

Spring Training Rundown: As Close As You Can Get

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

Friday, March 29 2013 8:07 AM - Last Updated Friday, March 29 2013 10:03 AM



It's that time of the year again.

The time of the year when everyone starts putting out preseason predictions, division and team previews, and try their hand at predicting or forecasting what is going to happen.

That means, it is the time of the year when I get a little antsy and start thinking the Indians have a chance to win the World Series. It doesn't matter, they could field a team of 12-year-olds that have one arm tied behind their backs and are restricted to wearing snow boots and I would think there is a chance.

That's the magic of Opening Day and the impending return of baseball season. The magic of hope, and sometimes lunacy and unsupported, but wildly imaginative potential scenarios in where the Indians win it all.

Previews [like this one](#) and [this one](#) can help shed perspective, but also give you a rebellious attitude. What do they know! They're totally overlooking the Indians in that regard! Or if there are any slivers of hope, it helps you manifest some good point into a full-blown reason to

Spring Training Rundown: As Close As You Can Get

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

Friday, March 29 2013 8:07 AM - Last Updated Friday, March 29 2013 10:03 AM

believe.

I was going to try and fight it, but why do that? I'll take my periods of untamed hope and wild optimism, because I also have those moments of sober realization that will probably bring me back to the middle somewhere.

So with that, as I did last year, I present to you the final Spring rundown of the 2013 year. It is one that I look back the Spring Training Primer and cover up any loose ends before we begin to start the season. Enjoy.

[SPRING PRIMER REVISITED]

I'm man enough to admit when I make mistakes or make a critical error. I'm also okay with pointing out things I get wrong and making an incredibly big deal about them.

Mostly because when I do get things right, I make as equally big of a deal. So, I'll make a big deal about things I say, whether they are right or wrong. The following section where I revisit the spring training primer has an equal amounts of both wrong and right.

Three to Keep an Eye On: Trevor Bauer, Lonnie Chisenhall, and Yan Gomes

All Chisenhall did was hit four home runs and knock in a team-high 12 RBI this spring, so it was kind of hard to not keep your eye on him. Bauer did well, but ultimately fell short to the story of Scott Kazmir in his bid for a rotation job, but he definitely looks close to the major leagues. Yan Gomes was off to a great start and decided against the WBC before he had some injury issues that slowed him down. Ultimately though, he gets regular playing time at catcher in Columbus, which may benefit him more.

Prospect Dark Horse: Tim Fedroff

Spring Training Rundown: As Close As You Can Get

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

Friday, March 29 2013 8:07 AM - Last Updated Friday, March 29 2013 10:03 AM

His stay was pretty good and in 11 games he went 5-for-21, but never really played much of a factor in the Indians final bench spot race. [They wanted some versatility](#), and opted not for a true fourth outfielder, so he really never stood a chance in that regard. It's the big reason they took Raburn over someone like Ezequiel Carrera, and in that regard, that pretty much worked against Fedroff just as much.

And even if it didn't, Carreras spring was able to hold Fedroff at bay before he could make any sort of huge impact or gain a significant opportunity.

Injury Watch: Chris Perez Withdraws from WBC

The big news and biggest injury was what happened to Chris Perez and how he was forced to step back and not participate in the World Baseball Classic. The good news? Chris Perez is going to be ready to go, and his situation strongly mirrored what happened to him last year. But if Perez's injury is the most noteworthy and he is going to be okay for Opening Day, then the Indians have made it through spring in really good shape.

Joe Smith started a little behind, Jason Kipnis and Asdrubal Cabrera both have [recently been dinged up](#),

Michael Brantley missed some time for a arm laceration, and unfortunately the Indians lost Frank Herrmann to Tommy John Surgery for the year, but otherwise, a relatively healthy spring.

40-Man Endangered Species: Phelps Makes Statement

No one really lost their spot when all was said and done. Because of Josh Tomlin and Blake Wood taking 60-day DL status, spots were created for people that needed them. Frank Herrmann was able to hold his standing when he suffered the same fate, so for him, it may have been something that saved his status, but not his season. David Huff is one that will be losing his status, regardless. If he is sent to another team, obviously he'll keep it, but if no one takes him, he'll be sent to Columbus and jettisoned off the roster because he is out of options. As is Zeke Carrera, who the Indians continue to look for a taker for.

Spring Training Rundown: As Close As You Can Get

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

Friday, March 29 2013 8:07 AM - Last Updated Friday, March 29 2013 10:03 AM

Terry Pluto notes that the [Rockies had some interest in Huff](#) .

The only name that really saved himself was Cord Phelps, who was looking like someone who was lost in the overall shuffle of the team. But Phelps had an excellent spring, and even though the Indians have Mike Aviles, Ryan Raburn found a spot on this team, so that gives Phelps hope that there is room for him at some point down the road. If Raburn doesn't pan out, or if the Indians eventually at some point even further down the road part ways with Asdrubal Cabrera, it would be Aviles that assumes the shortstop role, opening up a really large need for a "everything" guy, which Phelps has demonstrated he can do defensively.

