

Lonnie Chisenhall And The Tribe's Third Base Conundrum

Written by {ga=papabearjere}

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It's not easy being a small market team in Major League Baseball. It requires extra diligence through every decision, as one wrong move could hamstring the franchise for years to come ([cough](#) [TRAVIS HAFNER](#) [cough](#)). It also means that a team like the Cleveland Indians needs to be more creative than their competitors when it comes to getting the most bang for their buck. In other words, it's imperative that the Indians devise some creative solutions for holes in the roster as opposed to simply spending their way out of trouble.

When it comes to creative roster construction, the team that first comes to mind is the Oakland Athletics. There are a lot of examples of the A's using their limited resources in creative ways, but the one tactic the A's employed last season that the Indians can use for their own benefit in 2014 is the straight platoon, a tactic the A's used last season to near perfection.

[Brandon Moss](#) is a flawed player; he struggles mightily against left-handed pitching. But despite being a flawed player, Moss still has a very valuable skill; he can absolutely crush right-handed pitching.

[Nate Freiman](#) is also a flawed player; he struggles mightily against right-handed pitching. But despite being a flawed player, Freiman still has a very valuable skill; he can absolutely crush left-handed pitching (Also, after typing his name a couple times, I will never forget it's spelled Freiman and not Frieman).

Put those two together, and now you have one of the [most productive first basemen](#) in all of

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baseball. Not only that, but you have one of the most productive first basemen in all of baseball at a [fracti](#)
[on of the cost](#)
of the higher end options.

Lonnie Chisenhall is a player cut from the same cloth as Brandon Moss; even going back to the minor leagues, the dude just [hasn't been able to hit lefties](#). And that's okay. Chisenhall is still a left-handed hitter that can hit for power against righties. That has value.

In a perfect world, the Tribe could just pencil Chisenhall's name in the lineup card for 150 games and let him figure out how to hit lefties over a full season of at-bats. But right now, the Indians don't have that luxury; they can't afford to go through another 162 games receiving a sub-.300 OBP from their third basemen. If the Indians plan on contending in 2014, which I assume they do, they can't give Lonnie Chisenhall a full season to see if he can somehow figure out how to hit lefties.

I'm sure this sentiment is just as disappointing to Indians' management as it is to fans. We've been hearing for years now that Lonnie Chisenhall is going to be the [next big thing](#) in Cleveland. He's still just 25 years old, so he could very well still discover the ability to hit lefties. But for now, the Indians need to put the notion of Lonnie Chisenhall being the every-day third baseman to rest, and they need to put him in the best position to succeed.

Now, to be fair, the Indians did make an effort to limit Chisenhall's at-bats against lefties; he logged just 39 plate appearances against them in 2013. The issue was that the Indians had no one to man the other side of the platoon. After the Indians put the kibosh on the Mark Reynolds experience, the only other option they had at third base was Mike Aviles, and despite being a right-handed hitter, he too struggled with lefties, hitting .232/.269/.335 against them in 2013. Ryan Raburn would make sense as a platoon option, except at this stage of his career he is strictly an OF/DH*

**(Not so) Quick Tangent: The Tribe's third base situation makes the [Ryan Raburn extension](#) that much more puzzling. I still don't understand why the Indians thought it was so necessary to lock up a guy who is only one year removed from one of the worst seasons in MLB history (a -1.5 WAR in just 66 games according to FanGraphs.). The issue is not so much the money they committed to him as it is guaranteeing a roster spot to a backup outfielder when they already have Drew Stubbs, a superior player due to his fielding and base running, under team control*

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for the next three years. And whom exactly were they bidding against? If a team wanted to offer Raburn two years and \$8 million, then they could have had him and the Tribe could move on to the next

[NRI](#)

. But instead, Raburn is all but guaranteed to occupy a roster spot that could have been put to better use.

No, for a third base platoon to work in Cleveland, both halves of the platoon need to be productive. The challenge for the Tribe enacting this platoon will be to find a third baseman that can hit left-handed pitching, and it will be more challenging than one might think.

For one thing, the potential free agent options at third base are [limited](#) . Michael Young and Kevin Youkilis would be good options if it were still 2008. Juan Uribe would seem to be a good fit, but he has [never](#)

[been especially good against lefties](#)

and he struggled mightily in the two seasons prior to 2013, not to mention that the nouveau-rich Dodgers are likely to give him a multi-year deal given the influence he holds in that clubhouse.

As far as free agent third basemen, the Tribe will likely be limited to non-roster invitees. The two NRIs I would bring to spring training are [Wilson Betemit](#) and [Ryan Roberts](#) .

Betemit had a lost season for the Orioles in 2013 due to a knee injury, but he's typically been a solid hitter when healthy. But despite being a switch hitter, Betemit has [not fared well](#) against lefties in his career, and he's known as somewhat of a butcher at third base. But hey, that's why he's a potential NRI.

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[Minnesota Twins' Lonnie Chisenhall: A Look At His Performance On Te Asecurball For 2014](#)