



Around this time last winter, I took a shot at using social media to get shutdown setup man, and Twitter aficionado, Vinnie Pestano to agree to an interview with me for TheClevelandFan.com. I [succeeded](#)

. In what has been one of the most entertaining winters in recent memory for the Cleveland Indians, I found myself hoping to get a player's perspective on what has happened so far and what lies ahead. The choice of who to approach was easy.

It's not just a coincidence that Pestano was the recipient of the 2012 Bob Feller Man of the Year Award as voted on by the Cleveland chapter of the Baseball Writers' Association of America. Pestano has been a constant for the Indians, both as a tremendous late inning reliever and as a fun-loving, approachable personality on Twitter. Underneath all of the Dumb & Dumber references, video game postings, and corny jokes is a player who is serious about his craft and desperately wants to bring a winner to Cleveland that the city is proud to support.

Pestano was candid with me, both on and off the record, on a number of subjects, ranging from Hall of Fame voting and attendance to his strengths and weaknesses as a pitcher. Obviously, the things that were said in confidence aren't going to be included in this article, but the takeaway from those off the record remarks is that Pestano is a realist, who loves to pitch for this team and understands the frustrations that we have as fans.

With the official start of Spring Training under one month away, Pestano generously took time out of preparing for the season to spend a few minutes answering the mountain of questions that I had for him.

Adam Burke: How has the offseason gone so far? Anything exciting happen?

Vinnie Pestano: Offseason has gone well. Workouts are progressing nicely, just ramped up heading into spring. Got a fire pit built in my backyard and that's about all the excitement I've needed this winter. Besides, it was a great winter for video games (laughs).

AB: 2012 was obviously a really difficult year, especially with the epic collapse after the Verlander game. How will that benefit the team going forward?

VP: We have a lot of guys coming back that were a part of that rough August and it took a lot out of us, both mentally and physically, probably more from a mental standpoint. Towards the end of the year, the main concern was looking ahead to make sure something like that never happens again to this team.

AB: In both 2011 and 2012, the team collapsed after a pretty good start. What happened and how can it be fixed if the team is in the same position in 2013?

VP: It's tough to attribute one thing. Each season had its own faults. In 2011, we lost half of our lineup and two-fifths of our rotation before September came around, so that played a huge factor that year. Last year is still a bit of a mystery as to what was at fault. I know that we don't have a lot of outspoken guys in the clubhouse. We have a lot of guys that like to lead by example, which is great, but, when a team doesn't have a voice, you run into things snowballing like they did last year. We had team meetings, with and without coaches, but just couldn't get back on the same page. Some of us jokingly started calling it "The Cunningham Curse" because after we sent Cunningham down, we lost 29 of our next 34.

AB: What does it mean for the players to see the Dolans making a financial commitment to winning in 2013?

VP: From a player standpoint, there was never a concern as to how much money they spent because it's not our job to worry about things like that. Has this offseason brought some needed life [to the team] going into the season? Yes, absolutely, but I was never upset with the Dolans or Management for not going out and spending money because I accepted the type of market our team is in.

AB: Nick Swisher is definitely a high energy guy and his personality has rubbed some teammates and media the wrong way in the past. How do you think he'll fit in the Indians clubhouse?

VP: I think that, first off, he absolutely comes in with a clean slate here. From a vocal standpoint, his fire and enthusiasm are something we haven't had. After our collapse last year, we thought our clubhouse needed a change. The Swisher signing and the additions of Mark Reynolds and Brett Myers will go a long way to help that.

AB: What does having a proven, veteran manager like Terry Francona mean to the team?

VP: Terry, who I just met Monday, obviously has a proven track record as a manager and, personality-wise, is a complete 180 from what we had with Manny. Manny liked to be quieter and provide that rock for his team. Francona seems like more of a hands-on manager that would just as soon be lobbing grenades with you in the trenches. He is very excited for this upcoming season and it has definitely rubbed off on me.

AB: What are your initial impressions of the new coaching staff, specifically pitching coach Mickey Callaway and bullpen coach Kevin Cash?

VP: I have known Mickey from small conversations in passing before this offseason, but, from what I have heard about him from players that have had him, I think he is a great addition to our staff and look forward to working with him. Cash, I have heard great things about. I got a chance to meet him Monday and think he will be great asset to our pen.

