



International League News & Notes



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BUFFALO BISONS

FORMER HERD RELIEVER IN METS CAMP: The New York Mets added LHP **Ron Villone** to their spring training camp roster. The 39-year old reliever signed a minor league deal with the Mets. Villone is a former Buffalo Bison, having pitched with the team during their 1998 Governors' Cup Championship run. That season he was 2-2 with a 2.01 ERA. He also ranked 2nd on the team with seven saves and 20 games finished. Villone has seen action in one spring training game, with a scoreless inning of work.

BIDDING THE GAME ADIEU: It could be that former Bisons and Mets outfielder **Moises Alou** has played his last baseball game. The 18-year veteran had hinted that his career would end with his participation with the Dominican Republic team in the World Baseball Classic. The DR was eliminated from pool play because of a pair of losses to the Netherlands. Alou was 0-2 in the tournament. Alou hit .273 with five home runs and 31 RBI in 75 games with the Bisons in 1990. He hit 332 career major league home runs, including 13 in 102 games with the New York Mets (2007-08).

THE METS BASEBALL CLASSIC: The 2009 World Baseball Classic definitely has a New York Mets feel to it. A total of 15 Mets players are participating in the event, and that's not including ace LHP **Johan Santana**. While the list includes stars like **Jose Reyes** and **David Wright**, it also consists of minor leaguers such as RHP **Elmer Dessens** (Mexico), RHP **Nelson Figueroa** (Puerto Rico) and OF **Jesus Feliciano** (Puerto Rico). Dessens was 10-2 with a 4.02 ERA in 20 games in the Mexican League last year while Figueroa was 4-7 with a 4.43 ERA with Triple-A New Orleans in 2008. Feliciano hit .308 with three home runs and 55 RBI in 139 games with the Zephyrs last season.

CHARLOTTE KNIGHTS

TOP PROSPECTS MAKING CASE TO START WITH KNIGHTS: The 8th overall selection in the 2008 first year player draft, **Gordon Beckham**, is quickly looking like a player that won't need much seasoning in the Minor Leagues. Despite playing only a handful of games at Class-A Kannapolis in 2008, Beckham is making a case to possibly begin the season at the Triple-A level in Charlotte. The power hitting shortstop has played in eight Cactus League games so far and has gone 6-18 (.333) with a slugging percentage of .889. He also has 2 home runs and 4 doubles. Beckham was a first-team All-American at the University of Georgia in 2008. The other top prospect looking to start the season at Charlotte is 2007 first round pick **Aaron Poreda**. The hard throwing left-hander has gone 1-0 with a 2.57 ERA in two Cactus League appearances. Poreda is the number-three ranked prospect in the White Sox organization.

WELCOME TO AMERICA: Knights fans may get a chance to see **Dayan Viciedo** this season. Viciedo just celebrated his 20th birthday this week and has had an amazing year. Viciedo signed a four-year contract with the White Sox in the offseason after defecting from his native Cuba. Viciedo did not play baseball in 2008 because of his defection. Viciedo has been nicknamed "The Cuban Tank" by White Sox manager **Ozzie Guillen** and is considered a very raw player. Viciedo is a power hitting third baseman who has already hit 2 home runs in just 7 Cactus League games.

WE'VE GOT THE ARMS: In addition to possibly having Poreda on their pitching staff, the Knights could also feature IL veterans **Lance Broadway** (11-7, 4.16 ERA), **Jack Egbert** (4-12, 4.65 ERA), former Pirates first round pick **John Van Benschoten** (7-4, 3.92 ERA) and **Wes Whisler** (12-10, 3.81 ERA). The club may also have former Yankees first round picks **Jeff Marquez** (6-7, 4.69 ERA) and **Clayton Richard** (6-0, 2.45 ERA). The Knights were 6th in the IL in ERA in 2008.

