

Lazy Sunday: A View From Pluto

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}

Saturday, January 17 2009 7:00 PM -

More snow is falling, and before we try and pretend like today's AFC Championship Game isn't happening, it's time for a little Paulie C and another Lazy Sunday. And man ... if you missed he and Tony's radio show/podcast on Thursday, you gotta go back and listen to it. Terry Pluto was on, and the three of them had a 40 minute discussion about this years Indians, which included some startling insight and bold predictions from Pluto. Paulie recaps their conversation, and some of the recent moves by the Indians in his latest column.



More snow is falling as another Sunday is upon us and before we try to avert our eyes from the AFC Championship Game, let's get rolling with another Lazy Lazy:

In what was the biggest news of the week (at least to me), Tony Lastoria and I were lucky enough to have Terry Pluto join us on this past week's edition of "Smoke Signals", which turned out to be not only an exciting moment for me (given that Pluto, to me, is the cr me de la cr me of Northeast Ohio writers), but also tremendously enlightening on a myriad of topics. The audio can be listened to here [in a podcast](#) , but if you don't have a spare hour, here are some of the high points:

Rotation

He doesn't think that the Pavano signing represents much more than a lottery ticket for the Indians, in that they might get lucky with it, but it's not something they should count on to "pay the mortgage",. Pluto thinks that Pavano will be on a pretty tight leash and won't continue to get starts, regardless of

Lazy Sunday: A View From Pluto

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}
Saturday, January 17 2009 7:00 PM -

performance, into June if he's obviously a shell of what he was in 2004. He thinks that the rest of the names past Lee and Carmona in the rotation represent just as big in terms of question marks as Carl Pavano, saying that the youngsters (Laffey, Huff, Sowers, etc.) are all far from sure things and putting Pavano in the mix goes along the idea that another arm is better than just going with the youngsters and hoping for the best. To Pluto, how the two at the top of the rotation perform and how the youngsters emerge to fill out the rotation remains the key to the 2009 season.

Shoppach

In a discussion about how particular pitchers work well with particular catchers (with Pluto lending some tremendous insight as to why this may be), I pointed out that Wedge had said in an interview on WTAM that Shoppach was likely to always catch Lee and that Victor was likely to always catch Carmona because of the way that those two batteries clicked (something [Pluto expands on with some fascinating numbers with in today's PD](#)

). The conversation then turned to whether the Indians "missed the boat" on trading Shoppach at what could be his peak value and Pluto pointed out that as much as he read about that possibility in our blogs that he NEVER heard a rumor regarding the Indians trading Kelly Shoppach in any sense all off-season. He said that he had the discussion with Paul Hoynes as to whether Hoynes ever heard Shoppach's name mentioned in trade talks and neither could come up with one legitimate rumor that they heard involving Mr. Show Pack. Pluto said that the reason that he had heard for this is that many teams feel that they have a good young catcher (like Matt Wieters in Baltimore) with whom that team felt comfortable going forward, meaning that the demand for Kelly may not have been what it was thought to be here. Additionally, Terry pointed out that whether or not this is the "peak" of Kelly's trade value, there will always be a team (regardless of what Shoppach does from this point forward) that will look to Kelly's 2008 season and see enough potential there for the Indians to find an interested party (see Gutierrez, Franklin Delano).

Hafner

Quoth Pluto - "I will be stunned...I will grow hair, if this guy has more than 500 AB." Because of the arthritis and injuries that have been sustained in Hafner's shoulder, Terry thinks that it would be a "disservice" to Hafner to give him 500 or more AB because maximizing Hafner's effectiveness in 2009

Lazy Sunday: A View From Pluto

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}
Saturday, January 17 2009 7:00 PM -

may be accomplished by minimizing his playing time and the amount of strain that he puts on that perpetually troublesome shoulder. Pluto points out that Hafner's shoulder trouble goes back as far as his days with the Rangers (which is one of the reasons the Indians were able to acquire him for a pittance), and that playing Hafner without giving him shoulder time off to rest on a regular basis is only going to further weaken the shoulder.

Bullpen

Pluto says that he put a phone call into Mark Shapiro last season when he was writing the article (he thinks it was in May...which sounds about right) writing off the 2008 season because of how bad the bullpen was. Shapiro's off-the-record response of "well, I'm not going to disagree enormously with you...although I think it's a little early" went further when Pluto told him that he had a bad bullpen, to which Shapiro responded, "yeah...tell me about it." Pluto thinks that the depth of the arms in the bullpen will prevent that conversation from happening again in 2009 and asserts that The Atomic Wedgie was the driving force behind going after Kerry Wood to settle that back end of the bullpen (something [he touched on in a piece earlier this week](#)) and allow the team (as well as the fans) to not dread the 9th inning in 2009 as they have in years past.

Infield

While the Indians would never come out and say it (for fear of taking anything away from Casey Blake, whom they still hold in high regard), Pluto says that the Indians feel that DeRosa is a significant step-up from Blake at 3B because of DeRosa having more range than Blake at the hot corner. In Pluto's mind, he still would have put DeRosa at 2B, if only to allow Asdrubal to slot over to SS, but points out that the infield arrangement, as it looks today, is "written in pencil". When I asserted that the players who figure to start the season in Columbus could have a large impact on where Peralta eventually ends up, Pluto mentioned that he's been underwhelmed by Wes Hodges the couple of times that he's seen him and that the Indians are high on Valbuena's ability to hit and that he figures to play an adequate 2B.

