After Victor Martinez was traded to Boston in 2010, I swore I'd never have another favorite player. I'm probably too old to have a favorite player anyway, I thought to myself at the time. But, just three years later, another charismatic catcher has worked his way up to the top of the list and is threatening to become my next favorite player.

At the time, Yan Gomes seemed like a throw-in for the Mike Aviles/Esmil Rogers swap between Cleveland and Toronto last November. The Indians were desperate for infield help, specifically a competent backup to Asdrubal Cabrera, and that's what they received in Aviles. That probably would have been enough. Give credit to Chris Antonetti, however, for finding something to add to the deal that the Jays had no trouble giving up.

At a minimum, the idea was that Gomes should be an upgrade to Lou Marson, a slightly above average defensive catcher with no hit tool whatsoever. Gomes had put up good numbers in the hitter-friendly Pacific Coast League with the Las Vegas 51s in 2012 after moving up through the system pretty quickly. Gomes had power and walked a little less than average, which are things you would expect from a backup catcher. In a 43-game stint with the Blue Jays in 2012, Gomes played first base, catcher, third base, left field, and served as the designated hitter.

Gomes entered the 2013 season carrying the weight of an entire country on his shoulders. Gomes was the first Brazilian-born player to reach the Major Leagues and it was a shock to a lot of people when Gomes declined an invitation to play for Brazil in the World Baseball Classic to instead focus on making the Opening Day roster for the Indians. After Gomes was one of the key contributors in helping Brazil qualify for the tournament in 2012, he opted to stay in Goodyear with the Indians for Spring Training.

Nobody would have criticized Gomes for the decision to go. He chose to stay and try to win the

backup catcher job, which he eventually lost to Marson. As fate would have it, Gomes wouldn't have to wait long, as Marson was barreled over by Tampa Bay's Desmond Jennings in a brutal home plate collision on April 7 that left Marson with a concussion. That hit, coupled with a "shoulder injury", and Gomes's performance kept Marson on the disabled list for the remainder of the season.

Gomes started slow, going just 5-for-25 in the month of April, but he showed that pop in his bat with a couple of home runs. He started six of the team's 24 games in April. May was a different story, as Gomes started to prove that he truly belonged at the Major League level. In 13 games, Gomes posted a 1.010 OPS. Not only did he prove that his bat played at the Major League level, but his defense was a pleasant surprise. Gomes played in 85 games, with 79 starts, behind the plate for the Indians, throwing out 41 percent of attempted base stealers, and allowed just four passed balls.

Depending on which site you look at, Gomes finished third (Baseball-Reference) or second (Fangraphs) on the Indians in wins above replacement player for the season with just 88 games played. If we project Gomes out to a 150-game season, he would have been worth 6.3 WAR (Fangraphs), which would have led the Indians and would have been ninth among position players in all of baseball. He would have been 0.7 WAR ahead of Yadier Molina, who has gotten serious MVP consideration and is widely-regarded as one of the game's best catchers.

The final numbers of Gomes's season are very impressive. He posted a .294/.345/.481/.826 slash line, with 11 home runs and 38 RBI in 322 plate appearances. Perhaps the most impressive thing is that Gomes went from starting Triple-A catcher to starting Major League catcher on a contending team in rapid fashion.

Catchers are one of the most important positions in all of sports. Not only do they have to hit for themselves, play defense, and control the running game, but they also have to serve as impromptu psychologists and handle the pitching staff. It's a role that takes a lot of charisma, attention to detail, and focus. Where Carlos Santana is a good hitter, with world-class plate discipline, he doesn't put forth the same focus or concern towards the defensive side of the game. As a result, Gomes became the starting catcher because he gives the Indians so much more value defensively than Santana. Pitchers have additional confidence throwing to a guy who will sacrifice his body to block pitches or protect home plate. Pitchers have additional confidence in catchers who can still nail a runner on a breaking ball or a slow delivery. While the psychological aspects cannot be quantified, the statistics can tell us a lot about the difference between Gomes and Santana.

Newly-crowned American League Manager of the Year Terry Francona appeared on local radio station 92.3 FM on Wednesday afternoon. During the show, Francona said that Yan Gomes will be the starting catcher in 2014. That will push Carlos Santana to a first base/designated hitter role, which is something I've advocated for a while.

We know that Gomes is a better catcher than Santana. The eyes tell us that. But, as is usually the case with one of my articles, I'm going to tell you just how much better.

We'll start with the basics. While I don't think catcher ERA (cERA) is a great indicator, it'll serve as some kind of evidence in this case. With Gomes behind the plate, Indians pitchers posted a 3.56 ERA. With Santana behind the plate, the Tribe's staff posted a 4.05 ERA. Catcher ERA can be misleading, but there are a lot of elements involved that led to such a disparity.

Keep in mind that Santana caught 712.2 innings while Gomes caught 710. We're talking about very similar sample sizes.

1. Strikeout-to-walk ratio: With Gomes behind the plate, Indians hurlers posted a 2.87 K/BB ratio (674 K, 235 BB). With Santana behind the plate, the K/BB ratio was 2.27 (691 K, 304 BB). That's a significant difference. A deeper look may help explain why.