COLUMBUS CLIPPERS

CANNIZARO CONTINUES CLEVELAND POWER SURGE: On Monday, former Clipper of the Year **Andy Cannizaro** (2006) went 3-4 with a double and a home run against the White Sox. It was Cannizaro's first home run of the spring, as the Indians have collectively hit an American League best 18 long balls. Cannizaro is coming off a career high 4 HR season in 2008, smacking 3 HR in only 84 AB after an August 4 trade to the Indians organization. Prior to his outburst with Buffalo last season, he had been averaging a home run every 206.2 AB at the minor league level. If Cannizaro plays for the Clippers this season, he will be the first player to have been a Clipper as a Yankees' (2005-06) and Indians' affiliate.

FORMER BUCKEYE COMPETING FOR FINAL SPOT: LHP **Scott Lewis** is in the running for Cleveland's #5 spot in the starting rotation. In 2008 he saw his first big league duty, going 4-0 with a 2.63 ERA in four starts during September. So far this spring he is off to a rocky start, posting a 7.11 ERA through three games (6.1 IP). Lewis, who attended The Ohio State University from 2002-04, will likely start the year in Columbus if he doesn't make the Indians. He has only four career starts at the Triple-A level.

LOVULLO REBOUNDED FROM BROKEN BAT: Clippers manager **Torey Lovullo** received the first scare of spring training when outfielder **Trevor Crowe**'s maple bat was shattered in a March 2 game against the Rockies. The sawed-off bat hit the skipper above his left eye, leaving a gash that required nine stitches. Lovullo was back to work the next day, but was unable to participate in team picture day earlier this week due to the lingering cut and black eye.

DURHAM BULLS

FIGHT FOR FIFTH: Several former and potential Bulls are fighting for the fifth spot in the Rays rotation. Righties **Jason Hammel** and **Jeff Niemann** as well as lefties **David Price** and **Carlos Hernandez** are hoping to join the quartet of **James Shields**, **Scott Kazmir**, **Matt Garza** and **Andy Sonnanstine**. Hammel and Niemann, both former Bulls, are out of options. Price, the top pitching prospect in baseball, has options remaining while Hernandez, a former Astros top prospect, is signed to a minor league contract. Hammel or Niemann would have to pass through waivers to be part of the Durham club this season, an unlikely scenario.

BULLISH ON DURHAM: Tampa Bay did make its first set of cuts in spring training this week. Lefty pitcher **James Houser**, who spent last year starting for Montgomery, was optioned to Durham, and probably will be a starter for the Bulls this year. Righty **Chad Orvella**, who's coming off shoulder surgery, also was sent to minor league camp this week. Orvella is expected to be part of the Durham bullpen.

OUTFIELD NOT AS CROWDED: Injuries in spring training will impact Durham's outfield at the start of the 2009 season. **B.J. Upton** is coming off shoulder surgery, and it's not clear if he'll start for Tampa Bay on Opening Day in Boston, or whether he'll be on the disabled list. **Matt Joyce**, acquired in the **Edwin Jackson** trade, has been bothered by a calf injury and hasn't played in a spring training game yet. In addition, **Fernando Perez** suffered a dislocated left wrist Tuesday trying to make a diving catch. He was vying for a reserve spot with Tampa Bay, but is now expected to miss three months.

GWINNETT BRAVES

TOMMY HANSON MAKES SPLASH WITH SPRING DEBUT: Rated the No. 1 prospect in the Braves organization by *Baseball America*, **Tommy Hanson** did not disappoint in his first start in Major League camp. The 6'6" right-hander struck out the side in the opening frame against Panama on March 3. Hanson, 22, threw 23 of 29 pitches for strikes in his first two innings before allowing two singles, a walk and one unearned run in the third. With the Atlanta's five-man rotation in place with **Derek Lowe**, **Javier Vasquez**, **Jair Jurrjens**, **Kenshin Kawakami** and **Tom Glavine**, all indications are that Hanson will open the season with Triple-A Gwinnett. Said Atlanta General Manager **Frank Wren**: "He's surely not disappointed in what we've seen so far, but the facts are he hasn't pitched in Triple-A. He hasn't pitched at the major league level yet. If you have the opportunity, and there's not a need to rush a young player, it's probably always more prudent to be cautious."

