



The underrated offseason continued for Chris Antonetti on Wednesday when he acquired Josh Outman from the Colorado Rockies for Drew Stubbs. The appropriately-named pitcher will serve as the team's second lefty in the bullpen behind 2013 Trade Deadline acquisition Mark Rzepczynski and, like most of the players the Indians have acquired recently, will be put into the best possible position to succeed.

Outman was tremendous against left-handed hitters in 2013, holding them to a .195/.278/.261 slash line with a .249 wOBA. Right-handed hitters had far more success with a .343/.423/.459 slash and a .359 wOBA. Inexplicably, Outman faced 126 lefties and 112 righties during the 2013 season. As my buddy Steve Kinsella [noted on Twitter](#), Rockies' manager Walt Weiss realized he was using Outman incorrectly and he faced 18 more lefties than righties in the second half after facing more righties in the first half.

Of Outman, GM Chris Antonetti had this to say: *"We'll try to leverage him as best we can to allow him to be successful and allow our team to win as many games as possible. The role will still be determined, but I would envision him pitching more against left-handed hitters than right-handed hitters."*

One of the imperatives in this market is utilizing a player in way that maximizes his potential value. It doesn't take charts of information and advanced statistics to see that Outman fares significantly better with lefties than he does with righties. Outman struck out 31 percent of the left-handed hitters he faced and posted a 3.55 strikeout-to-walk ratio. Outman posted a poor 1.17 K/BB ratio against righties.

Matchup relievers have become the norm all around baseball and the Indians are no different than most Major League teams in that regard. But having two capable matchup lefties in the

bullpen at Terry Francona's disposal is just another example of what has become a team philosophy.

For years, Indians fans scoffed at the notion of platoons. A platoon is a situation in which two players share playing time to utilize each player's strengths and minimize each player's weaknesses. People have the misconception that platoons arise because neither player is good enough to be an everyday player. In some cases, the player could play everyday and be successful, but the team will get more value out of a platoon than they will a player's good and bad splits.

Remember when the Indians were absolutely horrendous against left-handed pitching? You should, because it was just a season ago. The Indians batted .234/.312/.352/.664 against lefties. The .234 average and .664 OPS were the fourth-lowest marks in all of baseball. The Indians went 18-35 against left-handed starters.

Fast forward to 2013. The Indians led all of Major League baseball with a .271 average against southpaws. They also had the highest OBP, third-highest SLG, and best OPS of any team in baseball. As a result, the Indians were 36-20 against left-handed starters, the best mark in baseball, and it was a big reason why they were able to win 92 games.

What happened? Here's what happened: The left-handed heavy Indians in 2012 had more plate appearances by left-handed hitters against left-handed pitchers than they had right-handed plate appearances against southpaws. Fifty-two percent of plate appearances against left-handed pitchers were taken by left-handed batters.

Let's look at this from a league average standpoint in 2012:

Indians:

LHB v. LHP: .221/.301/.311/.612 (1095 PA)

RHB v. LHP: .249/.323/.398/.721 (1008 PA)

MLB:

LHB v. LHP: .240/.303/.365/.669

RHB v. LHP: .262/.330/.428/.758

In 2013, the Indians cut the number of lefty-lefty plate appearances from 52 percent to 31.2 percent. What followed is one of the biggest reasons for the Indians' offensive turnaround in 2013.

Indians:

LHB v. LHP: .271/.325/.378/.703 (644 PA)

RHB v. LHP: .271/.348/.449/.797 (1358 PA)

But wait, there's more! Right-handed hitters also tend to do better against opposite-handed pitchers as well.

