



As baseball fans, and specifically as Indians fans, this is a time of year when doubts and worries (and maybe some reality) give way to optimism and hope. It's that way across baseball, in nearly every major league city (sorry Minneapolis and Houston) and it's no different here.

Except that it is. For the first time in a long time there may be reason aside from Opening Day to be excited about the Indians. After a surprisingly busy offseason and a lot of buzz generated by it, the speculating and forecasting is done with and the club sets off to win or lose and be defined by which of those two things they do more often. Will be it a magical year? Will it be disappointing? Give us six months or so and we'll let you know. But we'll ask our writers what they're looking for and expecting out of the 2013 Tribe and, as always, they won't be short of thoughts on the matter.

**Thomas Moore**

**A lot of new faces, but still some familiar ones. For the returning players, what has to be different to avoid mediocrity and/or another collapse?**

Simply not having to carry as much weight on offense should help Jason Kipnis, Lonnie Chisenhall and Carlos Santana. With Casey Kotchman, Jack Hannahan and Johnny Damon no longer around to be a drain on the offense, Kipnis, Chisenhall and Santana should have the opportunity to progress naturally without having to feel that if they don't do it on a nightly basis no one will. It seems like these three have been around a long time already, but Kipnis has just one full season in the majors, Santana just two and Chisenhall has barely played a 100 games total at the big-league level. Just being able to go about the process of learning what it takes to

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make it through the season should help their on-field production.

Sadly, the same cannot be said of the starting rotation. It's past time for people to think that we will see the "2010 Ubaldo Jimenez" ever again; the first half of that season was every bit a mirage as the 19 wins that Roberto Hernandez put up in 2007. After making 96 starts over the past three seasons, Justin Masterson is as advertised: a pitcher than has trouble repeating his delivery on a consistent basis. On a good team, he would be a No. 3 starter at best; on the Tribe he's the No. 1 by default and there's not much he can do as he is what he is.

### **What influence are we expecting from the organization's new faces (including the skipper)?**

A professional approach to how to play the game. The younger players need to be around players who have been there before and who they can learn from. Even though there is a lot of standing around in baseball, the season is still a long one and knowing how to get through it both mentally and physically is key.

With Nick Swisher, Michael Bourn and Jason Giambi, the Tribe has players on the roster that have been through it all (even if that was only three playoff games in Bourn's case) and should be good influences on the younger players. Even Giambi, who's probably shot as a player, is not a bad 25th man on the roster; it's not as if manager Terry Francona kept him over Brandon Phillips.

On the pitching side, we're not sure that Brett Myers and Scott Kazmir will have the same impact, but they probably can't hurt. We liked the move to keep Kazmir as the No. 5 starter as the Indians have nothing to lose at that spot. Having Kazmir start the season with the club lets Carlos Carrasco work to rebuild his arm strength in the minors with regular turns in the rotation, rather than rush him back. If Kazmir can pitch anywhere close to the way he did in 2007 and 2008 with Tampa, it's a win for the Tribe. If he struggles, Carrasco (among others) is waiting.

The biggest wildcard is probably Francona. Yes, he won two World Series in Boston (with bloated payrolls) and he is touted as a player's manager, but things didn't exactly end well in Boston and he wasn't a very good manager in Philadelphia when the Phillies had a small payroll. And apparently we are obligated to mention that he ran around the Indians clubhouse

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as a kid when his dad played for the Tribe. (That's the downside of Cleveland pride, we too often grab hold of things that are insignificant to the success of our sports teams, like Swisher's "return" to Ohio).

After eight years in Boston and another four in Philadelphia, there's little doubt that Francona has seen everything and that should be a big plus. We still go back to the question we asked when Francona was hired:

If you could manage any team in Major League Baseball, why would you choose the Indians?

### **Realistically, where will the Indians finish in the AL Central?**

Detroit should easily win the division again this year and Minnesota should easily finish in the basement again. As for the rest of the division ... there's not much that separates the Indians, Kansas City and Chicago; all three are sort of just there on the national landscape. Injuries will probably determine the order of the second-, third- and fourth-place teams.