ROTATION, OUTFIELD CROWDED WITH YOUNG TALENT: It's not just **Tommy Hanson** who will likely begin the season in Gwinnett thanks to a jam-packed roster in Atlanta. Starters **Jo-Jo Reyes**, **Charlie Morton**, **Francisley Bueno** and **Jorge Campillo**, all of whom have Major League experience, will likely make up the majority of the G-Braves' rotation. **Josh Anderson** is out of options and is a likely fit in Atlanta for the centerfield position, but **Jordan Schafer** and **Gregor Blanco** are still competing for that spot. Either Schafer or Blanco should wind up in Gwinnett for part of 2009. Schafer is rated the No. 3 prospect in the Braves organization by *Baseball America*. Blanco is the starting center fielder for Venezuela in the World Baseball Classic. **Brandon Jones** will likely return to the Triple-A outfield with Atlanta's acquisition of left fielder **Garret Anderson**. Jones ranked 4th on the team with 52 RBI for Triple-A Richmond last season.

GWINNETT STADIUM GOES GREEN: Over the weekend of March 7-8, crews from Precision Turf, LLC, finished laying the fresh sod that will become the playing surface at Gwinnett Stadium. The event, which was attended by more than a dozen media outlets in the greater Gwinnett County area, marked one of the final steps toward the G-Braves' new ballpark being ready for opening day April 17. The field features a state-of-the-art, recycled-water irrigation system that employs more than 10,000 feet of drainage pipe beneath a filtration system of sand and stone. Gwinnett Braves General Manager **Bruce Baldwin** estimated that Gwinnett Stadium is "about 95 percent" complete.

INDIANAPOLIS INDIANS

TAKING ON THE WORLD: Six former Indianapolis Indians were selected to represent six different countries in the 2009 World Baseball Classic. Headlining the group is current Pirate and former Tribe standout RHP **Ian Snell**, who tossed the Indians first no-hitter at Victory Field on May 15, 2005. Snell is a member of the starting staff for Team Puerto Rico. Another former Tribe pitcher, who is taking part in the 2009 WBC is **Dave Davidson**, who is representing his home country of Canada. The 6'1", 195-pound lefty was also a member of Team Canada in the 2008 Summer Olympics, where he pitched a total of 5.1 scoreless innings. In 2009, Team Canada was placed in Pool C of the World Baseball Classic along with teams from the USA, Italy and Venezuela. Joining Davidson in Pool C representing team USA is fellow southpaw **John Grabow**. The 6'2", 205-pound reliever turned in a stellar season out of the Pirates' bullpen last season, amassing a 6-3 record, 2.84 ERA and four saves. Veteran journeyman catcher **Henry Blanco** rounds out the group of former Indians that appeared in Pool C of the WBC, returning for a second go-around with Team Venezuela. Blanco was instrumental in Venezuela's win over team USA in this year's WBC, launching a double and home run to help lead his home country to a 5-3 win. Along with Blanco, former Tribe LHP **Oliver Perez** and INF **Yurendell de Caster** are also making return appearances to the WBC, with Perez returning to Team Mexico and de Caster to Team Netherlands. Perez, now a member of the New York Mets starting rotation, tossed four scoreless innings in the 2006 WBC, while de Caster helped lead the Netherlands to a first round upset of the Dominican Republic in this year's Classic.

EVAN NOT SO MEEK: Last year's Indianapolis Indians July Player of the Month, **Evan Meek**, is making an excellent case to be a member of the Pittsburgh Pirates 2009 bullpen. Though Meek struggled early in his appearances with the Tribe in 2008, he turned things around with a dominating July, including a team best 17.2 consecutive scoreless inning streak. The right-handed reliever then turned heads in the 2008 offseason with 13 saves and a 2.93 ERA in the 2008 Mexican Summer League. Meek has since dominated with three saves over seven scoreless innings to begin the 2009 Spring Training season, helping to lead the Pirates to an impressive 8-4 start in pre-season baseball.

