

## **Knight Ridder/Tribune News Service**

March 20, 2001 | Ocker, Sheldon

Danys Baez is among eight players sent back to the minor-league camp on Tuesday. The Indians are not disappointed in his progress, but he still needs work. In three exhibition games, Baez pitched seven innings and gave up five runs on nine hits and seven walks, striking out six. Baez and right-hander Jake Westbrook were assigned to Buffalo. Westbrook also worked in three spring games, giving up three runs in six innings. "We want Baez to get into a regular routine," Manuel said. "He's got a great arm. His biggest problem is control. He was pitching behind in the count this spring." Veteran left-hander Eric Gunderson, catcher Victor Martinez, infielders Jason Hardtke and Ralph Milliard plus outfielders Terrell Lowery and Mark Buzinski were reassigned to the minor-league camp. The Tribe has 41 players in big-league camp, excluding Cameron Cairncross, Dave Roberts and Scott Radinsky, who are injured.

## **Indians Cut Eight From Roster**

AP Online March 20, 2001

WINTER HAVEN, Fla. (AP) -- Danys Baez and Jake Westbrook, right-handers the Cleveland Indians hope will someday be in their starting rotation, were among eight players cut from the major-league roster Tuesday. Both were optioned to Triple-A Buffalo as manager Charlie Manuel trimmed the roster to 41. Outfielders Terrell Lowery and Mark Budzinski, infielders Jason Hardtke and Ralph Milliard, catcher Victor Martinez and left-handed pitcher Eric Gunderson also were reassigned to the minor-league camp. Only Lowery and Gunderson have big-league experience.

## **What a relief ; bullpen looks to be strength of 2001 Bisons' roster**

The Buffalo News (Buffalo, NY) April 2, 2001 | MIKE HARRINGTON

In their six years with the Cleveland Indians, the Buffalo Bisons have had a lineup that has been dotted with sluggers who've filled the box scores.

Names such as Manto, Sexson, Ramirez, Giles, Aven, Selby and Branyan have been the main focus. Sure, there have been some solid seasons on the mound, but pitchers like Joe Roa, David Weathers, Jason Jacome and Chris Nichting were free-agent signees and not homegrown talents the Tribe could pump their chest over.

The outlook is quite a bit different in 2001. Returnees Danny Peoples and Mark Budzinski are the only raised-by-Cleveland players in the batting order. It's the pitching staff that's going to get the bulk of the attention.

"We're in great shape arms-wise," acknowledged Neal Huntington, Cleveland's director of player development. "In the offseason, we sat and saw maybe 10 guys that we

thought were prospects. Two, three or four of those guys will make the major-league club. It's exciting to have those guys competing and seven or eight other guys behind the scenes that have come along to have great springs and are definitely in our plans for the future."

All winter long -- and up until the last three days -- the Bisons looked like they would have probably the best rotation in Triple-A. Late roster moves by Cleveland scuttled that thought, but did leave Buffalo with perhaps the minors' best bullpen.

Top prospects C.C. Sabathia and Tim Drew, both of whom figured to open in the Buffalo rotation, made the big-league club but certainly could be here at some point to hone their talents. Danys Baez, the Cuban defector who signed a \$14.5 million free agent contract in 1999, is coming to Buffalo as planned -- but as a reliever. Baez has had limited success as a starter and the Tribe thinks his improved velocity make him potential closer material. "We think he can come real fast in the bullpen," Cleveland general manager John Hart said Saturday when the move was announced prior to the Tribe's final exhibition game in Houston. "His stuff plays really big in the pen. This could be a quick path for Danys."

In addition to Baez, the Buffalo bullpen will feature David Riske, Sean DePaula and Roy Smith, all of whom made strong bids to make the Cleveland roster this spring and are likely to see big-league time at some point this year. Even with the late changes, the strong pitching will be the key in Buffalo's bid for its sixth postseason berth in seven years. The Bisons won their second International League North Division title in three years in 2000, posting an 86-59 record that was just one win shy of the franchise-best total for victories.

Buffalo's hopes of a second trip to the Triple-A World Series were dashed, however, with a four-game loss at the hands of Scranton/Wilkes-Barre in the IL semifinals. It should be noted the Triple-A Series is on hiatus for this year due to differences between the IL and Pacific Coast League over sites after it was agreed Las Vegas was no longer viable.