### **Who will be the Indians MVP this season? Any All-Stars?**

After giving him the biggest free agent contract in franchise history, Nick Swisher better be the team's MVP. We're still not sure how smart it was to give \$56 million to a player who's Similarity Scores compare him to Oscar Gamble and Cliff Johnson, but here we are.

As for All Stars, Asdrubal Cabrera, Chris Perez and Vinnie Pestano should all be in the mix for consideration.

### **Who's the World Series winner when it all ends in October?**

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Let's go with the Washington Nationals. If we can get them off the list of teams that have never won a World Series (or haven't won in a long time) then maybe we can move one step closer to the Tribe actually winning a World Series.

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### **Nino Colla**

**A lot of new faces, but still some familiar ones. For the returning players, what has to be different to avoid mediocrity and/or another collapse?**

For the players on this team that were around last year, they need to keep last year in their memory. They know what the lowest of the lows in this game looks like and it looks incredibly ugly. If they can use that to motivate them, then something like that won't happen again. And hopefully, it pushes some of them to do something they may not ordinarily do. If you were on the Cleveland Indians last year and you are this year, then there must be something worth while. Considering the changes the Indians made, if you were just another Aaron Cunningham, you wouldn't be around. The returning players need to just perform.

**What influence are we expecting from the organization's new faces (including the skipper)?**

The entire environment has changed though with all the new faces, but it all starts with Terry Francona. His influence runs from the top on down and the way he has impacted this team before they've even played a regular season game is remarkable. Set aside how he has been able to get players to buy into the Indians, he has taken a fan base that was growing ever increasingly frustrated and upset and made them shift their perspective dramatically. And the infusion of whatever it is Nick Swisher brings? That's a bonus.

**Realistically, where will the Indians finish in the AL Central?**

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Last year it was a situation with Detroit where they became vulnerable. They were not able to do what they did in the playoffs because of injuries, lack of starting pitching, and a shaky back-end of their bullpen. This year it looks to be totally different after what they did in the playoffs. If this Indians team this year could compete with the situation last year in the AL Central, they might win it all. But that looks unlikely. That being said, it should be a fun battle between the Tribe, Royals, and White Sox. What will be interesting to see is the Royals new pitching versus the Indians new hitting.

### **Who will be the Indians MVP this season? Any All-Stars?**

If the Indians do want to compete for an AL Central with what we think the Detroit Tigers are going to be like, someone has to play at an MVP level. The guy who can do that? The guy who needs to be the Indians offensive MVP, Carlos Santana. Now that he has hitters around him and isn't protected by the ghost of Travis Hafner in the lineup or Shelley Duncan, I think Santana is poised to finally do what he's capable of, and that's put up All-MLB numbers. He's one of the best offensive catchers in the game and with hitters around him to take the pressure off, he may just prove it.

### **Who's the World Series winner when it all ends in October?**

That being said, without pitching, the Indians cannot beat the Tigers, which puts them right in the playoffs. While they have a solid team offensively and in the rotation, their bullpen is quite the mess because they don't know who will be the guy at the very end. That can cause problems, and perhaps get them off to yet another slow start, but I'd expect them to prevail. I do not however think they'll be taking home the Commissioner's trophy. Hard not to like the Miami Marlins as the favorite for the World Series. Just kidding, I like the Nationals, a lot, and I'm going with them over the Angels.

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**Jeff Rich**

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### **A lot of new faces, but still some familiar ones. For the returning players, what has to be different to avoid mediocrity and/or another collapse?**

There's a difference between coming back down to earth and just giving up, and unfortunately we saw a lot of the latter by late August last season, when victory was just a way to mercifully truncate whatever losing streak they were in at the time. Asdrubal Cabrera doesn't have his youth to use as an excuse any longer; if he's bona fide, it's time to show it. The left-handed bats, namely Michael Brantley and Lonnie Chisenhall should have a little bit of pressure taken off them with the new right-handed bats coming in to keep the opposition from loading up on the southpaws when they see the Indians on the schedule. It's more of the same for the pitching rotation; throw strikes and stay out of your own head. Mickey Callaway, the new pitching coach, seems to be a good fit for this staff.

