins will most likely take on some of Farrell's old responsibilities which included assisting and supervising the signing of minor league free agents, and assisting Indians GM Mark Shapiro on all major league player acquisitions. At this time, there is no known successor to take over Atkin's former role of

Director of Latin Operations, but the guess from this corner is Lino Diaz might be given the promotion (he was Atkins' assistant the past few years).

Indians Also Lose Scouting Director

In addition to losing Farrell, the Indians also lost their Director of Professional Scouting DeJon Watson to the Dodgers. The Dodgers hired Watson to fill their vacant Director of Player Development role, and he will be in charge of the Dodgers farm system.
No word yet on who will replace Watson as the Director of Pro Scouting, but an early guess is Don Poplin may get the nod.

Farrell's former assistant Mike Hazen left the Indians last year to become the Red Sox Director of Player Development. With the recent exodus of Farrell, Hazen and Watson the strength of the Indians front office and scouting is being shown, and very much resembles when some of former Tribe GM John Hart's top assistants were popping up as GM's and in other important roles with various teams.

Burks Staying Put

While Farrell and Watson have left for more challenging opportunities and greener pastures, Special Assistant Ellis Burks has elected to stay with the Indians after being offered the first-base coach job for the Colorado Rockies. Besides being comfortable working directly with Indians GM Mark Shapiro, Burks also preferred the more flexible schedule his Special Assistant role with the Indians provides.

In his role as Special Assistant, his primary role is to work with and evaluate outfielders in the Indians farm system. In addition, Burks assists with instruction and development of both major league and minor league players in Spring Training, and assists Shapiro with personnel decisions.

Former Director's Cuts

Farrell might be gone, but he did offer up a few nuggets on some Tribe prospects prior to leaving:

On Wyatt Toregas: Farrell mentioned that Toregas was up with the Indians in September to get a firsthand look at the atmosphere and how players prep for games. To regas actually sat behind home plate at Indians games and watched the action while charting games.
Right now, the Indians are working with Toregas on blocking balls in the dirt and how to smother and control them.

On Max Ramirez: Ramirez is a disciplined hitter with a very advanced approach to hitting. Goi ng forward, the Indians focus will be on developing Ramirez's receiving skills and game calling.

On Sung-Wei Tseng: Farrell mentioned that Tseng will start 2007 at Kinston . He has a compact build, throws right-handed with average velocity, and has good control of his body throughout his delivery.

Indians Put Kibosh on Crowe Move to 2B

Prior to leaving, Farrell and the Indians decided to nix the 2B experiment for top Indians prospect Trevor Crowe. The general feeling was that it would take at least two years for him to become adequate at the position defensively, and when weighing this with where he is at currently as an offensive player, they just did not want to slow down Crowe's progress.
Crowe even admitted he never seemed to get comfortable at 2B as he was thinking too much, rather than reacting like he does when he plays in the outfield.

By moving back into the outfield for good, Crowe could very well figure into the outfield mix in

Cleveland
sometime in 2007 depending on his performance, as well as injuries or performance issues with someone at the major league level.
According to
Baseball America
, scouts from other teams view Crowe as a player that can "hit for average with some pop" and has "excellent plate discipline and pitch recognition."
Currently, Crowe is playing left field in the Arizona Fall League (AFL), but mostly because Red Sox big-time prospect Jacoby Ellsbury occupies the spot.
Crowe will play CF next year in the minors, but with Sizemore firmly planted in CF for the Indians, the experience in LF for Crowe in the AFL will only help him as that is the position he most likely plays when/if he becomes a regular in Cleveland.

JD Martin Shutdown

JD Martin didn't last long in the Florida Instructional League (FIL). The Indians had planned to evaluate his arm strength and command while he pitched in the FIL, but after he began experiencing some tenderness in his elbow and also pulled a groin muscle, the Indians shut him down. Martin is still
rehabbing from Tommy John surgery in 2005, and pitched in the second half of the season on a rehab assignment with several Tribe farm clubs.
In a combined 44.1 IP at

Mahoning

Valley

,

Kinston
and

Akron
, the tall, lanky righty went 1-2 with a 2.03 ERA in 44.1 IP and held opposing batters to a .190 average.
Martin is one of those players on the bubble to be protected from the Rule 5 Draft, and almost certainly will be protected (especially with the new rules in place).

Award Winners

Kevin Kouzmanoff and Adam Miller were recently honored by the Indians as the top players in their minor league system. Kouzmanoff was the recipient of the 2006 Lou Boudreau Award, which goes to the top position player in the system. Miller was the recipient of the 2006 Bob Feller Award, which goes to the organization's top minor league pitcher.

Both players persevered in their recovery from serious injuries in 2005, as Kouzmanoff missed almost two months of the 2005 season with a back injury, and Miller (who won the award in 2004) suffered an elbow injury that forced him to miss pretty much the first two months of the 2005 season. At Akron and Buffalo , Kouzmanoff combined to hit .379 with 22 HRs and 75 RBIs in only 94 games and 346 at bats. Mil
ler went 15-6 with a 2.75 ERA in 26 games at

Akron
, and was the Eastern League Pitcher of the Year.

