

A Lazy Sunday In Goodyear

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}

Saturday, February 14 2009 7:00 PM -

Well, everyone's in Goodyear which means that the waiting is over, right? In one sense, yes, in that the players are there; but in another, now we have to wait for something to actually happen.

Not too much news comes out of camp before the actual game action starts. Unfettered, Paulie Cousineau takes our readers on his regular Lazy Sunday roller coaster ride through all things Cleveland Indians baseball.



Well, everyone's in Goodyear which means that the waiting is over, right?

In one sense, yes, in that the players are there; but in another, now we have to wait for something to actually happen as the odd thing about waiting for the date that Pitchers and Catcher Report is that, once the players are there and before actual game action starts, there's very little that comes out of Spring Training by way of 'news'. Much of it is reports on who looks good, who doesn't...who said what canned comments regarding a topic that's been dissected to death in the off-season...what all the players think about the season, straight out of the Nuke LaLoosh Handbook for Player Quotes...etc, etc.

Obviously, no news can be good news, in that there are injuries to report, but Castro's right when he calls the 'news' in Arizona thus far 'excruciating minutia' as we're all dying for information, then when we get said information, there's a kind of let-down...unless multiple quotes from Josh Barfield playing the OF are that compelling to you. Not that it's the beat reporters'

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fault as you can almost envision them aimlessly walking around, trying to find out something to write about when there is nothing going on. To wit, both [Hoynes](#) and

[Castrovince](#)

mention chicken on the grill as one of the highlights of camp thus far...no, seriously.

Nevertheless, that doesn't mean that there haven't been some nuggets of info to come east from Arizona, so we're off:

Terry Pluto comes correct with a bit of a continuation of the ["Three Divided by Four" piece](#)

that I did on the infield last week,

[expanding mainly on Victor and Show Pack and what 2009 may hold in store for each](#)

. The piece that jumps off the page, as I'm not sure it's ever been put on paper by Terry (though he did mention it when he was on "Smoke Signals" a while back) is that the Indians really have no idea if Hafner is ever going to be 100% as "that right elbow and shoulder have long been sources of pain for him";.

On Hafner, Hoynes comes through with [a piece that looks like he confronted Hafner point-blank and asked him if he ever used steroids](#)

, especially given that Hafner cut his teeth in MLB in a Rangers' clubhouse that could have doubled as a GNC with a back-room operation. Unsurprisingly, Hafner denied ever using steroids (as if we were expecting some admission) saying that he was big enough (250 lbs. in AAA) without them and didn't want to get any bigger. Hafner says that he was "scared what it would do to (his) body health-wise" and that "it was illegal". Give Hoynes credit for laying the article out well in terms of making the case of why Hafner, on some level, has the traits of a former user and goes right to the source for the answer and give Hafner credit for giving the answers. Unfortunately for Hafner, however, in this day of denials followed by revelations of use, words are just that and questions will always surround him, fair or not.

That, to me, is one of the ugly corollaries of this whole A-Rod thing ([among many](#)) - that players are almost guilty by association or guilty by suspicion. Sure, some of them are guilty, but there's very little that a player can do to remove all doubt about his cleanliness is simply to not have his name included on these lists that are certain

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to continue to emerge.

Getting back to the topic of Hoynes (or at least his mailbag), Jay Levin at the LGT dips into that well once more and [takes a crack at the questions on the minds of Indians' fans everywhere](#) ...or at least the ones that take the time to e-mail the PD beat reporter instead of just doing some research themselves.

For things actually happening ON the field in Goodyear, [Grady Sizemore apparently hit the first HR at the new ballpark in Goodyear](#) (in batting practice, not in a game), which will hopefully serve as a prelude to Sizemore christening the New Yankee Stadium with the first HR there too...off of CC...with the bases loaded...on his way to a 3 Grand Slam game.

Is that asking too much?

As a quick aside on the Yanks, Rosenthal has a piece that should warm your heart on a February morning about how [spending \\$441M didn't really solve all the problems in the Bronx](#)

An interesting bit of info came this week that [Frank Viola is in Goodyear as a pitching instructor](#), presumably to help with the Indians' bevy of young LHP who are all trying to separate themselves in the race for that 5th rotation spot. It's odd to think that Viola's connection here is that [he was on the 1992 Red Sox team with a then-24-year-old Eric Wedge](#) (mainly because I still have trouble picturing The Atomic Wedge as a player), but [Viola's credentials as a LHP who thrived in MLB](#) with an ability to avoid HR and BB should complement Carl Willis very nicely in Goodyear. Maybe the first order of business for Viola should be for him to spend a week or two with Jeremy Sowers to see if he can see what happened to the former #1 pick and the pitcher that blazed his way to MLB in 2006.

Finally from Goodyear, the PD has [a nice photo gallery up of all the pictures coming to them from Arizona](#), with the one with Joel Skinner driving a golf cart and Peralta and Garko sitting in the back seat being my favorite thus far.

I'm not sure why I get such a big kick out of it (other than the look on Peralta's

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face), but it looks like he and Garko are kids being driven to school by a buddy's parent.

