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NEWS RELEASE

FOR 3:00PM EASTERN RELEASE

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DURHAM'S KEVIN WITT NAMED IL MVP; PHILLIPS, FIELDS, RUSSELL ROUND OUT AWARD WINNERS

The International League today announced its post-season All-Star Team and Award Winners as selected by the League's managers, coaches, media, and club representatives. Durham Bulls first baseman **Kevin Witt** has been named the IL's Most Valuable Player on the strength of his League-leading 36 HR, 99 RBI, 82 runs scored, and .577 slugging percentage. A pair of Charlotte Knights have won Special Awards. Lefty **Heath Phillips** is the League's Most Valuable Pitcher thanks to a 13-5 record, tied for most victories in the IL, and a 2.96 ERA, second-best in the League. His teammate, third baseman **Josh Fields**, has been voted the IL's Rookie-of-the-Year. The former college football star is hitting .308 with 19 HR, 69 RBI, and 28 SB in just his third season in professional baseball. Rounding out the list of 2006 Special Award Winners is the IL Manager-of-the-Year **John Russell** of the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre Red Barons. Russell's club leads the IL North with a 79-57 mark, the best record in the League this season.

Kevin Witt becomes the first Durham Bulls' player to win the League MVP award since Toby Hall in 2001. The 30-year-old first baseman made quite an impact on Triple-A Baseball after playing in just 25 games last season, all in the Japanese Central League. Witt, who was the International League's Player of the Game at the Triple-A All-Star Game in July, dominated IL pitching this season with numbers unmatched by any of his peers. His 36 home runs are 9 better than the rest of the League; his 99 RBI best the entire field by 11; his .577 slugging percentage is 41 points ahead of the pack. He also leads the IL with 82 runs scored and 66 extra-base hits. Witt has played in 130 Major League games in his career with Toronto, San Diego, Detroit, and now Tampa Bay after being recalled Friday. Witt previously made the International League post-season All-Star team in 2002 while with Louisville, when he led the IL with 107 RBI.

Another hero from the 2006 Triple-A All-Star Game, winning pitcher Heath Phillips, has parlayed his success into a post-season award. The IL's Most Valuable Pitcher leads the League with 13 victories, tied only with teammate Charlie Haeger. Phillips has posted the League's second-best ERA (2.96), and fifth-highest number of innings pitched (155.0). The 24-year-old is in his sixth season pitching in the White Sox farm system. Phillips first reached the Triple-A level in 2005, going 0-3 in five starts with the Knights. He's the first Knight to be named the IL Pitcher-of-the-Year since Jon Garland in 2000. Phillips is currently away from the Knights, pitching for Team USA in Olympic qualifying action.

Phillips was one of many impressive Triple-A rookies leading the Knights this season, but the best of the bunch may have been third baseman Josh Fields. Entering the season *Baseball America* ranked Fields as Chicago's fourth-best prospect overall and top power hitting Minor Leaguer. The 23-year-old did little to disappoint the White Sox. Less than two years after being chosen in the first round of the 2004 draft, Fields made his Triple-A debut by hitting .311 in April and never cooled off. Though not a League leader in any offensive category, Fields is among the top five in the IL in batting average (4th, .308), hits (4th, 138), slugging percentage (3rd, .522), extra-base hits (4th, 54), and runs scored (2nd, 81).

One win away from guiding his team to its first playoff appearance in four seasons, Scranton/Wilkes-Barre skipper John Russell is the 2006 IL Manager-of-the-Year. Russell's Red Barons came storming out of the gate in April, winning ten in a row during one stretch (April 15-25) and thirteen out of fourteen. The club leveled off a bit during May and June, but returned to first place in late July during another extended winning streak, this time eight consecutive victories. By mid-August Scranton/Wilkes-Barre surpassed Charlotte for the League's best record, which now stands at 79-57 (.581). The Red Barons lead the IL North by 3.5 games over Rochester, and have a magic number of one to clinch a postseason berth. 2006 marks Russell's first year as a manager since 2002 when he led the Edmonton Trappers of the Pacific Coast League to an 81-59 record and the PCL Championship, and was named *Baseball America's* Minor League Manager-of-the-Year. He spent the past three seasons as a member of the Pittsburgh Pirates coaching staff.