### **What influence are we expecting from the organization's new faces (including the skipper)?**

Let us take a moment to just sit and appreciate the front office's proactive approach to the off-season, even if they were in a "go, or get off the can" mode. If I'm talking to a stranger about the 2013 Tribe, the first thing I'm telling them is that it's a whole new ballgame. Even if they don't get Michael Bourn, which was obviously a fantastic surprise a week before camp started, the whole thing is built on the foundation of Terry Francona and Nick Swisher. There is an element of leadership in the clubhouse and in the dugout that we haven't seen in Cleveland since before the Eric Wedge hire. That helps Jason Kipnis and Carlos Santana the most, not to mention how it eases the transition for Mark Reynolds and Drew Stubbs, who won't have the weight of the world on their shoulders. Regardless of what he does at the plate, understand that everyone is going to learn a thing or two about hitting the baseball from Jason Giambi.

### **Realistically, where will the Indians finish in the AL Central?**

There's a good vibe about this team, there really is, and there should be. Even if it isn't murderer's row, the lineup should be substantial, thanks to the off season moves. It wasn't that long ago that Brantley shared an outfield with Grady Sizemore and Shin-Soo Choo, and it still felt like he was in an island, but no one is missing either one of them. Credit Michael Bourn, he and Brantley have a chemistry that's hard to put into words, so the outfield should be solid offensively and defensively. There are some natural concerns about a sophomore slump from Kipnis, but hopefully the influence of Swisher, who is equivalent to about 8 shots of Five-Hour

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Energy a day in real life, and Giambi to carry him through the learning curve now that the book is out on the former Arizona State outfielder.

If this team can get the ball to Vinnie Pestano in the eighth inning, and ultimately Chris Perez in the ninth, then hey, "winner winner chicken dinner"; see you in October, but slow your rope on that assumption. There are positively no guarantees with this starting rotation, starting at the top with Masterson, the easy choice for Francona on Opening Day. The former Red Sox phenom has showed some flashes of brilliance, but he really has no go-to when the sinker isn't working, and that's a concern that Kansas City and Detroit don't have weighing them down at the top. Ubaldo Jimenez goes by "U", but the real thing with him is "why", as in "why can't he get it together?" Throwing strikes and staying out of his own head seems to be problem for 2012's AL leader in losses, perhaps Callaway, Jimenez's 4th pitching coach in 3 seasons can help, but #2 is a big question mark in a rotation that has a lot of those. Brett Myers had a bad spring, but pitching to contact in Arizona is a little different than doing it in April and May in the American League Central division; longevity is a worry, if his arm can't keep the bullpen on their rear ends through the 5th/6th inning, look out.

To put a number on it, I'll say the good only slightly outweighs the uh-oh, and expect 83 wins. In a completely unscientific numbers game, lets put that behind Detroit at 99 and the Royals at 88, but on top of Chicago at 80 (just to give them a losing reord) and the Twins at 71, perhaps giving credence to the Antonetti/Shapiro decision not to give Pat Willingham 3 years last spring.

### **Who will be the Indians MVP this season? Any All-Stars?**

Michael Brantley missed a lot of at-bats this spring after tearing his arm open sliding into 3rd base on February 25th, but swung a great bat on both sides of the hiatus. I like him in the middle or near the bottom of the lineup, which shouldn't be a place where the big inning goes to die, as it was a year ago. If the MVP is a starting pitcher, especially if it isn't Masterson, this season will be better than I expected. None of this is to say that Vinnie Pestano isn't an All-Star, but you aren't making your set-up man your team MVP.

### **Who's the World Series winner when it all ends in October?**

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I'm already thinking about washing my hands as I type this, but I believe Iltch gets the title he's spent so much money on. They have too much offense and adequate enough starting pitching to run away with the division, shut down the Tampa, Texas, and (I'm still calling them) Anaheim bats on the way to beating the NL West team that reaches the Fall Classic, whether it's the Dodgers or the Giants.

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### Adam Burke

#### **A lot of new faces, but still some familiar ones. For the returning players, what has to be different to avoid mediocrity and/or another collapse?**

Just like the organization as a whole, the returning players get a fresh start. There's a new manager, a new coaching staff, and less pressure on them to carry the burden. We forget that Jason Kipnis and Carlos Santana are still young guys. We forget that Justin Masterson has only been a full-time Major League starter for three seasons. Guys like Asdrubal Cabrera and Michael Brantley, who don't really know how to lead, tried to put it all on their shoulders and lead by example. Cabrera, especially, struggled at handling failure and it showed in his performance towards the end of the season.