Position Battles: Bullpen Rounds Out, Kazmir Surprises.

Some surprises came around when the Indians decided they wanted an extra bullpen arm, one less bench spot, and actually named Zach McAllister a concrete starter and put Carrasco in the fifth rotation spot battle. And then one man emerged in Scott Kazmir. A story that has legs and could lead the Indians into a nice reclamation project find. Kazmir took the reigns with his improved control and new pitching style.

With the bullpen expanded, I was spot on in my projection of who was making the bullpen, minus one. The one I didn't have in the mix, mainly because I didn't know another spot was available? Cody Allen, a welcomed add. For something as volatile as the bullpen, I'm quite shocked I hit it that close, but not surprised in the strategy the Indians went with in picking the last few reliever spots.

Completely wrong in so many regards was I on the final bench spots. The Indians decided to go with a three man bench, but will ultimately give one more spot to Jason Giambi after a few weeks. Raburn beat out Yan Gomes, pretty much. And Chris McGuiness, [who was sent back to the Rangers](#) , put up a hard fought (but ultimately, too hard) attempt, but it was no match for Jason Giambi's veteran presence.

And that answers that question we had....

Spring Training Rundown: As Close As You Can Get

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

Friday, March 29 2013 8:07 AM - Last Updated Friday, March 29 2013 10:03 AM

Five Burning Questions

Where Does Jason Giambi Fit? Apparently on the bench as a player-coach. Giambi has brought a big veteran presence and while he'll start the season on the DL, he made such an impact that he will be on the bench and see some time at DH when he does get activated.

What's this outfield going to actually look like? The question was answered fairly early and very quickly after the Indians signed Michael Bourn. He'd play center, that was a given, Brantley shifts back to left, and Stubbs mans right. Stubbs was not shopped and the Indians proceeded by moving Swisher to more of a regular first baseman, and Reynolds as the full-time DH who occasionally plays first.

How much will Francona's Lineup change? The guess was a lot, and it did. He even had Lonnie Chisenhall hitting in the middle half at one point. Francona did a lot of mixing and matching and we still aren't real sure how it will actually look like until Opening Day. It will have some sort of top with Bourn leading off, Cabrera second and Swisher at cleanup or third, but what Francona officially trots out there is not known exactly until he does.

Is this Dice-K thing for real? Oh it was for real and still is. So much so that until he came up with some cramping, he was very much in the race. But not just that, but the fact that he's still trying to build his arm strength back up to the right spot is why the Indians want to keep Matsuzaka in the fold and will start him in Columbus with him possibly playing a factor at some point in the season if he progresses and impresses.

Will the Indians worry about Santana playing the WBC? Not only did they have to watch their catcher play in the WBC, they had to watch him play the entire time as the Dominican Republic advanced to and won the whole classic with an undefeated record. Santana was caught up in the weeks where he returned, but he certainly did a little more full-time catching this spring than the Indians would have had him do had they had control of him. Hopefully it does not play a factor and that the Indians can get him some more first base and designated hitter starts to open up the season before Giambi is activated.

Spring Training Rundown: As Close As You Can Get

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

Friday, March 29 2013 8:07 AM - Last Updated Friday, March 29 2013 10:03 AM

How'd I Do?

Well, I hit the bullpen correct and was just wrong on the Carrasco-Kazmir rotation spot. The bench was going to be a difficult thing to predict a month ago when Giambi was just signed and the Indians felt really good about Yan Gomes and the fact that he was sticking around this spring. Who would have seen Raburn coming out like he did though? That's what makes spring fun in that regard and predicting the roster, hard.

[RANDOM RUNDOWN]

Carlos Carrasco was pleased [with the effort he put forth](#) and will be ready when the Indians call his name this season. Carrasco noted that he did not feel good early on and only started to feel good the past few weeks. He does say he is healthy though and it just goes to show you that it takes a lot of time for a guy to get back to a comfortable position coming off that type of elbow surgery. Baring injury or a miraculous situation where the Indians keep all five guys for 162 games, you know Carrasco will get that call and you know Car-2 should be at a good spot physically for the chance.

"It's the easiest way to derail your season, by not having enough pitching," said Francona, when asked about the rotation depth. "It's the hardest thing to do, but I thought [GM Chris Antonetti] did a great job. We have some guys sitting in Triple-A that are still developing that we could call up. We have a veteran we could call up. I think there's some balance there that, if something happens, we could go to some guys."

Chris Perez continues to [make his return to the mound](#) in live game action and things went horribly wrong in his latest outing. He gave up four runs off five hits and a walk, two home runs. Just ugly. But let's remember that he is very much having his spring condensed and probably working some things out and is very much just getting his footing for next week. He'll probably get one more shot, so that's the one we'll be focused on.