Overall, it was a thrill for me to talk to a writer whose opinion and style I respect so much and find it amazing the way that Pluto has an ability to put things in proper perspective, pointing out that the baseball season is enough of a crapshoot that nobody knows what's going to happen with a team from year to year and all the

Lazy Sunday: A View From Pluto

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}
Saturday, January 17 2009 7:00 PM -

Indians attempt to do is put multiple contingency plans (without the fear to initiate said plans) in place for those unseen events. If you didn't come away from the podcast feeling awfully good about what has been done this off-season and what 2009 could become, well...go back to drinking your perpetually half-empty glass.

One of the things that I mentioned in the show was [the video from Peter Gammons](#) that referenced the strength of the Indians' farm system at the upper levels, with an absurdly awkward introduction by Karl Ravech).

If you're looking for more optimism regarding [what the Indians have done in comparison to the rest of the AL Central](#), here's a piece from The Sporting News. Speaking of TSN, is anyone else on this Sporting News Daily service that basically delivers a Sports Page to your in-box every morning? It's an interesting concept (while not holding a candle to Google Reader), though it's awfully long to sort through in the AM.

Back to the off-seasons in the AL Central, it's true that the Indians' off-season does look pretty strong, particularly compared to the rest of the Central. But remember that the folks in Motown were clearing space in their trophy case after netting Miggy Cabrera last year (despite the fact that their pitching, which was their downfall, remained a question mark), so being the assumed front-runner in January is a tad bit different than being the actual front-runner in August.

As for what can happen for the Tribe in 2009, here's a little bit from Castro, [quoting Wedge saying that we may see Garko and Barfield perhaps getting some reps in...the OUTFIELD](#) !?!

Is this the moment when you know that the team is making alternate plans at your primary position (Cabrera, DeRosa, Carroll, and Valbuena ahead of Josh at 2B with Victor probably getting a lot of time at 1B this year and more talent at 1B in the minors), when they give you an OF glove?

Shapiro: So, I'm not seeing where Garko's going to get a lot of playing time at 1B.

Wedge: Hmm...well, it's not like we're going to put him back behind the plate and I suppose he's done enough in the Bigs that we're not going to send him down.

Lazy Sunday: A View From Pluto

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}
Saturday, January 17 2009 7:00 PM -

What do you think?

Shapiro: Let's give him a chance in LF and see if he can force his way into those plans.

Wedge (*fighting diabolical laughter*): OK...

Somewhere, Ben Broussard is [strumming his guitar](#), laughing, remembering the "good old days" [when he patrolled LF at the corner of Carnegie and Ontario](#)

On the topic of Garko and Barfield perhaps being involved in the outfield in some sense (and let's just say that the day that Garko is in LF in a game for the Indians will be a dark day because it means that A LOT has gone wrong in 2009) and the assertion by The Atomic Wedgie that Mark DeRosa will see some time in the outfield, is anyone else noticing the name that has yet to pass through the Indians' brass lips when it comes to the OF arrangement?

Umm...one Mr. Dave Dellucci?

Not that I'm upset that he's not being counted on for much of anything, given his performance since becoming an Indian, but does anyone else sense that the Indians are ready to eat The Looch's contract and go in another direction at some point this year?

The silence regarding Dellucci's role in 2009 is deafening.

Moving on, Paul Hoynes has some interesting tidbits in [today's piece](#) (done in an entirely more informative format than usual), including reporting that Brad Penny wanted to go to Boston and would have demanded more than the \$5M that the Red Sox gave him to come to Cleveland as well as reporting that the Indians did kick the tires on Jon Garland, but found his demands for a multiyear deal less than appealing.

On that topic, take a look at the [remaining FA that are still out on the market](#) (notably starters like Sheets, Loper, Oliver Perez, Pettitte, Wolf, etc.) and realize that Spring Training is now less than a month away. Or how about guys like Bobby Abreu, Orlando Cabrera, Joe Crede, Juan Cruz, Adam Dunn, Orlando

Lazy Sunday: A View From Pluto

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}
Saturday, January 17 2009 7:00 PM -

Hudson ([something Rosenthal hits on](#)), Brandon Lyon, and a certain guy named Manny still being out there?

It's a brave new world out there...

As for the movement by the Indians, they continue to add these arms to the bullpen (Aquino, Saarloos, Vinnie Chulk, Jack Cassel, Matt Herges), most of whom spent time on some MLB roster in 2008. Granted, most of them had varied degrees of success, if you can even say success with most of them given their ERA+ last year (Aquino-36, Saarloos-74, Chulk-91, Cassel-75, Herges-91), but let's throw it all up against the wall and see what sticks, no?

The nice thing about seeing these names signed is knowing that none of them are being counted on, in any sense of the word, to contribute to the parent club in 2009 and anything that the Indians may be able to squeeze out of them (with their reputation as a place to go for pitchers to stay healthy and rediscover effectiveness) is icing on the cake.

Speaking of relievers, remember when the JJ Putz-to-New York deal went down, how I thought that some of the subtext could be that the Indians' willingness to get Franklin Gutierrez in on the three-way deal is what helped make it happen? Jon-Paul Morosi of the Detroit Free Press (who is a very good beat writer, by the by) [sheds some light onto those shadows](#), saying that the Mariners did want to hold out for a CF in the deal and that the Tigers' Matt Joyce was not what they were looking for. After the Rays rebuffed the M's and the Mets in an attempt to include Fernando Perez on the deal (because, as it turns out, BJ Upton has shoulder issues), the two teams turned to the Tribe to get the M's their CF in Frank the Tank.

Just fantastic to keep Putz out of Motown, made better by Morosi's closing paragraph:

"The Tigers, meanwhile, traded Joyce to Tampa Bay for hard-throwing starter Edwin Jackson. But they did not leave the winter meetings with a closer. And they are still looking for one today."

I know burns...and that was a burn.

Lazy Sunday: A View From Pluto

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}

Saturday, January 17 2009 7:00 PM -

Off to spend what looks like another day spent with my Toro.