Moving on, Tony Lastoria has some [nice ins-and-outs regarding our conversation with Josh Tomlin on "Smoke Signals" this past week](#) (yes, everyone, the Nicky Weglarz

interview is FINALLY next week and you can e-mail us your questions at smokesignals@theclevelandfan.com

) as well as announcing that some of the minor-leaguers will be blogging on his site. Most of the guys he mentions (Gimenez and Pestano, notably) have been guests of the show and lend tremendous insight, with enthusiasm and intelligence, as to what it's like to be a lowly minor-leaguer chasing that dream.

Regarding that quixotic notion that fills the heads of many minor-leaguers, [here's an excerpt from this week's SI from a book by Matt McCarthy](#), a former Angels' minor-league pitcher. It's a fascinating inside look at the type of players populate MiLB, with drop-ins by Bobby Jenks, Derrick Turnbow, and Joe Saunders as McCarthy navigates his way from a 21st round draft pick out of Yale through the sticks until finding himself out of baseball after a meeting with a tearful Tony Reagins.

Finally, this past Wednesday, I was elated to receive my [2009 Baseball Prospectus](#) Book, which is full of wildly informative insight and analysis. Admittedly, I've only had time to pore over the Tribe parts, but right off the bat, the intro to the Indians' section of the book is a tremendous look at the Tribe bullpens over the past 4 years and how the peaks and valleys experienced from 2005 to 2008 are unprecedented in all of baseball history in terms of successful bullpens being followed the next year by abominations.

Not to offer a book report type synopsis (or give too much away) here because you really should go out and [get the book yourself](#) for information not even related to the Tribe (and get

[this](#)

and

[this](#)

to complete your coverage of, in order, all of MLB, specifically the Indians, and the Indians' farm system), but here are some of the tidbits and predictions that jumped off the page to me.

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Just remember the predictions are according to them and should not be taken as fact...yet:

- Asdrubal could be one of the best middle infielders in the AL as early as this season, based on his performance in the second half of the 2008 season.
- LaPorta has the potential to be a mid-summer call-up (to either 1B or LF) with a "Ryan Braun-level impact not completely out of the question"; this year.
- Hafner will devolve further from Pronk into...well...Sid Bream.
- DeRosa's assumption as the regular 3B to mean that the Indians will "simultaneously play three infielders at their second-best positions";
- Beau Mills is the best hitting prospect in the system, saying that he'll be "knocking 30-plus homers...in a few years' time";
- Sizemore is only the 3rd player in MLB history to achieve the accomplishment of single-season milestones of 100 BB, 50 2B, 30 HR, and 30 SB (not in the same season, but with those milestones reached in one season), joining only Bobby Abreu and A-Rod. Seeing as how Grady accomplished it before his 27th birthday, that Abreu didn't do it until he was 28 and A-Rod...well, who knows what to think of him, is it time to appreciate Grady on another level - a historical level?
- Rounding out the top five behind Grady (42.5) in terms of projected [VORP](#) for hitters in 2009 are, in order, Peralta (20.7), Shoppach (16.6), Choo (13.3), and Martinez (12.3).
- As a final note on the hitters, Carlos Santana (who comes in as BPro's #33 prospect overall, 3 slots below LaPorta) has a higher projected VORP (10.9) than Hafner (10.1).
- Cliff Lee will remain one of the AL's best starters, if not figuring as prominently into the Cy Young race in 2009.
- Betancourt will perform at level closer to his 2006 season, not nearly as successful as his brilliant 2007 nor as atrocious as his 2008.

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- Dave Huff was one of only 11 qualifying minor-leaguers to finish 2008 with more strikeouts than walks plus hits.

- Wood should have no problem reaching his vesting criteria to net the third year of his deal.

- Starters, behind Lee (28.0) in terms of projected VORP are, in order, Scott Lewis (14.5), David Huff (11.1), Carmona (10.4), Westbrook (6.4), Sowers (4.3), Reyes (3.4), Laffey (2.4), Pavano (-0.6).

- Scott Lewis and Dave Huff have the 4th and 10th highest projected VORP for Rookie pitchers...so, Scotty Lewis, everybody!

- Projected VORP for relievers, again in order, comes in with Perez (16.2), Wood (12.6), Joe Smith (12.3), Betancourt (10.6), Jen Lewis (9.0), Sipp (7.9), and Mujica (7.3). Everyone else (Kobayashi, Miller, Meloan, etc.) have lower numbers.

By the way, the folks at BPro see the Tribe and the Twins as the two major players in the AL Central and feel that the Indians (with a little luck, and not the bad kind) are set up for a sustained run at a World Series championship, with 2009 serving as the first year of the next renaissance.

That's not coming from me, your designated homer, that's from the folks whose book has quotes on the front and back by ESPN's Rob Neyer, Billy Beane, Sports Illustrated, and Bob Costas.

Just for one last plug, in case that wetted your whistle for more information...which it should have - [here's where to buy this terrific book](#) .

The first full practice happens this week, with coverage on STO every night at 10:00 PM to put moving pictures into the mix.

Slowly, but surely, we're getting there...