For the second straight year, the Bisons will have a new manager. Former Buffalo player Joel Skinner was named IL manager of the year in 2000 and immediately graduated to third-base coach in Cleveland. Replacing Skinner will be 32-year-old Eric Wedge, a former catcher in several organizations who is the youngest skipper in Buffalo's modern era.

Wedge, the 1999 Carolina League manager of the year at Class A Kinston, directed Double-A Akron to a 75-68 record last season and missed the Eastern League playoffs by one game. He spent most of this spring in Cleveland's major league camp because the Tribe was so indecisive about sending players to the minors. Wedge won't truly know the makeup of his team until it hits Dunn Tire Park for its first workout on Tuesday.

"This is something I'm really looking forward to," said Wedge. "I'm still learning the guys we have down here, but I know a lot about the ones we had in big-league camp and I know that I like what I've seen. People in this

organization have worked hard in the offseason and we've seen the results."

Wedge will be joined on his staff by pitching coach Carl Willis and bench coach Jack Mull. Willis, a setup man for the Minnesota Twins during their 1991 World Series season, was with Wedge last year at Akron.

"Those guys work great together," Huntington said. "It will help the continuity of our system but it will also help the relationships. They worked hard to establish those with the players last year. It's always good to have a comfort level with the staff."

Here's a position-by-position look at some of the key members of the 2001 Bisons. It should be noted that roster moves can be made until Wednesday, the day before Thursday's season opener here against Pawtucket.

#### Infield

It will be Peoples at first and Ralph Milliard at second.

Things aren't so simple at shortstop or third base.

Glove man extraordinaire John McDonald is opening the season in Cleveland but could return when Travis Fryman comes off the disabled list in a week or two; McDonald has only one minor-league option left, so this is the last year he would see any time in Buffalo. With McDonald not here, free-agent signee Anthony Medrano is expected to get the call.

The third baseman is likely to be Sean McNally, who hit .262 with 12 homers and 41 RBIs last year at Triple-A Calgary. McNally spent the previous three years at Double-A Wichita, which is owned by Rich Baseball Operations. He was a Texas League all-star for the Wranglers in 1999 after hitting 36 homers and collecting 108 RBIs. Orchard Park High graduate Dave Hollins, now 34, will also see time at third and serve as a designated hitter.

On the right side of the diamond, Peoples will try to improve on his 21 homers and 74 RBIs in his debut season in Triple-A. But he must have a better finish than last year, when he hit just .153 after July 31 with only three homers and 10 RBIs. Milliard played last year for Las Vegas and also appeared for the Netherlands in the Sydney Olympics. He's a native of Curacao, part of the Netherlands Antilles. Jason Hartdke, a former IL all-star with Indianapolis in 1999, should provide solid middle infield depth.

#### Outfield

A solid threesome would be Trace Coquillette in left, Mark Budzinski in center and Karim Garcia in right. Coquillette, acquired from the Cubs Saturday for a player to be named later, has spent parts of the last two years with Montreal and Ottawa; Budzinski hit .290 in 118 games for the Herd last season; Garcia was an IL all-star and combined for 28 homers and 92 RBIs last year between Toledo and Rochester.

Cuban defector Osmany Santana will start the year in center field for Double-A Akron, but could see Buffalo by the end of the season.

David Roberts, Buffalo's regular in center the last two years, is out until at least July after undergoing shoulder surgery. He is the franchise's modern era stolen base leader with 80.

#### Catching

In an area where the Tribe is completely bereft of young talent, 31-year-old Tim Laker will be the starter in Buffalo. He's good insurance for Cleveland, as he's played for the Expos, Orioles, D-Rays and Pirates. Laker hit .247 with 19 homers and 75 RBIs last year at Nashville in the Pirates chain.

The backup will either be Alex Andreopoulos, an Independent League signee, or St. Francis High product Chris Snusz, who hit .210 last year in 63 games for Ottawa.

#### Starting pitching

It's not what it used to be as recently as a week ago. No Sabathia. No Drew. No Baez. Without them, the Bisons are left looking for an ace.

