

Appreciating Being Wrong About Yan Gomes

Written by {ga=papabearjere}

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Coming into the season, it was widely thought that the Indians would get good production out of their catcher. Many pundits and fans believed the Indians had one of the strongest hitting catchers in MLB, and that another season would lead to improvement in his defensive prowess. The hope in and around the organization was that a quality season from the catcher and other returning players, coupled with free agent supplements, would be enough to push the Tribe into October.

This narrative has mostly played itself out this season, but not in the way many thought it would. If you foresaw Yan Gomes usurping Carlos Santana's spot as the Indians' best catcher, then please contact me immediately, I have some lottery numbers for you to pick.

Gomes' emergence this season is truly a surprise. Cleveland acquired him in the [Esmil Rogers-Mike Aviles trade](#)

with Toronto this past offseason, and the stated reason for acquiring Gomes was to add depth at catcher, which the Tribe front office believed was a position of weakness across the organization. Whatever the Indians' brass hoped Gomes would become, they certainly didn't anticipate him taking the league by storm. In the Cleveland.com article linked above, beat writer Paul Hoynse made an emphatic point that the Indians did not view Gomes as a replacement for

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Santana. This bared itself out when the Indians decided to keep light-hitting Lou Marson over Gomes as the backup to Santana.

But since getting the call up to Cleveland, Gomes has done nothing but produce. Gomes has made huge strides as a hitter, slashing .297/.347/.504 over 259 plate appearances. That's a great triple slash line from any position on the diamond, but it is significantly more valuable coming from a catcher. Anecdotally speaking, Gomes has seemingly been one of the more clutch hitters on a team that often struggles to score runs, and he has consistently put up quality at-bats regardless of the situation.

Throughout the season, I have been skeptical of Gomes maintaining his hot pace at the plate due to a lack of track record at the major league level. Frankly, I'm still somewhat skeptical of Gomes' performance, mainly because 259 plate appearances are not nearly enough to get a complete picture of what a player is capable of. There are some things in Gomes' profile that indicate he is due for at least a little regression going forward. Gomes is not likely to hit around .300 next year, his BABIP of .335 is significantly higher than the league average, which typically hovers around .300. At the same time, Gomes has shown slightly below-average plate discipline, walking on just 6.2% of his plate appearances (the league average is around 8%).

There are reasons for optimism. Gomes has shown good power with a .208 [ISO](#) (.145 is considered average), and catchers typically mature as hitters more slowly than other players. Gomes has always been a solid OBP guy in the minors, and if he keeps getting at-bats, he should be able to boost his walk rate. Gomes' has a nice, compact swing that creates a lot of hard contact, and there's no reason to think he can't produce a .270 average with 20-plus home run pop over a full season.

Perhaps more important is Gomes' defense behind the plate. Gomes has thrown out a preposterous 44% of base stealers (the league average is 26%), and he has only allowed three passed balls in 579 innings. Beyond the numbers, it doesn't take long watching Gomes to see what an upgrade defensively he is over Santana. Gomes moves well behind the plate, blocking balls with his body that Santana usually has to swipe at, and Gomes has a lightning-quick delivery to the bases while exhibiting excellent arm strength.

Yan Gomes' emergence has created a good situation for the Indians. Because of his superior defense, the Tribe likely views Gomes as the every day catcher for the rest of 2013 and the 2014 season. Using Gomes as the every day catcher greatly increases the flexibility Tito

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Francona has in setting his lineup. Francona will be able to mix and match Gomes, Santana, and Nick Swisher at catcher, first base, right field, and DH. Using Swisher more often in right field will also allow Francona to use Drew Stubbs in a platoon role that better fits his skill set, playing him mostly against lefty pitchers and using him as a defensive replacement.

For a team like the Indians to compete, they need to find value in under-the-radar players looked over by other teams. Regardless of what the Indians' front office thought they were getting in Gomes, they should still be credited for shrewdly picking up a fantastic asset at a bargain price. The team can now consider Yan Gomes an addition to an exciting core of players that should be able to contend for the rest of 2013 and beyond.

Jeremy Klein is an unabashed Cleveland Sports fan who is shocked and appalled that college football players were [doing marijuana](#) (not really). You can follow him on Twitter [@PapaBearJere](#)

(All stats current as of the completion of games played on 9/11/2013)

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