

The Anti-Octobers

Written by {ga=riverburns}

Thursday, July 18 2013 4:58 AM - Last Updated Thursday, July 18 2013 11:07 AM



As we often do during these dog days of summer, with an emphasis on the doggish part during the week of the Major League All-Star Break, we scour the inter-webs to find anything that resembles relevance. Often we come up short, but that's exactly how we discover the news of the weird and other quirky types of things that pique our interest, as a result of perfect timing, if for no other reason. Occasionally, I might catch a glimpse of what another scribe is doing, and that inspires me. This week's inspiration comes courtesy of MLB.com's senior Indians writer, Jordan Bastian.

Bastian, who took over the Indians.com beat from Anthony Castrovince three years ago, had the difficult task of filling the shoes of a very talented once-local in Castrovince, but has done a good job engaging the reader, from where I sit anyway. So, I stumbled across Bastian's blog a few nights ago, [one that compiled an Indians All-Time All-Star team](#) ; great concept. Instead of putting together a team larger than my high school varsity football team, which is what the actual mid-summer classic has become, the guidelines were to create an actual 25-man roster, one that can theoretically play a 162-game schedule. While I'm sure extensive work was put in, and the roster looked great, it just looked familiar--almost too familiar.

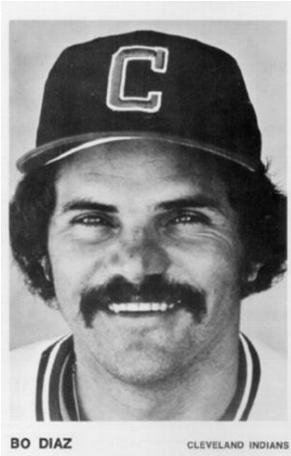
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The Tribe has been playing ball for over 110 years, yet the makeup of the all-time roster, based solely on first half performances, looked like the teams we had difficulty getting tickets to go see in the early days of Jacobs Field. The starting 9 contained 7 players that called Mike Hargrove their skipper, and the other two earned World Series rings while playing for Lou Boudreau in 1948. Understandably, the goal wasn't parity, it simply to find the best 25 first halves and compile a fun roster. For people my age, who certainly don't take any of the late-90s for granted, there's still more to Indians baseball than the games played at Carnegie and Ontario. History tends to forget those games played in front of 8,800 people on the Lakefront, as it should, but there are plenty of fans that appreciate the Braves of the Cuyahoga that never played a single October game in a Tribe uniform.

This is for all of those players, some who played with the hearts of lions each and every night. Only six players, all pitchers, from Bastian team would not be disqualified for playing on one of ten Cleveland playoff rosters since 1920. Julio Franco was difficult to dismiss; mainly, because it was a brief cameo return to the Jacobs Field Era Indians that put him in the post-season, and that's good for him. This roster does include two players who were with the Indians during playoff seasons, but one "died and got sent to the minors" and the other one actually died in August of a World Championship season. On top of the obvious rule that a player cannot take up two roster spots, I also limited my selections to one per season, which made 1968 a difficult decision.



Catcher - Bo Diaz (1981)

With all of the discussion surrounding Yasiel Puig going into this 2013 Mid-Summer Classic, it's funny that the first player we're discussing here only played in 37 games before the break in 1981, but things happen. He was hitting .356, and 13 of his 42 hits were doubles. That's a nice thing to remember about Diaz; it's much better than remembering he expired falling off of his roof while fixing a satellite dish.

First Base - Andre Thornton (1983)

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Now, the man known as "Thunder" would periodically have a bad year, especially near the end, but the stats tell you that Thornton was a heck of a player that was seen more often in the DH role on some really bad Indians teams. In 1984, Thornton's average was down a bit after hitting the break at a .324 clip in '83, but his other Triple Crown numbers were up; 21 HR and 61 RBI through 80 games.



Second Base - Ray Mack (1940)

Mack will be best known for making an outstanding defensive play on Taft Wright's ground ball to preserve Bob Feller's Opening Day no-hitter in 1940, and that bought him some time, I'm sure. He entered May hitting just .225, but they were just 11 games in at that point. Mack went on to hit .429 through 25 games in May, and entered the break hitting .318, before tapering off to finish at .283. The Tribe finished just a game back of the Tigers in the American League that season. Mack was a .232 hitter, but he was so much more for just a few months in 1940.