You may remember back in June when I made mention of Jeff Sullivan's work at Fangraphs on pitch framing. I chastised Santana's laziness behind the plate and discussed the possible impact it could have on the pitchers. Thanks to StatCorner.com and the excellent work of Matthew Carruth, we can quantify the impact that a good pitch framer has on preventing runs.

There remains a lot of debate on how much value a pitch improperly called a strike actually has. Carruth and others have calculated that a ball called a strike saves .133 runs. It may seem like an insignificant amount, just over a tenth of a run, but you have to keep in mind that we do not know the context of the pitch. A first pitch outside of the strike zone called a strike has less of an impact than a 3-2 ball incorrectly ruled a strike. What we know for certain is that balls are bad and strikes are good. Nearly every hitter is a worse hitter behind in the count than ahead in the

count. Hitters are better in 2-1 counts than 2-2 counts. My article linked above illustrates that point, showing American League batting splits in every count from the 2012 season.

Comparing Gomes and Santana side-by-side from the 2013 season is by no means surprising, but certainly shows the impact that a quality defensive catcher can have. The sample from the Carruth chart is comprised of only called pitches, so pitches that were not swung at. The most important categories on the chart are "+Calls" and RAA. +Calls is a cumulative count of how many called pitches a catcher assisted in getting called strikes. RAA is runs above average.

Gomes had a sample size of 6001 called pitches and assisted his pitchers in 115 additional strike calls. That was 1.5 per game on average for a total of 15.4 RAA. Santana had a sample size of 6796 called pitches and was -57 calls for -7.6 RAA. Gomes ranked eighth in RAA for catcher framing while Santana was the 13th-worst in the 122-catcher sample size. Of catchers with a 4000 or more pitch sample size, only four ranked better than Gomes on a per game basis.

Furthermore, Gomes had the third-lowest percentage of pitches in the strike zone called balls at 10.3 percent. Catchers who can frame pitches around the strike zone and ensure that strikes are correctly called are very valuable assets. For Santana, 15.1 percent of pitches in the strike zone were called balls.

While the exact number of runs saved may not be entirely accurate, applying the ballpark figure of .133 runs saved would mean that Gomes was 23 runs better defensively than Santana just from a pitch framing standpoint. There's no telling how many more wins 23 fewer runs would have led to, but with Gomes now the starting catcher, his framing numbers should go up with more games behind the plate and more familiarity with his pitching staff.

2. Controlling the Running Game: In 712.2 innings behind the plate, baserunners attempted 62 steals with Carlos Santana behind the plate. They were successful 82 percent of the time. In 710 innings behind the plate, baserunners attempted 49 steals with Yan Gomes behind the plate. They were successful 59 percent of the time. The league average success rate on stolen bases was 74 percent, making the caught stealing percentage average 26 percent. Since pickoffs by pitchers are also included in the caught stealing stat, we'll eliminate those and focus on both catchers. Gomes threw out 38.2 percent of attempted base stealers and Santana threw out 16.3 percent.

Note as well that runners attempted 0.7 steals per game against Santana to just 0.57 per game against Gomes. Baseball-Reference tracks stolen base opportunities (SBO), which are situations where first or second base was occupied and the next base was open. Santana had just 20 more stolen base opportunities than Gomes. As you can see, runners were more eager to run on Santana than on Gomes.

Gomes also had 10 additional runner kills (advancing on ball in dirt or pickoff) to Santana's eight. In total, Gomes cut down 11 more runners than Santana and allowed 22 fewer stolen bases.

I'll add this one here as well. Baseball-Reference keeps track of the number of balls in play fielded by a certain player that were turned into outs. I'm including this because balls in play fielded by a catcher are going to be pop ups or, more importantly for this comparison, bunts. On balls in play fielded by Gomes, he recorded an out 88 percent of the time. For Santana, just 76 percent of the time. Though it's not specifically listed, this would imply that Gomes was a better fielder on bunts than Santana.

3. Passed Balls and Wild Pitches: Carlos Santana, who deals with bouts of laziness behind the plate, allowed 44 wild pitches and five passed balls. Yan Gomes allowed 27 wild pitches and four passed balls. Keep in mind that Santana was behind the plate for an additional 98 plate appearances, so we're still talking about very comparable sample sizes.

Baseball-Reference has a stat called runner bases added (RBA). It's a counting stat on how many additional bases a catcher allowed via wild pitch, passed ball, and stolen base. Santana, in one fewer game played behind the plate, allowed 35 additional bases more than Gomes.

Add it all up and it simply proves what we already knew, but it gives more of a value to it. By Fangraphs's defensive runs saved (DRS) totals, Gomes was +11 defensive runs saved while Santana was -12. The DRS count doesn't take pitch framing into account, where Gomes was 23 runs better than Santana. By using the data available, one could make the argument that Gomes was 46 runs better defensively than Santana behind the plate this past season.

With Gomes behind the plate full-time according to Francona, that helps the pitching staff and the overall team defense immensely. If his bat continues to be above average, Gomes will be one of the most valuable Indians, if not one of the most valuable position players in all of baseball for the foreseeable future.