AB: A lot has been said about Trevor Bauer and his unconventional warm-up routine. Do you think what has been said about it is unfair? Will we see you playing any 400-foot long toss?

VP: I've heard the same things everyone else has. True or false, he comes in with a clean slate. I won't judge someone until I meet them, so his impression and attitude will be based on how he wants to be perceived by us. We have a very easy going clubhouse, with a lot of great personalities. I can't speak for Arizona's clubhouse, but hopefully he has learned a few things from his last experience and is conscious about that coming in here. And no, no foul pole to foul pole toss for me.

AB: We all know Carlos Santana has the potential to become one of the premier hitting catchers in baseball, but there have always been some concerns about his defense. As a pitcher, or talking with the other guys on the staff, what have you noticed about his development behind the plate?

VP: Carlos's defense gets a bad rap sometimes because, at times, it can be inconsistent. But, he is still fairly new to the position and still needs to grow into it. That has to stop being an excuse at some point because he is a big league catcher and it's up to him when that point is. As a staff, we have to help with the running game a lot more than we have in the past. We gave up way too many doubles last year without guys even hitting the ball, if you get what I'm trying to say.

AB: Let's shift gears and talk about you. In 2011, left handed batters hit .280/.350/.462/.812 off of you. In 2012, that improved to .237/.329/.423/.752. Was that a goal you set for yourself entering 2012? How did you achieve it and how can you improve on it again in 2013?

VP: Lefties have always had an advantage against me because of my arm angle, but righties have always been at a disadvantage, so there's a give and take there. Your focus should be to want to dominate in any situation, against any hitter, and that's what a lot of my focus was. I went into last year knowing the numbers are out there, so managers are going to start matching up with me better. So, it's more of a conscious effort to mix up locations and throw my offspeed for strikes in counts where the hitter would have an advantage. In 2013, I just need to execute that plan more consistently.

AB: You mentioned an advantage over righties. Over the last two seasons, right handed batters are 35-for-249 (.141) against you, with a 4.875 K/BB ratio. Dominant is an understatement. What's the key to that level of success?

VP: A lot of my success comes from my deception and arm angle and I know that, so I'm not blind to the fact it's not exactly my stuff, but the way in which I throw it. Also, to point out again, my success against righties is always evened out against lefties, so for me to truly turn a corner, it will be to have no weaknesses in my game and I'll work on that until I stop picking up a

baseball.

AB: Last February, Brandon McCarthy told *ESPN The Magazine* that sabermetrics saved his career. Are you a believer in sabermetrics?

VP: Saber what? (laughs) I was told there would be no math in this interview.

AB: So, you're more of an "eyes" guy than a "stats" guy?

VP: I watch video of hitters that I'm probably going to have to face in tough situations and build my plan against them. My theory is less is more. I'm not a stuff guy. I've got 2 pitches and try to attack you with both while also trying not to be predictable.

AB: You were recently named to Team USA for the World Baseball Classic. What does it mean to you to represent your country?

VP: I jokingly caught a lot of flack on Twitter about a hashtag saying it was a childhood dream to play in the WBC and some people were quick to point out it wasn't around when I was a child. I've wanted to play for my country for as long as I can remember. Watching Olympians get that honor and then hoping one day that I would be playing for my country. Well, junior national teams come and go and I don't get a sniff. Then, the Olympics shuts baseball down and that dream dies. Then, here comes the WBC and the opportunity arises again, but I never really

thought I'd have the opportunity to play on a team like that. During my sophomore year of college, the WBC team that year was using our facility to practice. I watched Jeter, A-Rod, Roger Clemens, [Jake] Peavy, and Al Leiter go about their business and how fun it looked to be a part of that. Not to mention, I got to watch Ken Griffey Jr. take a round of BP with a metal bat. It was like a modern day "field of dreams". (laughs) An American All-Star team. Words can't express how honored and humbled I am to be a part of something like this.

AB: Regarding the World Baseball Classic, do you have any concerns about how it will affect your training for the start of the season?

VP: I'm confident the only thing the WBC will do in terms of my training and season prep is give me more motivation to be ready. I try to be game ready when I get to camp. Every rep is a game rep for me, whether it's a spring training rep or a bullpen rep. Plus, I will have almost a month of spring training with the Indians before the WBC games start, so I should be right on schedule.