ALL ABOARD! The Indianapolis Indians have welcomed a new member to the Board of Directors, **Jim Devellano**. Devellano is also currently serving as the Senior Vice President for both the Detroit Red Wings and Detroit Tigers. This is his eighth season with the Tigers, 27th with the Red Wings organization and 42nd year in the National Hockey League. The 65-year-old is an owner of seven Stanley Cup rings (NY Islanders 1980-82, Red Wings 1997-98, 2002, 2008). Devellano was also instrumental in helping to bring the 1987 NHL Entry Draft to the U.S. for the first time, as well as aiding the League in developing the current overtime format and pioneering the scouting and signing of European players.

LEHIGH VALLEY IRONPIGS

CITY OF BROTHERLY KOP-LOVE: One projected member of the IronPigs bullpen is former Arizona hurler **Mike Koplove**, who -- in parts of seven ML seasons with Arizona and Cleveland -- has gone 15-7 with a 3.82 ERA in 222 career games. The new organization offers a trip home for the Philadelphia native, who was born and raised in the Philly suburbs and graduated from Chestnut Hill Academy. An avid Philadelphia sports fan, Koplove earned the win in his first career appearance at Veterans Stadium (May 13, 2003).

THE RETURN OF HOGS 'HONDO': After his contract was sold to the Korean League late last season, RHP **John Wayne Ennis** has made his return to the Lehigh Valley and, most probably, the International League. Ennis initially signed Feb. 25 with the Lancaster Barnstormers of the independent Atlantic League, but then accepted a minor league deal to rejoin the Phillies on March 3. He started the 2008 season with the IronPigs, going 4-3 with a 3.67 ERA in 40 relief appearances and a team-leading seven holds.

HAPPIER THAN PIGS IN SEATS?: The IronPigs put single-game tickets on sale for the first time beginning at 12:01 a.m. on Saturday, February 28 -- and wound up selling more tickets in Day One of Year Two than they did during their inaugural season. The team sold just shy of 10,000 tickets -- nearly 1,000 tickets more than were sold prior to the 2008 season (which also included an Exhibition Game against the Philadelphia Phillies; a luxury not available in 2009). Lehigh Valley has also eclipsed its 2008 season ticket total for the upcoming campaign.

NO BO? DEGS TAKES A RIDE FROM THE READING: The Pigs have added long-time Reading Phillies play-by-play voice **Steve Degler** as a color analyst for all broadcasts on the IronPigs TV Network. Degler will team with returning members **Mike Zambelli**, **Troy Hein**, **Matt Provence** and **Meredith Marakovits** on the IronPigs TV Network. Last season's color analyst, former Major Leaguer **Ricky Bottalico**, is expected to join the broadcasts for both the IronPigs and R-Phils on a limited basis. Degler, the longest tenured broadcaster in the Eastern League, will also continue as play-by-play announcer for all 20 televised R-Phils games on their Service Electric Cable TV2 Sports broadcasts.

LOUISVILLE BATS

OPENING DAY ROSTER: On Opening Day a season ago the Bats returned just four players from their 2007 Opening Day roster. While RHP **Homer Bailey** is the only player who could make three straight Opening Day rosters, there are as many as nine players (including Bailey, LHP **Matt Maloney**, LHP **Adam Pettyjohn**, INF **Kevin Barker**, INF **Paul Janish**, INF **Adam Rosales**, OF **Drew T. Anderson**, OF **Chris Dickerson**) that could make back-to-back appearances on Louisville's Opening Day roster.

FORMER LOUISVILLE PLAYERS IN THE WBC: Several former Louisville players are participating in the 2009 World Baseball Classic. **Johnny Cueto**, who played for the Bats in 2007, and **Jung Keun Bong**, who played for the Bats in 2004, both recorded victories for their squads in the first round. Cueto recorded the only victory for the Dominican Republic, pitching 4.2 innings and allowing zero off of three hits, while striking out five. Bong has pitched in two games for Korea and has yet to allow a run in 8.2 innings of work. INF **Joey Votto**, INF **Adam Dunn**, OF **Chris Denorfia** and INF **Jorge Cantu** all had tremendous showings in the first round, batting a combined .462 with 14 runs, nine doubles, four home runs and 12 runs batted in. Votto, who played for the Bats in 2007, batted .556 with two runs, two doubles, one home run and two runs batted in for Canada. Dunn, who played for the RiverBats in 2001, batted .500 with six runs scored, two home runs and three runs batted in for the USA. Denorfia, who played for the Bats in 2005 and 2006, batted .400 with two runs, three doubles and two runs batted in for Italy. Cantu, who played for the Bats in 2007, batted .467 with four runs, four doubles, one home run and five runs batted in for Mexico.