The Indians were not a 68-94 team last year. Problems in the clubhouse with Manny Acta and the snowball effect took the train completely off the rails. That's not to say that they even reached a level of mediocrity, but they learned a lot last season about how to handle adversity and very few of them would say that they handled it well. Baseball is a humbling game and a lot of guys found that out the hard way over the last two seasons. They'll be better for it in the future, hopefully, beginning with 2013.

#### **What influence are we expecting from the organization's new faces (including the skipper)?**

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Creating a better culture in the clubhouse, in the dugout, and on the field is a big step. The Indians trailed after the first inning 48 times last season and lost 41 of those games. There was a "woe is me" attitude when things started to go south and the team lacked the necessary personalities to bounce back from those tough times. With the backing of ownership, a supportive manager, and some guys who come from winning environments and know what it takes to improve morale and keep morale high, the team is in much better shape than they were last season.

From an on-field standpoint, Nick Swisher will more or less replace Shin-Soo Choo's production. Michael Bourn gives the team an element of speed and contact that they have sorely lacked. Mike Aviles is one of the most underrated additions to the ballclub. Not only does he allow Terry Francona to rest Jason Kipnis and Asdrubal Cabrera to keep them fresh, he's also a pretty good player in his own right. Drew Stubbs is a massive defensive upgrade in right field and his bat against left handed pitching is above average. Mark Reynolds will be one of the most frustrating hitters on the team, but he walks and hits for power. Those are two highly valuable assets. The strikeouts will be a burden at times, but for each handful of strikeouts with runners on, he'll crush a three-run homer.

Terry Francona signifies a huge chance for this organization. He could have hand-picked any job he wanted and he came to Cleveland. He believes in the front office. He believes in the way things are done. The money spent on free agents makes a big difference, but to have a guy who enjoys working with Chris Antonetti and Mike Chernoff, as well as the scouting staff, and Mark Shapiro on the business side is a big deal. Plus, he has ties to the organization. His passion for the game and his job will rub off on the players on a daily basis.

### **Realistically, where will the Indians finish in the AL Central?**

The Tigers are the overwhelming favorite and they should be. Their rotation is probably the best in the American League. Their lineup is terrific. They don't have great depth and have a lot of bullpen questions, but there's enough talent there and in Triple-A to get them over the hump. Their rotation stayed remarkably healthy last season with the exception of Doug Fister's two DL stints. Injuries there could be a factor, especially with Anibal Sanchez's rebuilt shoulder from a couple years back. But, they should win 90 games without much difficulty.

The Indians should finish second in the division. The White Sox don't impress me on paper. Outside of Chris Sale, the rotation is mediocre to poor and Jake Peavy looks like a regression

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candidate. The Royals still have one of the game's weakest rotations. James Shields has a career 4.67 ERA in open-air stadiums and a 4.49 ERA on grass. Some of the position players, like Eric Hosmer and Mike Moustakas may have breakout seasons, but this is a very bad starting rotation. The bullpen has the potential to be fantastic.

The Twins are pathetic. They may be the worst team in baseball.

### **Who will be the Indians MVP this season? Any All-Stars?**

A great season would mean that the Indians MVP is a pitcher. Since that seems unlikely, I'll say Carlos Santana. Batting sixth, there will be less pressure on him and he can get a lot of opportunities with runners on base. It's reasonable to assume that Asdrubal Cabrera would be an All-Star representative because of the lack of offensive talent at that position. Chris Perez also has the chance at another Midsummer Classic appearance.

### **Who's the World Series winner when it all ends in October?**

The Nationals have no excuses this season. With Rafael Soriano, their bullpen is one of the three best in baseball and their rotation might be the best out of anybody in baseball. They can hit for power, they have speed, and it doesn't take a lot of runs for them to win games. Representing the American League, I'll have to say the Detroit Tigers. I think they have some holes, but in a short series, their rotation will make them a favorite over pretty much every AL team.

I'll hope that the Nationals beat the Tigers.