League Top Prospects

Baseball America recently completed a Top 20 Prospect list for each league in the minors, and the Indians were well represented. Here are the Indians six affiliates, and who made the list in the respective league:

- *Gulf Coast League (GCL Indians):* None
- *NY-Penn League (Mahoning Valley Scrappers):* C Matt McBride (#3), RHP Neil Wagner (#20)
- *South Atlantic League (Lake County Captains):* OF John Drennen (#12)
- *Carolina League (Kinston Indians):* LHP Chuck Lofgren (#1), OF Trevor Crowe (#4), LHP Scott Lewis (#10), OF Brian Barton (#16)
- *Eastern League (Akron Aeros):* RHP Adam Miller (#4), OF Trevor Crowe (#12), 3B Kevin

Kouzmanoff (#13)

- *International League (Buffalo Bisons):* LHP Jeremy Sowers (#3),3B Andy Marte (#8)

In addition to doing their League Top Prospects, *Baseball America* also recently compiled a top prospect listing by position. Once again, the Indians were well represented:

Top 10 Catchers: Matt McBride (#9)
Top 10 Third-Basemen: Kevin Kouzmanoff (#8)
Top 20 Right-handed Starters: Adam Miller (#7)
Top 12 Left-handed Starters: Chuck Lofgren (#7)
Top 5 Closer Prospects: Tony Sipp (#2)

If you have been reading *Minor Happenings* in the past, you probably are familiar with most of these players. The two unknowns in this list are probably McBride and Wagner. Mc Bride was considered probably the best all-around catcher in the 2006 Amateur Draft, and figures to be a solid backstop who can hit and also be a strong leader.
Wagner was taken in the 2005 Amateur Draft, and is a potential closer in the making.
His fastball consistently hovers in the 95-97 MPH range, he has very good command of it, but he has had trouble developing a useful secondary pitch.

Indians Minor League Free Agents

With the conclusion of the World Series, the off-season is officially underway. With that, free agency and trades will start to heat up.
Many fans are aware who the major league free agents are, but here is a listing of the minor league free agents:

http://www.baseballamerica.com/today/minors/news/262709.html

Here are the Indians minor league free agents: 2B Jason Alfaro, 2B Jared Sandberg, SS Ivan Ochoa, SS Eider Torres, OF Dennis Malave, RHP Rob Bell, LHP Vic Darensbourg.

Winter Ball Update

Arizona Fall League (AFL)- The Indians have several players playing in the AFL. Here is a quick update on how some of the Indians prospects in the Arizona Fall League are performing, statistics-wise (through 10/29):

Joe Inglett (2B)- .481/.531/.481 (13-27), 0 2Bs, 0 3Bs, 0 HRs, 2 RBIs
Kevin Kouzmanoff (3B): .429/.487/.743 (15-35), 5 2Bs, 0 3Bs, 2 HRs, 8 RBIs
Javi Herrera (C)- .429/.600/.500 (6-14), 1 2B, 0 3Bs, 0 HRs, 1 RBI
Trevor Crowe (OF)- .348/.436/.413 (16-46), 1 2B, 1 3B, 0 HRs, 8 RBIs, 2 stolen bases
Reid Santos (LHP)- 0-1, 6 games, 0.00 ERA, 6.1 IP, 4 Ks, 1.11 WHIP
Kyle Collins (RHP)- 0-0, 6 games, 9.00 ERA, 5.0 IP, 6 Ks, 2.40 WHIP
Tony Sipp (LHP)- 0-0, 5 games, 7.71 ERA, 4.2 IP, 6 Ks, 1.71 WHIP
Jake Dittler (RHP)- 0-1, 2 games, 11.25 ERA, 4.0 IP, 4 Ks, 2.25 WHIP
Ryan Edell (LHP)*- 0-0, 2 games, 4.76 ERA, 5.2 IP, 3 Ks, 1.41 WHIP
* Edell replaced Dittler on the roster.

Latin Winter Leagues- Play in the Dominican, Venezuela, and Mexican Winter League's are under way. Here are some of the stats on noteworthy players (through 10/29):

Ryan Garko (1B): .158 avg (6-38), 1 2B, 0 3Bs, 0 HRs, 2 RBIs
Wyatt Toregas (C): .344 (11-32), 6 2Bs, 0 3Bs, 0 HRs, 4 RBIs
Asdrubal Cabrera (SS): .250/.270/.278 (9-36), 1 2B, 0 3Bs, 0 HRs, 2 RBIs
Ben Francisco (OF): .277/.356/.462 (18-65), 2 2Bs, 0 3Bs, 3 HRs, 10 RBIs, 2 stolen bases
Fausto Carmona (RHP): 0-0, 2 games, 3.38 ERA, 8.0 IP, 9 Ks, .188 BAA
Jeremy Guthrie (RHP): 0-0, 2 games, 4.00 ERA, 9.0 IP, 4 Ks, .226 BAA
Jim Ed Warden (RHP): 0-0, 6 games, 3.85 ERA, 4.2 IP, 4 Ks, .143 BAA
Albert Vargas (RHP): 0-1, 3 games, 6.35 ERA, 11.1 IP, 6 Ks, .302 BAA

Hawaii Winter League- The Indians only have two players playing in the Hawaii Winter League, infielder Rodney Choy Foo and right-handed pitcher Scott Roehl. Through 10/29, Choy Foo is hitting .294/.390/.426 (20 for 68) with 2 HRs and 11 RBIs in 19 games, and in 9 appearances (14.0 IP) Roehl has a 3.21 ERA and has held opposing batters to a .255 average.

Coming Soon

The ClevelandFan.com's first foray into the world of ranking the Indians top prospects is on the horizon. Be on the lookout for that sometime in mid-November, as well as a November update of *Minor Happenings* sometime in late-November.