IT'S GETTING CLOSE: It is hard to believe but the Louisville Bats are just five days away from starting their spring training schedule. They open on March 17 with the Baltimore Orioles' Triple-A Affiliate, the Norfolk Tides. The Bats will play 14 spring training games and conclude the schedule on April 2 against the Tampa Bay Rays' affiliate, the Durham Bulls. Louisville opens the regular season on April 9 at Louisville Slugger Field against the Columbus Clippers. The Clippers are in their first year affiliated with the Cleveland Indians.

NORFOLK TIDES

FORMER TIDES A BIG PART OF CLASSIC: A total of 18 current or former Tides are on a roster for the ongoing World Baseball Classic. The 18 players represent eight different nations, with four players from Venezuela, three from Puerto Rico, two from Australia, Canada, the Dominican Republic, Italy and the United States, and one from Mexico. Three players that played for the Tides in 2008 are appearing in the Classic, as pitcher **Craig Anderson** is representing Australia, outfielder **Adam Stern** is on Team Canada, and infielder **Mike Costanzo** made Team Italy's roster.

POTENTIAL TIDES BATTERS SHINING IN GRAPEFRUIT LEAGUE: Several players who may begin the season in Norfolk have had an excellent start to spring training. Infielder **Scott Moore**, who played 78 games for the Tides last season, has hit .435 (10-23) with two home runs and five RBI in 11 games for the Orioles, and he leads the club with 20 total bases thus far. Second on the club in total bases is *Baseball America's* top overall prospect, catcher **Matt Wieters**. Wieters has 15 total bases thus far and has hit .409 (9-22) with a homer and five RBI. Other potential Tides having fantastic springs include infielder **Justin Turner** (.300 average, 1 HR, 5 RBI), infielder **Blake Davis** (.417 average, 1 RBI, 2 SB) and 2008 Eastern League Triple Crown Winner **Luis Montanez** (.320 average, 4 RBI, SB).

NORFOLK HURLERS MAKING THEIR PITCH: **Radhames Liz**, **Hayden Penn** and **Chris Waters** combined to start 52 games for Norfolk last season, and each member of the trio is attempting to make the Orioles starting rotation this year. Liz has gone 1-0 with a 2.57 ERA (2 ER, 7.0 IP) in three games for the Orioles, while Penn has gone 0-1 with a 3.86 ERA (2 ER, 4.2 IP) in two outings and Waters is 1-0 with a 4.76 ERA (3 ER, 5.2 IP) in three games pitched. The O's currently have three openings in their starting rotation after #1 starter **Jeremy Guthrie** and #2 starter **Koji Uehara**.

PAWTUCKET RED SOX

REPORT FROM THE FORT: **Ron Johnson**, who begins his fifth season managing the PawSox in 2009, his 10th season in the Red Sox organization, and his 31st straight year in professional baseball, enjoys the early parts of spring training because it gives him a chance to see some of the new players who could appear at McCoy Stadium this season as well as some of the veterans who helped the PawSox to an 85-58 record and a Wild Card berth in the IL playoffs last season. "Everything's going really good," Johnson said of the early days of camp. "It's been really interesting to me so far, as far as the talent of players we have out here. We had a really good ball club last year in Pawtucket and we had a good ball club in the major leagues. It's always exciting for me because I get to see these guys coming up from Double-A like (closer) **Daniel Bard**, (outfielder) **Zach Daeges**, and (LHP) **Kris Johnson** -- and it's very impressive. So, as the Triple-A manager I'm feeling very excited right now. I want everybody to make the big league team. I hope **Jeff Bailey**, **Chris Carter**, and **Jonathan Van Every**, all these guys, get an opportunity, and I know that even if they don't out of the chute, they will during the year. When it all shakes down, we're going to have an interesting ball club, because there is a lot of talent here."