2012 Indians:

RHB v. RHP: .213/.275/.296/.572 (743 PA)

RHB v. LHP: .269/.342/.419/.760 (1008 PA)

2012 MLB:

RHB v. RHP: .253/.307/.401/.708

RHB v. LHP: .259/.331/.424/.755

2013 Indians:

RHB v. RHP: .238/.299/.392/.691 (1173 PA)

RHB v. LHP: .271/.348/.449/.797 (1358 PA)

Look at the breakdown of plate appearances:

2012:

RHB v. RHP: 18.1 percent

LHB v. LHP: 52 percent

RHB v. LHP: 47.9 percent

LHB v. RHP: 81.8 percent

2013:

RHB v. RHP: 28.1 percent

LHB v. LHP: 32.1 percent

RHB v. LHP: 67.8 percent

LHB v. RHP: 71.8 percent

In 2012, the Indians had a platoon advantage in 70.3 percent of their plate appearances. In 2013, the Indians had a platoon advantage in 70.5 percent of their plate appearances. That was the second-highest mark in the league behind the Oakland Athletics. While the percentage isn't much greater from the 2012 team, the offensive numbers were significantly greater because righties tend to hit same-handed pitchers better than lefties. The Indians sacrificed some of their platoon advantage against righties to improve against lefties and it paid off handsomely. Granted, there was more talent in the lineup on a daily basis, but the use of platoon advantages also had a lot to do with the offensive improvements.

This is where David Murphy comes in. Indians right fielders were great against left-handed pitching last year, posting an .872 OPS, the fourth-best mark in baseball. The five guys that got right field plate appearances were Ryan Raburn, Drew Stubbs, Matt Carson, Ezequiel Carrera, and Jason Kubel. Carson, Carrera, and Kubel only combined for 41 of the 799 plate appearances. Against righties, Tribe right fielders combined for a .698 OPS, which was 24th among the 30 MLB teams. In his career, Murphy is a .280/.347/.469/.816 hitters against righties. That signing will allow the Indians to regain some of the platoon advantage they lost against righties this past season.

The Stubbs trade for Outman completes this circle. The Indians now officially have a Raburn/Murphy platoon in right field and two guys who boast a very good platoon advantage over the course of their careers.

Dan Szymborski is a baseball writer who produces a series of [computer-based projections called ZiPS](#). For the Raburn/Murphy platoon, ZiPS came up with these combined numbers: 174 hits, 42 doubles, 22 home runs, and 86 RBI. One caveat about this system is that it does not predict playing time, but Murphy is listed with 457 plate appearances and Raburn with 317, which both seem like fairly reasonable numbers as Stubbs had 481 and Raburn had 277 in 2013. ZiPS projects Murphy for 1.7 WAR and Raburn for 0.4 WAR. You can judge for yourself, but, in my opinion, his slash line numbers for batting average and on-base percentage do seem low for both players, especially given the platoon advantages they'll get the majority of their at bats in. There's a reasonable chance they could perform well above the ZiPS projections.

Are those earth-shattering numbers for a corner outfield position? No. However, Andrew Ball at Beyond The Box Score put together [a fantastic article](#) on Wednesday to determine what was "average" production in 2013. Average production for the right field position in the American League in 2013 was 163 hits, 31 doubles, 20 home runs, and 76 RBI. If the Raburn/Murphy platoon exceeds those numbers, as it should, the Indians should have an above average right fielder making just \$8.25M this season, with the cost of a win hovering somewhere around \$6M. This is how the Indians front office is forced to operate. Fans like to evaluate moves on the surface without looking at the bigger picture. No transaction the Indians make can be evaluated in a vacuum. It is simply one piece that fits into the much larger puzzle.

These moves for pitching specialists or platoon players aren't necessarily the sexiest transactions, but they create value at a low cost. It's an exercise in signing flawed players and putting them in a position to play to their strengths to maximize their value. It can be frustrating not to have a dominant bat like Miguel Cabrera or Mike Trout, but putting a team of average or better players at every position is a recipe for winning.

While the starting rotation remains a big question mark again, Antonetti and his staff have weaved together a very formidable bullpen and a lineup that can produce good numbers at a very reasonable cost. For the average fan, they look at the roster and see the need for a lot of "what ifs" and "I hopes". For me, I look at the roster and see a tremendous work of art that was brilliantly put together and simply needs to be appreciated, even by those who do not

understand it.

There are no guarantees that things will go as planned, but the plan shows a clear direction and one that makes complete sense if you take the time to examine the artwork.