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NEWS RELEASE

(Page Two of Three)

In addition to Witt, Phillips, and Fields, nine other players have been named to the International League post-season All-Star Team for 2006. The Charlotte Knights, with Phillips, Fields, and shortstop Jorge Velandia, lead the way with three All-Star selections. Joining Charlotte with multiple All-Star representatives are Durham and Scranton/Wilkes-Barre with two apiece.

- ☆ Scranton/Wilkes-Barre second baseman **Joe Thurston** was a major contributor in his first full season outside of the Dodgers organization. After being traded to the Yankees last July, Thurston signed with Philadelphia in the offseason as a free agent. Thurston has played in 127 games for the Red Barons this season, hitting .282 and legging out 9 triples, second highest total in the League. Thurston was a starter for the IL at the mid-season Triple-A All-Star Game, his third career appearance. Thurston is now with the Phillies, with whom he's played in five games since being recalled August 23.
- ☆ **Jorge Velandia** of the Charlotte Knights has been chosen as the All-Star shortstop. The 31-year-old is in his 15th professional season, which includes 150 Major League games with San Diego, Oakland, and the New York Mets. Velandia played the 2005 season for Indianapolis, hitting .277 with 3 HR, 39 RBI, and 2 SB. After signing with Chicago as a free agent in January, Velandia has hit a career-best .293 with 10 HR, 59 RBI, and 14 SB this season. Like Thurston, Velandia was a starter on the IL's mid-season All-Star team in July.
- ☆ Scranton/Wilkes-Barre backstop **Carlos Ruiz** improved upon a 2005 season in which he hit .300 with 4 HR and 40 RBI in 100 games for the Red Barons. This season, between a pair of stints with the Philadelphia Phillies, Ruiz has posted a .307 average with 15 HR and 65 RBI for the IL North leading Red Barons. Ruiz is fifth in the League in hitting, and is also among the IL leaders in on-base percentage (2nd, .389) and slugging percentage (5th, .501).
- ☆ After spending parts of the last two seasons in the Major Leagues with the Cubs and Indians, outfielder **Jason Dubois** has spent the entire 2006 campaign in Buffalo where he's lit up International League pitching for 21 home runs and 83 RBI, both team highs. Dubois hit a hot streak in July immediately after appearing in the Triple-A All-Star Game. He hit safely in eight of nine games including a four-game stretch in which he went a blistering 9-16 with 4 HR and 9 RBI, earning IL Player of the Week honors.
- ☆ It's been 36 years since a player won the International League batting title by more than 30 points, but that's what Louisville outfielder **Norris Hopper** is primed to accomplish. The leading vote-getter among all outfielders is hitting at an amazing .348 dip this season in 95 games for the Bats, 32 points ahead of the League's second best qualifying average (Delmon Young, .316). A Triple-A rookie, Hopper is in just his second season in the Cincinnati organization after hitting .310 last season for Double-A Chattanooga. He made his big league debut August 20 for the Reds, singling in his first at-bat off of Pittsburgh's Mike Gonzalez.
- ☆ Durham's **Darnell McDonald** emerged this season from the shadows of several high-profile teammates to establish himself as one of the International League's top outfielders. The 27-year-old leads the IL with 150 base hits, and is tied for third with 79 runs scored. McDonald signed with Tampa Bay as a free agent last June, just five days after being released by the Cleveland organization. McDonald has played in 131 games in 2006, the second highest total in the IL.
- ☆ **Josh Phelps** has been chosen as the League's All-Star Designated Hitter. Phelps, who's also used as a first baseman by the Mud Hens, has previously made the post-season All-Star Teams in the Florida State League (1999) and Southern League (2001), where he was League MVP. Phelps is clearly among the top International League hitters this season, batting .310 (3rd) with 23 HR (T-4th), 88 RBI (T-2nd), 139 hits (3rd), and a .536 slugging percentage (2nd).
- ☆ In his first season above the Double-A level, right-handed pitcher **Pat Neshek** is the International League's All-Star reliever. Dominating the League during the first half of the season, Neshek went 6-2 with a 1.95 ERA and 14 saves, striking out 87 in 60.0 IP for Rochester. He stole the headlines during the first ever online fan balloting program for the Triple-A All-Star Game, getting more votes than any other player in Triple-A Baseball. Neshek never made it to the All-Star Game, instead earning a promotion to Minnesota for whom he has posted a 3-0 record with a 1.14 ERA in 18 appearances in the midst of the American League playoff chase.
- ☆ The final All-Star spot goes to Pawtucket's **Dustin Pedroia**, who has been selected as the League's top utility player. The .305 hitter finished second in the voting at both second base and shortstop, where's he's split time this year along with 4 games at third base. The youngest member of the 2006 IL All-Star Team made his Major League debut with Boston on August 22, having already started games at both second base and shortstop for the parent Red Sox.



