

## Doing The Splits

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}  
Monday, May 19 2008 7:00 PM -

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The Tribe offense is in a funk, plain and simple. Manager Eric Wedge is starting to experiment, and the lineup card looks drastically different from night to night. Now past the quarter pole, we have enough empirical data on Indians hitters to decipher in which situations they are succeeding and where they are failing, and Paulie looks at this data for us in his latest column. What's the answer? Is it more platooning? Paul thinks it may be ...



As the Tribe offense remains offensive since [the thought a couple of weeks ago was that some of these players \(one of these players?\) would have to start progressing toward their career numbers](#)

, perhaps a new strategy is necessary as each passing lineup card looks like The Atomic Wedgie is grasping at straws and each game ends with the Indians' offense still mired in their season-long slump. The offense, to this point, remains an all-or-nothing affair with 56 of the 183 runs scored to date (a whopping 30% of the year's runs) coming in 11 of the 388 innings (just under 3%) that the team has batted in.

Yikes.

Without yet getting into the terrifying notion that perhaps this isn't just a slump (I'm reminded of the Jack Nicholson line of "What if this is as good as it gets?" in the film by the same name), perhaps the solution lies in simply putting the existing hitters in positions that they can thrive in, carefully picking those spots, as opposed to simply trotting out the usual suspects and hoping for the best. With each passing game, it becomes apparent that at a certain point, no

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Indians' hitter has "earned" any kind of right to be in the lineup every day based on anything but performance THIS year or even over the past few weeks (which incredibly does put Hafner in that category), so the time has come to use 2008 as the barometer for success for each of these players and plan accordingly.

Now, with 1/4 of the season in the books, approaching the 1/3 mark, the sample sizes are getting substantial enough (for some) to examine some trends and find out where hitters are succeeding and where they are failing, with the idea of maximizing optimal opportunities for them while putting them in positions in which they can thrive because not much more help is coming from within the organization, other than the BLC or maybe Barfield, that isn't already here. As much as that elusive "big bat" remains on everyone's mind, it is still mid-May and not too many teams are looking to shed an established hitter with so little of the season spoken for.

Realizing that the Indians are going to have to play with the hand that's been dealt to them, what can be done to revive this slumbering offense? I know that you're not going to want to hear this, but the answer for waking up some of these bats may be redistributing plate appearances based on whether the Indians are facing LHP or RHP...the platoon concept that everyone loves, right?

Whether or not you accept or even acknowledge the usefulness of the platoon or think that anything can be gleaned by looking at individual players' splits (which is their performance versus RHP and LHP), the Indians' brass has to figure out how to present a lineup card that at least poses the threat of putting some runs on the board. Obviously, some of these players have very limited plate appearances on which to base OPS, but something is better than nothing. With that in mind, how do the Indians' current position players stack up in terms of OPS versus RHP and OPS versus LHP?

### OPS versus RHP

Martinez - .647  
Shoppach - .712  
Garko - .660  
Cabrera - .554  
Carroll - .475  
Peralta - .669

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Blake - .762  
Marte - .174  
Dellucci - .705  
Francisco - 1.039  
Sizemore - .884  
Gutierrez - .582  
Hafner - .675

## OPS versus LHP

Martinez - 1.033  
Shoppach - .444  
Garko - .994  
Cabrera - .351  
Carroll - .718  
Peralta - .851  
Blake - .376  
Marte - .933  
Dellucci - .200  
Francisco - .750  
Sizemore - .716  
Gutierrez - .683  
Hafner - .815

Right now, the only player (yes, that is a singular noun) posting an OPS over .700 against both RHP and LHP with more than 10 AB against both on this team is (yes, again, that is a singular verb)...wait for it...Grady Sizemore with his sparkling .716 OPS against LHP.

Nearly as shocking as the team wide struggles against RHP is the disparity on some of these guys from RHP to LHP:

Martinez - .386 higher versus LHP  
Garko - .334 higher versus LHP  
Cabrera - .203 higher versus RHP  
Carroll - .243 higher versus LHP  
Peralta - .182 higher versus LHP  
Blake - .386 higher versus RHP  
Dellucci - .505 higher versus RHP

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Obviously, with a guy like Dellucci you have no expectations of him hitting LHP and don't put him in that position, but maybe it's time to employ that strategy for the rest of the lineup.

If Garko isn't hitting RHP and the LH hitting Michael Aubrey is on the roster, what's the harm in giving Aubrey plate appearances against RHP while he's on the team? I know that Aubrey's ticket to Buffalo when JoeBo returns is probably already punched, but why not keep Aubrey on the roster over little-used Craig Breslow as the offense may benefit more from an extra LH bat than the bullpen may from an extra LH arm?

If Cabrera is struggling against LHP (.351 OPS), give those plate appearances to Carroll every so often to improve the offense without sending Cabrera's glove to Buffalo. Obviously, you'd like to keep Asdrubal on the field as much as possible, as well as not deterring any adjustments the young player is making to MLB; but with the way things going as they are, perhaps it's better for him to build his confidence by succeeding in limited playing time to gain momentum as opposed to rolling downhill, as he seems to be doing now.

If Blake is posting a .376 OPS versus LHP, for the love of all that is holy, why is he still in the lineup against them? Given the success of Andy Marte throughout his minor league career against LHP, could he really be that much worse? I know that this subject has been beaten to death and that Andy Marte must have allowed somebody's house pet out of the front door on his first day of house sitting (how else can you explain his absence in the lineup?), but Blake is posting a .376 OPS against LHP...that's beyond dreadful.

If Gutierrez isn't hitting RHP, why doesn't Francisco become an everyday OF with Grady, switching between LF and RF, with GooLoochi (replacing the famous Dellichahls) alternating based on opposing pitchers? Frank the Tank's defense should keep him in the mix and his upside garners some patience, but rather than letting him slip into the abyss, allow him to face only LHP to (like Cabrera) get some confidence back in his ability as a MLB hitter.

With all of that in mind, what should these lineups look like?

## Versus LHP

Martinez

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Garko  
Carroll  
Peralta  
Marte  
Francisco  
Sizemore  
Gutierrez  
Hafner

### **Versus RHP**

Martinez  
Aubrey  
Cabrera  
Peralta  
Blake  
Dellucci  
Sizemore  
Francisco  
Hafner

We're basically talking about platooning 1B, 2B, 3B, and one OF position to try to take advantage of some desirable match-ups with the roster as it is currently constructed. That may seem like a lot of positions to be in flux and shared between players, but the production (or lack thereof) from those positions (save 1B, where Garko is sitting on a pretty big split) has been the difficulty in the lineup. The Indians actually have started to do this to a certain degree, if you look closely at the last week of games, but at this point it's time to set some hard and fast rules to try to work some of these younger players in to see if the team can catch lightning in a bottle or to give the veterans every chance to succeed against those whom they are succeeding against this year. Blake, Dellucci, and Cabrera should never see LHP, just as Gutz should never see RHP and Garko should take a break from RHP to clear his head and get some semblance of power back for him.

The overall strategy here would be that, by putting players in situations that they are able to excel in, their confidence (which I think is sorely lacking given the team-wide "slump") can improve to the point that the principals that are thought to be contributors for this team can get closer to that point, as

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opposed to sabotaging every run-scoring opportunity that seems to present itself.

Short of a surprising move this early in the season, the Indians are going to be playing the cards that have been dealt to them...maybe it's time to start stacking the deck.