RON JOHNSON'S SCOUTING REPORTS: We asked Johnson to give his scouting report on three standouts so far in big league camp:

OF **Chris Carter** - "He's probably the one guy, after spending the year with him last year, he's a constant that I don't really worry that much about. He's in phenomenal shape. He came in 17 pounds lighter than he finished last year. He works his rear end off. He can flat out rake. You know he's going to hit. It's just a matter of opportunity with him."

INF **Nick Green** - "I liked Nick when he was in Scranton/WB last year. I know he's got quite a bit of big league time (275 games) with the Braves, Rays, Yankees, and Mariners from 2004 through 2007. I always liked him. I never knew him before last year but managing against him, he was an easy guy to get to know. He was always smiling out there and having fun it seemed like. I'm really excited about him. I think he's going to be a really valuable guy to us in Pawtucket, should he not break with the major league team."

OF **Zach Daeges** - "I've been scouting this guy since he was in Lancaster (A) two years ago. I like the fact that he can flat out roll the pole. This guy has a beautiful swing. He drives the ball. Zach's got a tremendous ceiling as far as being a run production guy. He's almost hit 100 doubles the last two years. It will be really interesting should he break with us and I'll be anxious to see him for a full season playing at McCoy and in some of the ballparks that we play in. I think he'll put some really exciting numbers up."

PROUD PAPA: While Johnson can be objective about his own players, the one player he can't be neutral about is his son Chris, who is in his first big league camp this spring with the Houston Astros. Chris is likely next at third base on the depth chart behind **Aaron Boone** although **Chris Johnson** is among the Astros leading hitters this spring. "Oh, I'm awful," Johnson admitted, when it comes to lack of objectivity about his son. "I'm just so thrilled and happy for him. But, don't get me started or I might not stop." "Everything is going great," Chris said last week in Kissimmee, the Astros' spring training home. "This is my first big league camp and I'm just trying to learn as much as I can. I don't know how long I'll be here, but I'm just really thankful for the opportunity."

ROCHESTER RED WINGS

HERE WE GO AGAIN: The Minnesota Twins open minor league camp today in Ft. Myers, FL. Minor league players will report today and hold the first workout of spring training on Saturday, March 14. Rochester will begin its 15-game spring training schedule on Tuesday, March 17 vs. the Durham Bulls in Port Charlotte. Rochester will break camp on Tuesday, April 7 and hold a workout in Rochester on Wednesday, April 8 prior to opening the 2009 International League season in Syracuse Thursday, April 9.

SLOW STARTS: Some of the guys that are expected to be with Rochester this year have gotten off to slow starts. Outfielder **Jason Pridie** (.111, 1-9), infielder **Matt Tolbert** (.087, 2-23), outfielder **Luis Matos** (.143, 2-14), infielder **Matt Macri** (.167, 2-12), infielder **Brock Peterson** (.100, 1-10 and only hit was a grand slam) and **Trevor Plouffe** (.100, 1-10) all could be on the Red Wings Opening Day roster.

PITCHING LOOKS TO BE A STRENGTH: If spring training is any indication the Red Wings pitching staff looks to be the strength of their roster again. RHP **R.A. Dickey**, LHP **Brian Duensing**, LHP **Mike Gosling**, LHP **Sean Henn**, RHP **Kevin Mulvey** and RHP **Anthony Swarzak** are a combined 1-1 with a 1.14 ERA in 23.2 innings of work (3 earned runs) so far this spring. All of these pitchers could open with the Red Wings.

SCRANTON/WILKES-BARRE YANKEES

BACK TO THE MINORS: The Yankees have made a few cuts from Major League camp and there are a few potential Scranton/Wilkes-Barre Yankees in the group. **J.B. Cox**, **Konekoa Texiera**, **George Kontos** and **Andrew Brackman** were in the first group of players to move to the minor league side. **Eric Hacker** and **Wilkins DeLaRosa** joined them in the second group sent to the Yankees Minor League complex.