With three days left before the opener, Buffalo's starters appear to be Mike Bacsik, Jake Westbrook, Chris Hammond, Richie Lewis and Tim Byrdak.

Bacsik and Westbrook, both 23, are the young guns.

Bacsik, a left-hander who joined the Bisons late last season, won Buffalo's only playoff game last September. Westbrook was acquired from the Yankees in the David Justice trade and was 5-7 at Columbus. He never pitched for Buffalo last season due to a rib injury.

Hammond has major-league experience from 1990-98 with the Reds, Marlins and Red Sox. His career record in 191 games is 46-55. He was a former American Association standout against Buffalo while pitching in the mid-'90s for Nashville; Lewis, who has thrown for five big-league teams, made two starts for the Herd last year but was shut down for the season due to elbow trouble; Byrdak, another lefty, has pitched mostly in relief the last four years in the Kansas City chain.

On the horizon at Double-A Akron are Ryan Drese, who had a huge big-league camp after pitching just 21/3 innings last year at Class A Kinston before suffering a knee injury; Zach Day, acquired from the Yankees in the Justice trade and owner of a 15-9 record and 180 strikeouts in 165 innings last year; and Jamie Brown, who was 7-6 last year at Akron.

#### Bullpen

It's a total overhaul from last season but there is plenty of depth. DePaula, Cleveland's 1999 playoff hero, is back for set-up work along with Riske, who had an 0.65 ERA and six saves for the '99 Bisons but made just five appearances last year due to back surgery. The closer is likely to be veteran Dario Veras, who has big-league experience with San Diego and Boston.

Baez's development, likely as a late-inning setup man to start the season, will be a key story to watch. The Indians were thrilled to see his fastball consistently hit 94-95 mph in the Arizona Fall League and think his improved delivery has his arm speed back to where it was when they first scouted him in Costa Rica.

Marti Vargas should get a trip from Akron at some point during the season. He was 10-8 in 53 games (all relief) for the Aeros last year. Also stockpiled in Double-A and likely to be in Buffalo quickly is former Scranton pitcher Kirk Bullinger, who had an 0.72 ERA and 12 saves last year in 26 outings for the Red Barons.

## **BISONS' ROSTER OFFERS**

### **MIXED BAG**

*The Buffalo News (Buffalo, NY) April 5, 2001 | BOB DICESARE*

The Cleveland Indians have paraded so many prospects through Buffalo it seemed they had cornered the market on emerging baseball talent. Every team the Indians put here since the working agreement commenced in 1995 was stockpiled with youthful brilliance. Brian Giles. Herbert Perry. Richie Sexson. Russell Branyan. The list, in its entirety, is extensive.

This season defies the norm. The Bisons team that opened today against the Pawtucket Red Sox at Dunn Tire Park is an eclectic mix of young, old and middle-of-the-road. It's an intriguing amalgamation of players developed from within as well as players lured within by the prospect of performing in a high-profile Triple-A city for an organization with perennial World Series aspirations. The Bisons have accomplished major leaguers such as pitcher Chris Hammond and infielder Dave Hollins. They have some players, like shortstop Anthony Medrano and second baseman Ralph Milliard, who have bopped around for years with little if any big-league time to show for it. They have a high-profile trade acquisition in today's starter, right-hander Jake Westbrook. And they have a spicing of organizational prospects, returning first baseman Danny Peoples for one but none more subject to scrutiny than reliever Danys Baez, a Cuban defector in the second season of a three-year, \$14.4 million contract.

"I think it's a great mix," Peoples said after Tuesday's workout. "We've got guys here who are working on getting to the big leagues. We've got guys here who were big prospects with other organizations who are trying to get to the big leagues. We've got guys who are trying to get back to the big leagues.

"That's what's going to be fun about it. We're all working for a common goal here and that's to win because that's the best practice I think for getting to the big leagues. I think everybody here understands that. I think everybody here is excited about playing in Buffalo. A lot of these guys aren't real familiar with what baseball's like here in the city and we've gotten everybody real excited about it."

