

A Lazy Sunday Rundown

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}
Saturday, March 14 2009 7:00 PM -

In the middle of college basketball taking up most of our time as we all get ready to fill out brackets and prepare ourselves for the Madness that is March, let's take a quick break between conference championship games and the Selection Show to get off on a Lazy Sunday with Paulie C. As he does each Sunday, Paul takes us around the web for anything and everything Indians related ... and also offers up commentary on the 5th starter race, Masa Kobayashi, and the increased use of stats in baseball.



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Starting where we often do, Terry Pluto comes forth with [some tidbits of what he's hearing from the Indians](#)

, highlighted by news that Hafner's shoulder pain has yet to show itself (please, oh please, oh please...), that Josh Barfield's defensive versatility has impressed the Indians (which is really likely all they're looking for as a plate appearance for Barfield this year will mean that he's the last guy who has yet to hit and they need a player), that some names to watch in terms of reinforcements this year could be Michael Brantley and Chris Gimenez (who may top the list, along with Matt LaPorta, in terms of being able to contribute significantly from the position player side at some point this year), and handicapping the still-early bullpen and rotation spots.

On the bullpen, it looks like [Wedge has issued a public warning to Kobayashi to shape up](#) after his last lousy outing. While I think that Kobayashi will still break camp with the team, I'll stand by my prediction earlier this week that he'll be the first veteran to find himself off of the roster. More important than Kobayashi's guaranteed money, the fact that most of the NRI's (non-roster invitees) signed contracts that includes language that they've already accepted an assignment to Columbus if they don't make the team out of Goodyear, which means that guys like Vinnie Chulk and Matt Herges will remain in the organization, regardless of whether they're on the Opening Day roster. If that were not the case and if any of the NRI's who are outperforming Masa had a clause that allowed them to become a FA if they didn't make the team out of camp, the decision to carry Kobayashi out of Arizona would be tougher; but since the Indians can stockpile those arms in AAA and ostensibly give Kobayashi another chance in the Bigs (hopefully in rare appearances and on a very short leash), there's no reason for him not to make the team out of Spring Training. How long he stays on it is up for debate and, obviously, contingent on his performance, but I think that 6th spot in the bullpen is still his out of camp.

As for the 7th spot, I do see the Tribe going with Zach Jackson out of the gate (if camp were to break tomorrow), given his ability to provide length out of the bullpen, the fact that he's LH (with 3 of the 5 starters being RH and everyone in the bullpen not named Rafael Perez being RH), and the fact that he has those options remaining that allow the Indians to play with that 7th spot as needs on the parent club arise.

For the rotation, after [a strong outing by Aaron Laffey](#), I'd put the Babyfaced Bulldog back at the top of the list (if he ever really left) with Sowers and SLewis fighting to be the first guy out of the gate when (not if) something goes wrong in the rotation (whether it be injury or ineffectiveness) with Dave Huff readying himself to be the pitcher who could perhaps make the biggest impact when he comes topside, probably later in the year.

As a quick aside on the rotation, anyone else notice that Carmona motored through 4 innings in his last outing giving up only 1 hit, getting 8 of his 12 outs via the groundball, coming on the heels of Laffey pitching his 4 perfect innings, getting 8 of his 12 outs via the groundball?

Get Westbrook and his groundball tendencies back in there (and I think that [all of this talk that he's feeling good](#)

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still feels premature) maybe in the second half of the season and you're going to have some busy Indians' infielders come August and September.

Moving on to players that won't start the season in Cleveland, but could help at some point this year, [Jerry Crasnick has a nugget about how highly-thought-of the Indians' top "layer" of young players is looking](#), highlighting Mike Brantley in particular, writing *"that kid can really play,' one scout said of Brantley. 'Every at-bat is a quality at-bat.'"*;

That sound you hear is me salivating, Homer Simpson style...mmm, Brantley...

On the topic of those young players, SI.com's Jon Heyman has [an interesting piece chock-full of information](#), noting that a deal involving that Indians' newly created hitting depth (particularly with the glut of 1B/DH types like LaPorta, Mills, etc.) could be a way that the team augments their rotation, this after Heyman takes a look at who to believe when it comes to the this year's White Sox, the stat geeks at Baseball Prospectus (who pick them last in the Central) or GM Kenny Williams (who has a much more optimistic view).

Speaking of stats geeks, the tremendous Joe Posnanski has a [commentary on a discussion that took place on the MLB Network](#) between Matt Vasgersian, Harold Reynolds, Barry Larkin, and Sean Casey on which is more important, stats or scouts. It's a fascinating read as the "argument" laid out by the ex-players is one that those who dismiss stats often use, with Posnanski tackling each part individually.

Posnanski follows that up with a [hilarious commentary on the art of translation](#) and uses Eric Wedge (which, while it is fabricated is essentially every post-game interview he's ever done) to illustrate how he might sound if he were working through a translator.

Here's Posnanski's take on what the Wedge post-game interview (which anyone who's ever heard more than twice could probably almost dictate themselves) might sound like with a translator:

Reporter: Looked like Lee pitched well. □

Eric Wedge: Yeah, he had good fastball command. □

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Translator: "Yes. He ennobled himself with a performance of the highest rank."

Reporter: You think Hafner snapped out of his slump?

Wedge: Hope so. The club needs him.

Translator: "His erstwhile performance had brought ignominy upon his family and the glorious and stately stature of the Cleveland Indians. However, his double today suggests the resurrection we have awaited impatiently."

Reporter: Can you talk about the bunt in the fifth inning?

Wedge: Their guy was throwing good. We needed to try and get something going there.

Translator: "I feel strongly that the ever-changing nature of this virtuous game demands responsibility and honor, and it is incumbent upon a leader to ask for sacrifice in those difficult moments when the righteous opponent executes his duty with maximum excellence."

Wedge: All right? We good?

Translator: "I must take my leave. Fare thee well, noble scribes."

My favorite part of this is the reporter "questions"; that are precisely what is "asked"; in the manager's office after a Tribe game. Great stuff.

Apparently, the glowing reviews that have been coming out of Goodyear regarding the new park and the new facilities aren't unanimous [as the Arizona Republic reports that fans are upset with how inaccessible the Indians players are](#), particularly compared to the access that was apparently available in Winter Haven...which doesn't really concern me too much for my trip as...um...I could care less about getting autographs or rubbing shoulders with these guys.

I just want to see some baseball under the hot sun that has eluded me for too many months now on the North Coast as the trip out to the desert with The DiaBride is now less than two weeks away and I still couldn't be more excited. Of course as we sit there and peruse our IA2K9, now available at many fine local bookstores, like the Books-A-Million at Westgate in Fairview Park, where The DiaBride snapped off this beauty:

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If you end up going there, the stack will be decidedly smaller as The DiaBride halved that stack with the intentions of sending one off to family and friends, Tribe fans or not.

For now, I'm going to don my CSU gear (if I can find my one of my old "Kevin Mackey Basketball Camp" T-Shirts, whether it be the version from 1986, 1987, or 1988) in the rag pile to ready myself for the excitement of a #13 seed for the Vikes and anticipating a #13 seed upsetting an unsuspecting #4 seed later this week.