LIGHTING UP THE SKIES: The SWB Yankees will have a franchise record 16 fireworks dates in 2009. The pyrotechnics will follow every Friday home game at PNC Field and on selected other dates including July 4th, July 6th, July 29th, August 29th and September 7th.

POTENTIALLY A LIGHTS OUT ROTATION: With the signings of **CC Sabathia**, **AJ Burnett** and the resigning of **Andy Pettitte**, the SWB Yankees starting rotation should be loaded come the start of the 2009 season. Yankees fans in NEPA have the potential of seeing **Phil Hughes**, **Ian Kennedy**, **Kei Igawa** and two of the following: **Alfredo Aceves**, **Phil Coke**, **Dan Giese** and **Brett Tomko**. Early on in spring training it is up in the air and will depend on who puts up the numbers in the Grapefruit League.

SYRACUSE CHIEFS

ALL IS WELLS: The Washington Nationals signed right-handed pitcher **Kip Wells** to a minor league deal this week. Wells pitched for Kansas City and San Diego in 2008 after appearing with the Rockies in 2007. Wells was placed on the Chiefs roster.

NATIONALS ASSIGN PLAYERS TO MINOR LEAGUE CAMP: The Washington nationals assigned 13 players to their minor league camp including left-handed pitcher **Mike O'Connor** who spent much of the 2007 season in the International League with Columbus. O'Connor will battle for a starting spot in the Chiefs rotation.

CHIEFS FIRST FULL WORKOUT SUNDAY: The Syracuse Chiefs will begin their first workout as the Triple-A affiliate of the Washington Nationals on Sunday, March 15. Players report to minor league camp on Friday, March 13.

TOLEDO MUD HENS

RENEWED VOWS: On March 4 the Detroit Tigers and the Toledo Mud Hens announced that the teams will remain affiliates through at least the 2012 season. The two teams have been partnered since 1987, making it the sixth-longest affiliation in Triple-A Baseball. Every year since 2002, Toledo has sent at least 15 major league level talents to Detroit. In 2008 alone, 33 players who played for Detroit wore a Mud Hens uniform at some point in their careers. Eight of those players made their major league debuts last year. Since moving to downtown Toledo in 2002, the Mud Hens won three division titles and back-to-back Governors' Cup Championships under the Tigers organization. Since that time, they are 533-470 (.531) and have set attendance records each year. In 2008, the Hens tied a franchise-high with their fourth straight season with a record above .500. Also, Toledo's Fifth Third Field welcomed 584,596 fans, including its 4-millionth in the history of the ballpark. Toledo has been partnered with seven different major league teams. It has been with Detroit four times throughout its history, the only franchise it has teamed with more than once.

THE RIGHT CHANCE: With many of the Tigers participating in the World Baseball Classic, a few Mud Hens hitters have an opportunity to take advantage of some extra playing time during the spring. Some of these fielders have a chance to make the Opening Day roster with solid performances in spring training. First baseman **Jeff Larish** has a chance to show his ability as a reserve infielder with **Miguel Cabrera** playing for Team Venezuela. Joining Cabrera are outfielders **Carlos Guillen** and **Magglio Ordonez**, which opens playing time for the Hens' **Clete Thomas** and **Brent Clevlen**.

SPRING UPDATES: Many potential 2009 Mud Hens are with the Tigers for Spring Training in Lakeland, Florida. Of the players with the team last season, **Brent Clevlen** and **Jeff Larish** have had an impressive showing so far. Clevlen is competing for a spot on the Opening Day roster after a great 2008 season. He is hitting .273 (6-22) with a triple and 2 RBI in 10 games. Larish is batting .286 (6-21) with 2 HR and 3 RBI in seven games. The Hens' co-leading pitchers with 12 wins last season, **Eddie Bonine** and **Chris Lambert**, have combined for only one earned run in 8.0 innings. Lefty **Clay Rapada**, last year's dominant set-up pitcher, has no runs allowed in 3.0 innings pitched.