The task of blending all the elements falls to Eric Wedge, who has annually progressed on the organization's managerial depth chart and this season, at age 33, will be making his Triple-A debut. Wedge played pro nine years as a catcher after an All-America career at Wichita State that included an NCAA championship. The native of Canton, Mass., appeared in 39 big-league games, all but nine for the Red Sox. Wedge agrees this isn't Cleveland's typical Triple-A team. Nor has he come upon a typical managerial situation. Four players on the roster are older than Wedge. Four others are entering what could be their first full Triple-A season.

### **BISONS GET OFF TO FLYING START**

*The Buffalo News (Buffalo, NY) April 6, 2001 | MIKE HARRINGTON*

In a 144-game baseball season, you can't get overly enthused by a first impression. But you only get one chance to make one, too. On that count, the Buffalo Bisons' season opener was a resounding success. The Herd's 5-2 win over the Pawtucket Red Sox Thursday afternoon at Dunn Tire Park was a day of firsts for a team gunning for its sixth playoff berth in seven seasons as a Cleveland Indians affiliate.

Right fielder Karim Garcia and third baseman Sean McNally hit the first pitches they saw as Bisons for home runs. Jake Westbrook's initial start in a Buffalo uniform produced 5 1/3 innings and six strikeouts. Set-up man Roy Smith's Herd debut produced 2 2/3 innings of shutout relief.

It added up to a solid Opening Day victory for 33-year-old manager Eric Wedge, who became a winner in his Triple-A debut as the youngest skipper in Buffalo's modern era and perhaps the youngest ever in the franchise's 116-year existence.

The announced crowd of 14,169 got its first jolt in the bottom of the first when Garcia put Buffalo on top for good, 2-0, by launching a two-out, two-run rocket into the bleachers in right field. It came on the first pitch he saw from Pawtucket starter Carlos Castillo.

Garcia combined to hit 28 home runs last year with Toledo and Rochester and made sure to make quick work of his quest for No. 1 in 2001.

It was all Buffalo needed. A throwing error by Castillo in the second and an RBI single by Danny Peoples in third made it 4-0. The Herd's final run came in eighth on another quick strike, McNally's drive over the left-field fence off Pawsox reliever Alan McDill.

McNally, slated to be Buffalo's regular at third this year, entered the game in the sixth after Cleveland's Travis Fryman completed injury rehabilitation duties. The longball doesn't figure to be as prominent with this group as with past Buffalo teams. The 2001 Herd is likely to thrive on pitching and defense, just as it did Thursday.

Buffalo turned three double plays (sharp relays by second baseman Ralph Milliard keyed two of them) and came close to pulling off two more. Westbrook, acquired by Cleveland from the Yankees chain last year as part of the David Justice trade, neatly bridged the gap to the Herd's deep bullpen.

### **Bisons help Bacsik weather storm**

*The Buffalo News (Buffalo, NY) April 7, 2001 | TIM GRAHAM*

If Mike Bacsik has learned anything during this young baseball season, it's that he shouldn't fret over an apparent setback. Wait a bit. Things will change.

Bacsik originally wasn't supposed to be on the Bison staff. The slated rotation was Tim Drew, C.C. Sabathia, Danys Baez, Jake Westbrook and -- probably -- Chris Hammond. But Drew and Sabathia were retained by the Cleveland Indians. Baez was moved to the bullpen. So Bacsik, who

must feel more like a paddle ball than a ballplayer lately, didn't begin the season in the rubber capital of the world. Instead he won his first Triple-A regular-season game. The Sox took a 3-2 lead in the fourth inning, when Izzy Alcantara hit an apparent foul ball that third-base umpire Stu Robertson ruled a home run even though the fog had cleared. Replays strongly backed the foul-ball theory. The Bisons quickly eased the sting of Alcantara's homer and put Bacsik in position for the win with seven two-out runs in the bottom of the fourth. Eight straight Bisons reached base with two away. Dave Hollins started the streak with his first hit of the season to score Danny Peoples, who had doubled. Trace Coquillet and Ralph Milliard followed with singles of their own before Mark Budzinski reached on an error by Pawtucket third baseman Wilton Veras. Buffalo's hit parade then resumed with RBI singles from Anthony Medrano, Travis Fryman, Karim Garcia and Peoples again. Pitching with an 8-2 lead, Bacsik just had to last five innings to record the win. Fryman finished his two-game elbow rehabilitation assignment by going 2 for 4 with two RBIs and a run scored. The All-Star third baseman was scheduled to return to Cleveland on Friday night. He hit .571 in Buffalo. Milliard, who went 2 for 3 with two runs scored, strained a hamstring while running from first to third on a long fly ball in the fifth inning. He was replaced at second by Jason Hardtke and is listed as day-to-day.