Third Base - Brook Jacoby (1990)

John McNamara's club was just under .500 and 7 games back of the AL East-leading Red Sox after splitting a series with the Athletics at home. Brook Jacoby was not quite on his 32 home run pace from the year before, but he was hitting .314 and flirted with .400 in the month of June. He was typically a 5'11" third baseman, but McNamara had him over at 1st and batting sixth (between Chris James and Ken Phelps) to make way for Tom Brookens to bat third and man the hot corner.



Shortstop - Ray Chapman (1920)

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Julio Franco had a great first half in 1987, among other years in his first go-around with the Tribe, but he played four postseason games for the Tribe in 1996, batting .133 in a series loss to the Orioles, thus disqualifying him, per the criteria. Ray Chapman died the day after being hit by a pitch in August of 1920, and then the Indians won the World Series. However, this is no "lifetime achievement award"; the 29 year-old was having the finest season of his career, hitting .322 at the break.

Outfield - Earl Averill (1938), Jeff Heath (1941), Tito Francona (1959)

Earl Averill is a Hall-of-Famer; every year he played for Cleveland with the All-Star Game in existence, he was on the American League All-Star team. He was hitting .373 with a .611 Slugging Percentage at break in 1938.

In 1941, Jeff Heath was hitting .371 with a quadruple-digit in the On-Base + Slugging category. Heath spent ten solid seasons with the Indians, but was on the other side of the 1948 World Series, however he never played in the postseason for the Braves, sidelined by a broken ankle suffered in a September game.

Tito Francona is the father of the current Indians skipper, and he was an All-Star in 1961, a year the Indians should have been better, but he was at his best in 1959. At the break the elder Francona was hitting .394 with the OPS+ stat as high as it was for anyone I researched at 1.101.



Bench - Ray Fosse (1970), Pat Tabler (1987), Ronnie Belliard (2004), Vic Power (1958), Joe Vosmik (1935), George Hendrick (1974)

Fosse was injured by Pete Rose to end the 1970 All-Star Game, but what's forgotten is how Fosse earned the right to be there, hitting .312 with 16 bombs in 78 games. The pitchers loved

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him as a battery-mate; Gaylord Perry credited the young catcher for his 1972 Cy Young Award.

It's hard to believe that Tabler was only with the Indians for 5 full seasons, and harder to believe he never drove in more than 86 runs. That lower-than-you-probably-remember high water mark came in 1987, Tabler's only All-Star season. The former 1st-round pick of the Yankees notched 48 of those RBI in the first in '87, while batting .308 with 24 doubles.

Belliard was almost on a playoff team in 2005, but thanks to Sports Illustrated, he'll be the face of the collapse down the stretch in '05. However, he was really hitting the ball well in 2004, hitting over .300 in the first half. Sadly, Mack didn't win the starting gig by much; the Indians have had some really good second basemen, but most of them were on playoff teams. I did not consider Jason Kipnis, with 2013 up in the air.

Vic Power hit .315 in the first half in '58, playing mostly at 3B. His good first half was helped by a .387 clip at the plate in the month of June.

Joe Vosmik was a regular above the .300 mark in the first half, throughout his career. Of his 101 hits through 70 games in 1935, 35 of them were for extra bases. His .342 average helped pave the way for him to lead the AL in hits on the season at 216.

So, .303 doesn't jump off the page when discussing George Hendrick's first half in 1974, but when you consider how much better he got each month, leading up to the All-Star break after hitting .225 in April, you start to appreciate the first pick of the 1968 amateur draft. Hendrick did get selected to the American League All-Star team, and singled off the 1972 NL Rookie of the Year, Jon Matlack from the Mets.

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1982), Gaylord Perry (1972), Cliff Lee (2009), Mel Harder (1933), Rick Sutcliffe

Sam McDowell and Sonny Siebert were excellent for the Indians, who finished in third-behind Baltimore and Detroit, so Luis Tiant had to be outstanding in his 18 starts. He threw 14 complete games, 7 of them were shutouts. Opponents were hitting .196 and his 1.24 ERA complimented his 14-5 first half record nicely.