AB: Your name was brought up in trade rumors this offseason, though it's hard to determine how serious the rumors were. Does that affect you at all?

VP: I'd be lying if I said it didn't. Your curiosity gets the best of you. The situation our team was in at that time, and the nature of the market we operate in, it made sense that they might deal from our pen, which has been a strength of ours. I also knew that, with my years of control and my salary, it would take a decent package for me to be involved in, so the likelihood of getting traded wasn't something I put a lot of time into, outside of checking in on the rumors.

AB: When Jack Hannahan was non-tendered by the Indians back in November, [you said on Twitter](#) that it was "upsetting news" and that he was "the best teammate I've ever had". As fans, I'm not sure we realize how hard the personal side of the business is. How hard is it and how do you deal with it?

VP: It's definitely a tough side of the business. You get to know guys and their families. You want the best for everyone and want to watch everyone succeed. But, there is a business side to it and it's something you have to get used to. That's why when moves aren't made or new pieces are brought in, I'm not that upset. I believe in guys and the relationships that are there, and I truly believe that they will succeed because I want them to so bad. Sometimes it's not all sunshine and rainbows, though. Decisions have to be made and I'm glad I'm not the one making them. In Jack's case, I couldn't be happier for him and his family winding up in Cincy. He is going to be a great asset to that team and clubhouse.

AB: Last week, you and Jason Kipnis were credited with getting Josh Tomlin ([@jtomlin43](#)) on Twitter. How much convincing did it actually take?

VP: (laughs) All of about one night. Josh is rehabbing (from Tommy John surgery) and it's a very tedious and lonely process. I know from tons of experience and it's always nice to have something to get away from it all, even for a few minutes.

AB: The topic of discussion in baseball lately has been the Hall of Fame vote and the unwillingness of the voters to put suspected PED users, or steroid-era players in general, in Cooperstown. What's your take?

VP: All decades or eras have had some sort of advantage and the game has phased out those

advantages as it grew and got older. Guys took “greenies” back in the day. I guess that’s your modern day Adderall, but at least you have to go through an extensive testing and screening process to get approved to take it. It’s not put in the coffee anymore. Without a doubt it’s a PED, it’s just not making you faster, stronger and throw harder in some cases. We, as athletes, get caught up in always wanting to be the best and sometimes guys are presented with things that will propel them or set them apart. There’s the old saying, “If your friends all jumped off a bridge, would you do it too?” Well, if they jumped, and upon landing they received high praise and multi million dollar contracts for their efforts, you might not balk as much at the idea given the time period. I didn’t expect anyone who had that cloud floating around them to get in. Proven and speculation aside, I think first ballot there was no chance. Are Barry Bonds and Roger Clemens Hall of Famers in my book? Without a doubt. But, when that day comes, who knows? It’s not up to me. So is Pete Rose for that matter. I would gladly see Pete in before anyone that had a checkered past with PEDs, proven or rumored.

AB: After this season, you're going to be eligible for arbitration for the first time. Have you or your agent had any discussions with the team on a new contract? Do you plan to be a big part of the process or just let your agent handle things

VP: It's something you take in stride as you go. It's something that has a place in the back of your mind, but my focus is to be the best I can on the field and the rest will take care of itself. We haven't had a multi year contract in the pen since Kerry Wood was here and I'm not sure they want to change that. With how interchangeable bullpen pieces are and, again, the nature of the market our team operates in, with trades and flexibility, I'm not sure that's what they want to do just yet, but who knows. I am 100 percent open to staying in Cleveland as long as the team will have me. They took a chance drafting me knowing I needed surgery out of college after a lot of teams passed up on the chance, so I'm very grateful to the organization for the opportunities they have given me and would love nothing more than to call Cleveland my home for years to come.

AB: What would be your message to the fans for the upcoming season?

VP: I'm not one for bold predictions, but I think our active winter should show them that the both our attitude and the overall look of the team has made a complete 180 from the end of last season to the start of this one. We have been able to improve every part of our ballclub and it's going to be able to compete with anyone in our much improved division.

Special thanks to Vinnie Pestano for taking the time to participate in this interview. Like I said last year, if you're on Twitter and not following [@VinnieP52](#), shame on you.