



It's important enough to keep in the front of your mind, this one thing about Spring Training; don't read too much into anything. You can't watch these games in the same context that you'd watch any of the 162 that count; they just aren't played that way.

For the fans in Goodyear, some local and some quite traveled, the experience isn't about watching your team win, but seeing them or anyone play.

Just two days before the Goodyear Ballpark began hosting its fifth season of Major League Baseball, snow hit parts of the desert, near the Indians spring home, quite a few exits west of the metropolis we call Phoenix. However, when it was time to play ball on Friday, there wasn't a cloud to be found in the bright blue desert sky.

If we were to ignore the guy on the bump, we saw a group very similar to what Terry Francona is going to send out on the field to start the game, when the games start to mean something. That group included Michael Bourn, the exciting surprise that the Indians front office added at what amounts to the eleventh hour; he wore #24, played center field, and was at the top of the lineup card, but we weren't thinking of anyone else or anything.

The Indians new center fielder is likely to be a favorite among fans everywhere, including our friends from Seattle.

Michael and Michael

Written by {ga=riverburns}

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From his front row seat along the first base line, the Tribe fan from Washington state speaks very audibly, "Michael." Now, Michael Bourn is right there, within earshot, but it's Michael Brantley that looks over.

It was Brantley that would have been the man of the hour in a game that mattered, with his two doubles and an RBI in his only two at-bats of the day, but Bourn was the new guy with the big name.

Of course, this says nothing to the significance of Bourn's 0 for 1 day at the dish, which included a walk; but Brantley's doubles could have been home runs, and the Michael our friend was beckoning wouldn't have been the Player to be Named Later in the Sabathia deal of 2008.



Of course, our friend is a fan, and a gentleman to boot, so he's not out to upset anyone. So, when Brantley asked which Michael, our friend was content have them both sign a ball for his kids.

A few innings later, when Jason Giambi walked by, they tried to get his attention, but Giambi was polite in telling them that he didn't have time.

He was struggling, and I'm not talking about his pop out to short in his only at-bat, but he was carrying a few duffle bags and a couple of bats, racing to catch the bus behind the centerfield wall at the Goodyear Ballpark.

I get it; he was trying to get the big names, which mostly meant new acquisitions for 2013, but that's not necessarily what's going to make this team tick. The Michael and Michael situation is

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a good metaphor for how we can expect this team to be treated this year.

The guys that have been around, the Asdrubal Cabrerias and Michael Brantleys, aren't going to be trusted right away, no matter what they do in Goodyear or in April and May, because we don't trust what they represent.

They were part of a team that had no problems keeping the fans excited thru the month of June, but they're hangers on, from the Wedge and Acta eras.

It doesn't matter that they're good ballplayers, Cabrera's 0 for 1 with a run scored on Friday notwithstanding, there's a benefit of the doubt that Francona's influence has earned the new guys, and returning players will receive a lot less love from the fans (and maybe the papers) because of it. They might be on to something and they might not.

Brantley was supposedly penciled in as the leadoff hitter of the future when the Indians named him, instead of Taylor Green in the infamous Sabathia-for-prospects trade of '08. I'll give it to him for being solid in center field while Sizemore made \$5 million on the treadmill last year, but there's a reason that Shin-Soo Choo, who batted leadoff for the Reds on Friday, assumed top of the order responsibilities for Manny Acta a year ago.

Truthfully, Brantley found his niche hitting deeper in the order.

As a speedy outfielder, the stereotype would dictate that Brantley hit first or second in the order, but that just isn't Brantley's game. Forgetting that he was successful on just 12 of 21 steal attempts in 2012, we have to focus on how much of a square peg in a round hole the Brantley lead-off experiment proved to be. In 22 games at the top of the order, he batted a miserable .227 with an on-base percentage south of .300.

