



Most of you have probably already completed your fantasy baseball drafts or you are going to. Unlike in recent years, the rosters of the teams in your league are going to include a much higher number of Indians position players. Knowing when to draft them and putting aside your fan-related bias could be the difference between winning your league and wasting your entry fee, especially if you're playing with a lot of local guys.

Yes, the Indians lineup should score runs at a much better rate and has some guys who are going to be valuable in fantasy baseball. Two of them, Asdrubal Cabrera and Jason Kipnis, are at positions of weakness, so they will be valued higher than others. Are any of the pitchers worth drafting? Are some guys going to regress? Will a change in park hurt Nick Swisher and Mark Reynolds? Is Michael Brantley worth drafting? When should I take Lonnie Chisenhall?

All of these are very valid questions. A lot of intangibles come into play when talking about these players. How many teams are in your league? What is the scoring setup? What statistics are tracked? Is it an AL-only league? It's hard to place a specific round value or average pick spot for these players because most fantasy leagues are different. Most leagues will use the standard 5x5 (R, AVG, HR, RBI, SB; W, ERA, SV, K WHIP) or 6x6 (add OPS and holds) with a 12-team format.

Regardless, most fantasy leagues are going to use what stat-heads call "the counting stats". For this week's View from the Porch, we'll look at the fantasy impact of the Indians.

We'll start with **Nick Swisher**. Swisher is interesting, because he has been remarkably

consistent in his career. What's even more interesting about that is that he had good seasons in both pitcher-friendly Oakland and hitter-friendly New York. His one down year also came in a good hitter's park in Chicago.

While the right field wall is definitely further back at Progressive Field, and the park is technically considered a pitcher's park, it's hard to see a drop-off in Swisher's numbers. One thing that's important to keep in mind is that Swisher will have 1B/OF eligibility. That's important because as a first baseman, his numbers are a little bit less valuable than in the outfield.

Over the last three seasons, Swisher has averaged .274/.366/.478/.844, with 76 home runs and 267 RBI. Swisher hit second and sixth in the lineup for the majority of his 2012 plate appearances. In 2011, he predominantly batted fifth or sixth. Swisher is projected to bat cleanup for Terry Francona. That should lead to more RBI chances. Swisher will have good protection in the lineup and a deep lineup could lead to a lot of runs scored. Also, Swisher should be happier in Cleveland, in an environment that will accept him for who he is.

Swisher is a good option as a second-drafted outfielder. Unlike some 25+ home run guys, Swisher should hit somewhere between .270-.280, so he won't hurt you there, and could come close to 100 RBI hitting in the middle of the order.

**Asdrubal Cabrera** is one of the best shortstops in fantasy baseball. The average shortstop hit .257/.310/.388 in 2012. Cabrera hit .270/.338/.423. He did have a sizable power drop from 2011 last season, going from 25 home runs down to 16, but he's still a premier offensive player at his position. With more lineup protection and less pressure to do it all himself, Cabrera's average could spike this season.

Cabrera cut down on his strikeouts while increasing his walks, which would imply that his strike zone knowledge is improving. He also had the highest line drive percentage of his career, meaning that he was barreling up balls with more frequency, and a trend like that could definitely lead to more hits that following season.

Cabrera is obviously a must have in all formats and is probably a top five offensive shortstop.

**Michael Bourn** is a valuable fantasy player because of his speed, but it's hard to rely on him for a lot more than that. From an average standpoint, he should be between .275-.290, but a league change and a new ballpark could be a detriment early on. Personally, I try to sneak by on steals with guys who get 20-25 per year and avoid guys like Bourn. He could single-handedly win steals on his own on some weeks, but, if you value steals, then Bourn's one of your top guys.

Year after year, Bourn exhibits a very high batting average on balls in play because of his ability to bunt for hits and beat out ground balls. He *should* be a higher average hitter than he is, but there are holes in his swing and he does strike out a lot for a speedster. Bourn has scored 94 or more runs in three of the last four years and that's a number that should remain high.

There's nothing wrong with drafting Bourn, because he can be a big help to runs and stolen bases, but don't overpay or draft him too high.

It'll be interesting to see how **Jason Kipnis** does in his second full season. Second base is a weak position in fantasy baseball, posting a .257/.318/.383 line in 2012. Kipnis, even with his atrocious second half, had a final line of .257/.333/.379. The second half collapse that Kipnis experienced would seem unlikely this season. With better depth and experience, Kipnis will be better equipped to handle the grind of the season.

With over 30 steals last season, Kipnis will be one of the more valuable second basemen available in your draft. Keep an eye on how Terry Francona sets the lineup. Kipnis has the potential to score a lot of runs if he is batting second or third, but less so if he hits seventh or eighth.

Don't burn an early pick on a second baseman, but keep Kipnis in mind because he could be an afterthought in a lot of leagues.

**Carlos Santana** is just outside the top three catchers and is a player with a lot of upside. He hits for power, walks, drives in runs, scores runs, and could improve his average. He batted over .280 in the second half last season, on a team with no lineup protection whatsoever. He was dynamite in the World Baseball Classic and could build off of that confidence. He was also a very slow starter in 2012.

Catcher is not a premier offensive position at all. Santana should have C/1B eligibility, but his bat doesn't play nearly as well at first base. Fill most of your other positions in the lineup before trying for Santana. You can always find a guy like the Dodgers' AJ Ellis later on because catchers really don't make a lot of the difference in fantasy.

**Lonnie Chisenhall** and **Mark Reynolds** probably won't have much fantasy value. There are other options to Reynolds, like Chris Davis and Adam Dunn, who are more valuable in 6x6 formats. Chisenhall also needs to prove his value before being worthy of a draft selection. If Chisenhall starts out well, he could be worth a look, but he will struggle with left handed pitching and you'll have to pay attention to matchups to pick and choose your spots. Reynolds, at 25 HR and 75 RBI, is a fairly common player, but if he's going north of 30 HR and 90 RBI, he becomes a fantasy option.

**Michael Brantley** is not a viable option in mixed leagues. In an AL-only league, Brantley should be helpful for runs scored and batting average, but he doesn't hit for power and really doesn't steal a whole lot for a corner outfielder without power.

As far as the pitchers go, none of the starters are worth drafting. **Justin Masterson** doesn't put up the necessary peripheral stats to be drafted. He doesn't strike out enough hitters and his ground ball style coupled with mediocre control makes his WHIP a very hard statistic to swallow. Along those lines, his ERA is likely to be at or above 4.00 because of his reliance on the defense.

One name for AL-only leagues is **Zach McAllister**. McAllister struck out nearly eight batters per nine innings and that would project him for around 160 K's if he throws 180 innings. He could be an easy double-digit winner. If he lowers his home run totals, he could post an ERA in the 3.50-3.75 range.

Two relievers make the cut for fantasy purposes. **Chris Perez** will be the team's closer and a spike in his strikeout numbers last season will increase his value. Perez got a little bit unlucky with baserunners last season, as his ground ball rate spiked 12 percent from 2011 to 2012. A spike in home runs and ground ball hits allowed led to a higher ERA. That should regular in 2012 and he should be closer to 3.00.

**Vinnie Pestano** deserves a selection in the later rounds. For starters, he is first in line for save opportunities if Perez gets hurt. For another thing, Pestano is a valuable reliever with good strikeout numbers who doesn't give up a lot of runs or walks. He's only worth a selection in deep leagues with a lot of teams, because his value is pretty low in fantasy baseball unless he becomes the primary closer.

Good luck in your fantasy leagues this season!