Regarding that bullpen that I was able to define pretty accurately... Tito says things will take some time to settle in terms of roles. Other than Perez as a closer and Vinnie and Joe in the seventh and eighth innings, [things are very much undefined](#) .

Spring Training Rundown: As Close As You Can Get

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

Friday, March 29 2013 8:07 AM - Last Updated Friday, March 29 2013 10:03 AM

That could be an issue, but I have to think Francona has some sort of configuration in mind that he'll stick to early on and it won't be long for guys to settle in.

The guy who may be his go-to left-hander is **Nick Hagadone**, or at least, eventually his go-to left-hander. Rich Hill will get looks, but Hagadone's stuff can be electric when he is on. And [Hags has come a long way since how the situation with him unfolded](#) at the tail end of last year, which was not long ago at all.

"Being able to come back and make the team after how last year ended is a big step," Hagadone said. "Hopefully, we can move on from 2012 and just go from there. Going through stretches like that, and being able to make changes, are really important for future success. You can learn from the worst times. June was probably the worst month I've had as a pitcher at any level. Being able to take something away from that, learning how important it is to work ahead in the count and not be as predictable as I was, I think that's huge going forward."

And it really is a big time fresh start for Hagadone with a new manager. Not to say he had any bad blood with Manny Acta, but Francona may have heard about what happened, but he certainly didn't experience it. Does he know Hagadone hurt himself over frustration last year? Yes, but I doubt he really cares all that much considering he was not there to witness it first hand. That should work in his favor and should give him the confidence to go forward knowing it is not an issue and it is not holding him back.

Speaking of the new manager, he had quite the Q&A up on MLB.com the other day. He tackled a lot of good questions and his answers were very hopeful for Indians fans, and made you feel like he has this genuine quality about him, that he won't let this operation fail. It's like he knows that where there is a will, there is a way and nothing will stop this team from doing something special at some point.

Normally, I'd go through and analyze every quote that stuck out, [but Adam Burke already did a very good job with that](#). He makes some excellent points about a few of the things Francona said.

Spring Training Rundown: As Close As You Can Get

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

Friday, March 29 2013 8:07 AM - Last Updated Friday, March 29 2013 10:03 AM

There is one thing I'd like to point out though in regards to what Michael Brantley said to Francona.

Francona: Yeah. Michael Brantley and I talked about that. He said, "I was kind of forced into that role." He was kind of saying that he wasn't sure if he belonged doing that yet. We have guys in there now that should care about each other enough to want to do the right thing, and there are some personalities in there that, yeah, will definitely be able to do that. You can name a lot of names that are leader-type guys, which is good. And the younger guys will definitely be better for that experience.

Remember what Vinnie Pestano said awhile ago during the winter? How [he said the Indians did not have a clubhouse presence to step up](#) and figure out that losing streak? You may laugh at me any time I bring up Trot Nixon, but the club needs those type of people around. It just rings a little louder now if you ask me. And even more louder now that the Indians have those people this year.

The other thing is that some of those people, [didn't even experience what happened last year](#) first hand. It didn't happen to them, which in turn makes it easier for the people who did experience it, to move forward.

"A lot of these guys weren't there for it last year," Kipnis said. "So they don't know about it. They don't have that in their back pocket. They're not looking to bounce back from that. They have a fresh start going into this one, so I think that's why it's kind of been a good change for us -- where we've gotten over it so fast."

It's a new and different feeling around the squad, which is something we've already talked about. But with the anticipation of Opening Day, you can't help but get excited.

"It's definitely a different atmosphere, a different mentality coming into Opening Day than in years past," Perez said. "The front office stepped up and did their job. They put together a good staff for us. Now, it's up to us to go out there and do what we're supposed to do."

It seems perfect to now transition into the lighter side of Terry Francona as he had yet another classic moment, bringing his total up to three in just one spring. From riding around on a

Spring Training Rundown: As Close As You Can Get

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

Friday, March 29 2013 8:07 AM - Last Updated Friday, March 29 2013 10:03 AM

scooter, to Harlem Shaking, [to now, TERRi.](#)

Oh, yeah... I think that just happened... Yeah it did... Okay.

It would only make sense to wrap up on yet another light note, with mentioning the excellent post by Anthony Castrovine [where he once again dives into the Indians Media Guide](#) to find the most absolute excruciating of all the minutiae.

Highlights include Ubaldo Jimenez liking America's Funniest Home Videos, Sandy Alomar's slightly-older-than-me daughter, Scott Kazmir being part Czech, and Scott Barnes' listing Lou Marson as his favorite athlete.

Lou Marson is also my favorite athlete, in my heart. Not on the surface, but in my heart, and that's what is most important.

-

Nino is in full baseball mode here and on [The Tribe Daily](#), his own Indians blog. Don't miss all the fun, photoshopped Indians players, and LOLTribe ridiculousness.

[Follow @TheTribeDaily](#)