## **Opportunity likely to knock for peoples in 2002**

*The Buffalo News (Buffalo, NY) April 8, 2001 | MIKE HARRINGTON*

Cleveland third baseman Travis Fryman was not activated from the disabled list Saturday as the Tribe originally planned because of recurring pain in the ligaments of his right elbow. He returned to Cleveland from a two-game rehab stint with the Bisons, where he was 4 for 7 at the plate and made three throws without incident Thursday. Fryman had no plays in the field Friday. . . . Wedge was planning to give second baseman Ralph Milliard a day off Saturday to rest the strained hamstring he suffered Friday. Milliard is likely to sit at least today's opener -- with Jason Hardtke starting in his place -- and might get the day off entirely. . . . If they could sweep today's twin bill, the Bisons would be off to a 4-0 start for the second straight season. The best out-of-the-gate run in their modern era is the 5-0 mark they posted in 1989.

## **Bisons open six-pack of wins**

*The Buffalo News (Buffalo, NY) April 11, 2001 | BOB DICESARE*

Dave Hollins remembers the last time he was on a 6-0 baseball team. It was almost 20 years ago, when he played for coach Bob Barrows at Orchard Park High School. There are a number of high school teams that start their

seasons 6-0. It's a far more unusual occurrence in the pro ranks, where talent is more evenly spread.

The Buffalo Bisons, for instance, never had opened a season with better than five straight wins during their 14 seasons in the downtown ballpark. Not until they came from behind in the eighth inning to defeat the Syracuse SkyChiefs, 5-4, Tuesday afternoon and complete a sweep of their season-opening six games at Dunn Tire Park. The Bisons trailed, 3-1, into the eighth and had little to hang a rally on. They had squandered chances early, stranding seven runners in the first three innings. They had played poorly in the field, committing four errors. They headed into the eighth hitless since John McDonald doubled and scored leading off the fifth.

And then, within a span of four batters, the lead was theirs. Momentum often builds in a hurry for a team already on a roll. Sean McNally, a hitting revelation on this homestand, opened the eighth with a double off reliever Brad Corbett. Syracuse summoned veteran left-hander Scott Eyre, only to have left-handed batting Karim Garcia confound the strategy with a single up the middle that trimmed the deficit to 3-2. The comeback was on. Laker took a one-ball, one-strike pitch out of the park to left, his third homer on the season, all coming since he traded in tight-fitting jersey No. 31 for less restraining No. 52.

Two pitches later, it happened again. Hollins made use of the prevailing wind to the opposite field and hit his first homer as a Bison to right-center for a 5-3 Buffalo lead. The Bisons relished the insurance run in the ninth. Second baseman Ralph Milliard's second error of the game fueled a Syracuse rally that led to a run. Veteran reliever Eric Gunderson closed the door by fanning Aaron Holbert for the final out with the tying run on second, the go-ahead run on first.

After earning five victories without undue strain, the Bisons had come by 6-0 the hard way.

## **Francona hopes for second chance**

*The Buffalo News (Buffalo, NY) April 22, 2001 | MIKE HARRINGTON*

Terry Francona isn't bitter. Far from it. He's interested in getting another crack at a big-league manager's job. Fired by the Philadelphia Phillies on the final day of the 2000 season, Francona is working this year as a special assistant in baseball operations for the Cleveland Indians. He's reporting to vice president and assistant general manager Mark Shapiro, the former Indians farm director who is replacing John Hart as Tribe GM this November. Buffalo designated hitter Dave Hollins extended his hitting streak to 12 games in Saturday's 5-3 loss to Ottawa with a single off the glove of third baseman Rob Sasser in the bottom of the ninth. Hollins had been 0 for 4 with three strikeouts. . . . The Bisons sold 5,842 tickets for Saturday's game. A few hundred fans braved the steady rain. . . . Ralph Milliard, Buffalo's Opening Day second baseman, was released this week by Cleveland. He was batting .267 in five games