The Indians went to the playoffs in 2007; you might remember being one win away from a date with the pushover Rockies in the World Series, but Cliff Lee didn't have much to do with October...or even August, after being sent to AAA in favor of Aaron Laffey. He worked out whatever ailed him and registered 5 strikeout for every walk he issued; good for a 12-2 record and a 2.31 ERA.

Mel Harder's #18 has been retired by the Indians for a long time. There were 28 seasons between the 1920 and 1948 Championship teams; Harder pitched in 20 of those seasons, all with the Indians. His ERA was 2.90 at the break, but rose to 2.95 by season's end, still good enough for the 1933 ERA title.

Rick Sutcliffe's legend was born at Wrigley Field in Chicago, in the days, weeks, and months after being traded from Cleveland to the north side in 1984, but 1982 was the year he was under 3 with the ERA at the break, while holding opposing hitters to a .228 average.

There was very little about Gaylord Perry's first half in 1972. An ERA well under 2.00, check. A 16-8 record, check. Holding opposing hitters to a .202 average, check. It was half of a Cy Young season in any era.

Bullpen - Don McMahon (1964), Dick Stigman (1960), Barry Latmore (1961),

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Dave LaRoche (1976), Sid Monge (1979), Chris Perez (2011)

McHahon threw 48 innings in 25 appearances and finished 18 games, good for 5 saves, while keeping the ERA at 1.68 in 1964.

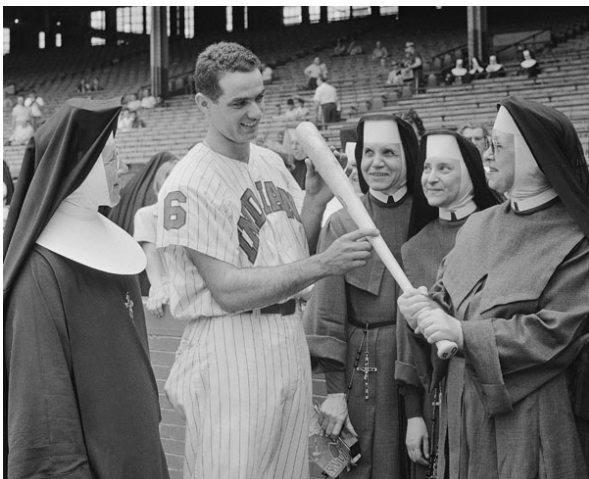
15 of Dick Stigman's 23 appearances in 1960 were in relief. He had six saves through 71 innings of work, and yielded a .216 opposing batting average.

Barry Latman was a perfect 8-0 with a 2.90 ERA at the break in 1961.

In 44 innings, Dave LaRoche, father of Adam and Andy, struck out 50 batters. He was 3-1 with a 2.05 ERA.

The year was 1979. Sid Monge had thrown 76 innings in 45 appearances and got 9 saves with an ERA at 2.10.

So, Jason Kipnis and Justin Masterson's 2013 performances were not considered on a list of non-playoff players because we aren't ready to say 2013 isn't a playoff year just yet. That said, why punish the current players by denying their 2012 performance. Chris Perez has honestly been outstanding since he assumed the closer role in 2010; despite a higher ERA than what he had in the first half of 2011, we're rewarding Perez for more Saves and a 5-to-1 strikeout to walk ratio in 2012.



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The Snubs - John Romano (1961), Rocky Colavito (1958), Harvey Kuenn (1960), Sam McDowell (1968), Jim Grant (1961), Jim Perry (1959), Len Barker (1981), Others

I'm sure there's an entire generation that feels the snub of Rocky on this list is the greatest injustice in the history of TheClevelandFan. I'd have to be a real jerk to put him in the same category as Harvey Kuenn, the disappointment that came back from Detroit in the Colavito trade. The curse of many hurt a few of the guys that were left out, simply for co-existing with another player in the same year. Johnny Allen (1938) and Barker just fell victim to me needing to fit a need with a player from the same season. Ken Schrom and Matt Lawton were left out intentionally.

Of course, this is the last time we'll be so focused on the Indians that missed the playoffs for a long time, right?