Conversely, he batted over .300 in the 5

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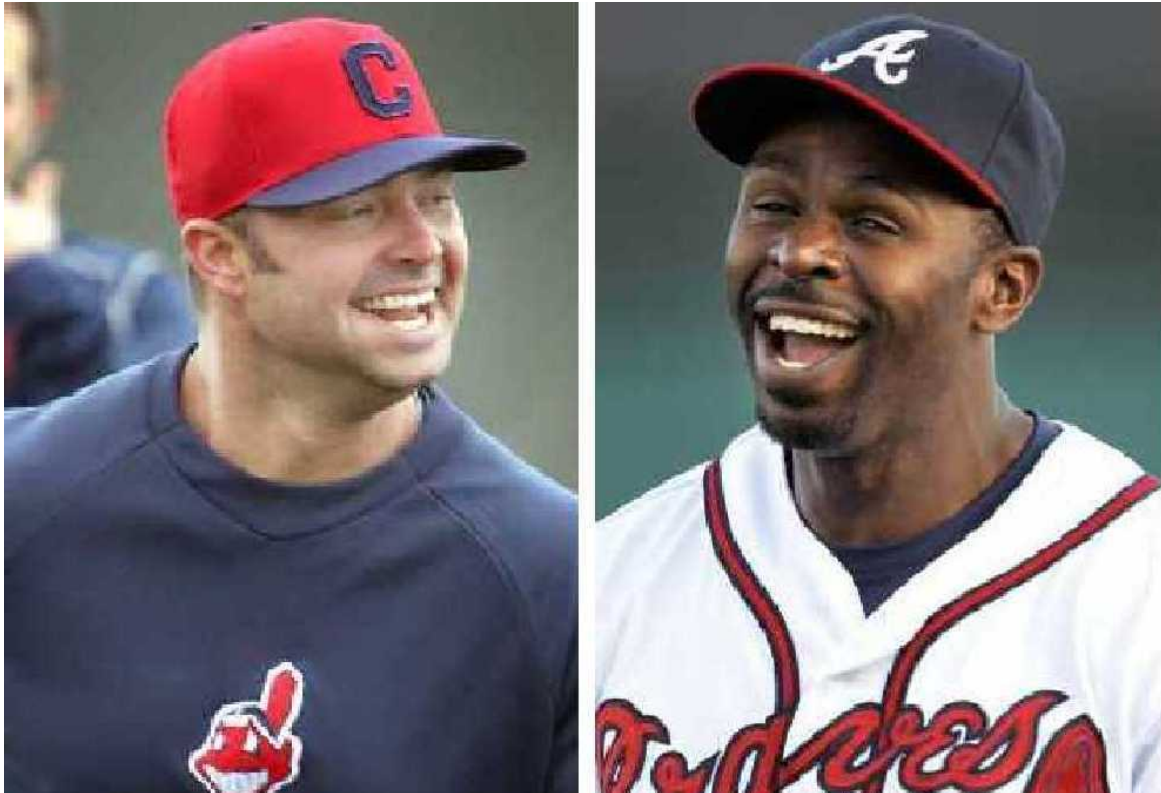
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spots in the lineup.

If he's finding the gap as often as the extremely small sample size (Friday's game) would indicated, I wouldn't mind seeing him protect Nick Swisher, Carlos Santana, and Mark Reynolds, towards the bottom of the lineup.



Swisher is another we're going to get excited about, almost to a fault. If The Ohio State University and Hang On Sloopy are your thing, Swisher likely won't disappoint, but the rest of the fans are going to need to see some results.

Though it's often erroneous to use the Barney Stinson logic that new is always better, we are talking about the guy after Matt LaPorta here.

LaPorta was the guy that was named in the aforementioned trade immediately, but has clearly been out-performed by the Player to be Named Later, not to mention Jose Lopez and Russ Canzler.

For what its worth and I promise that it really isn't worth much, Swisher looks comfortable in an Indians uniform and at first base with the glove. He got into his groove right away on Friday, singling Cabrera home from second in his first exhibition at-bat of spring.

A base knock off Tony Cingrani might not be much to write home about, but no one is saying that Swisher opened a bottle of bubbly to celebrate such a feat.

Still, one can worry about how the former Yankee might play down to the atmosphere, after being in the spotlight in the Bronx.

I suppose it's a legitimate concern, without reading too much into it either way, I don't believe that

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will be the case with the Buckeye that many of us believed was the Tribe's big signing this winter.

As Spring Training trudges along and we get to actual spring in late March, the Indians might have a clearer idea of how some other big names of years past might pan out. With names like Bauer, Kazmir, Myers, and Matsusaka (I'm not saying anyone other than Bauer should excite anyone) in camp, it will be easy for the casual fan to forget that Cory Kluber, Cody Allen, Josh Tomlin, and Carlos Carrasco are all fighting for roster spots, even after a few years in the organization.



For now, it's okay to root for Jason Giambi over Chris McGuiness, but you can prepare yourself for a letdown. If you're more interested in what Mark Reynolds can do with his bat than Lonnie Chisenhall, that's natural. When Mike McDade hits a walk-off double to give the Indians an 11-10 win in the bottom of the ninth, and you're still mesmerized by Swisher's third inning ground out, that's fine.

But, when you see the Michaels (not Jason Michaels) that patrol most of your 2013 Cleveland Indians outfield, don't just look at the new guy. Michael Bourn can cover a lot of ground, but he doesn't have to, with Brantley to his right and fellow newcomer Drew Stubbs to his left.

Even if it is the free agent you want to get to know, the other guy isn't chopped liver; so, when you want Michael, don't get disappointed when it's another Michael that answers the call.

The name on the front of the jersey is all that ever matters.