NEWS RELEASE

(Page Three of Three)

2006 IL AWARD WINNERS

- Most Valuable Player ➤ Kevin Witt, Durham Bulls
- Most Valuable Pitcher ➤ Heath Phillips, Charlotte Knights
- Rookie-of-the-Year ➤ Josh Fields, Charlotte Knights
- Manager-of-the-Year ➤ John Russell, Scranton/Wilkes-Barre Red Barons

2006 IL ALL-STAR TEAM

- First Baseman ➤ Kevin Witt, Durham Bulls
- Second Baseman ➤ Joe Thurston, Scranton/Wilkes-Barre Red Barons
- Shortstop ➤ Jorge Velandia, Charlotte Knights
- Third Baseman ➤ Josh Fields, Charlotte Knights
- Catcher ➤ Carlos Ruiz, Scranton/Wilkes-Barre Red Barons
- Outfielders ➤ Jason Dubois, Buffalo Bisons
- Norris Hopper, Louisville Bats
- Darnell McDonald, Durham Bulls
- Designated Hitter ➤ Josh Phelps, Toledo Mud Hens
- Utility Player ➤ Dustin Pedroia, Pawtucket Red Sox
- Starting Pitcher ➤ Heath Phillips, Charlotte Knights
- Relief Pitcher ➤ Pat Neshek, Rochester Red Wings

ALL-STAR STATISTICS (thru Aug. 28)

<u>Batters</u>	<u>Team</u>	<u>BA</u>	<u>AB</u>	<u>R</u>	<u>H</u>	<u>2B</u>	<u>3B</u>	<u>HR</u>	<u>RBI</u>	<u>SB</u>
Kevin Witt	DUR	.291	485	82	141	29	1	36	99	0
Joe Thurston	SWB	.282	479	74	135	29	9	9	55	20
Jorge Velandia	CHAR	.293	458	66	134	22	1	10	54	15
Josh Fields	CHAR	.308	448	81	138	31	4	19	69	28
Carlos Ruiz	SWB	.307	361	55	111	25	0	15	65	4
Jason Dubois	BUF	.273	432	62	118	30	1	21	83	4
Norris Hopper	LOU	.348	371	46	129	11	3	0	26	25
Darnell McDonald	DUR	.288	521	79	150	32	1	14	57	28
Josh Phelps	TOL	.310	448	59	139	26	3	23	88	6
Dustin Pedroia	PAW	.305	423	55	129	30	3	5	50	1

<u>Pitchers</u>	<u>Team</u>	<u>W-L</u>	<u>ERA</u>	<u>SV</u>	<u>G</u>	<u>IP</u>	<u>SO</u>
Heath Phillips	CHAR	13-5	2.96	0	25	155.0	102
Pat Neshek	ROCH	6-2	1.95	14	33	60.0	87