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As we all know, utility infielders are grown in secluded cloning farms in the rural Midwest. Each and every one of them is genetically engineered to be 5'10" and 170 pounds, and each receives daily injections of a specially formulated enzyme designed to promote "scrappiness." Released into the wild, utility infielders typically come to roost in the dugouts of professional baseball teams, occasionally emerging from the shadows to shag flyballs and forage for chewing tobacco. They all have shy-of-the-warning-track power, surprisingly poor

speed, and an uncanny knack for showing up at promotional events to sign autographs for disappointed children. It's no wonder then that many baseball fans have trouble recalling or distinguishing the various utility men that have played for their team, even in recent years. Admit it, you couldn't pick Casey Candaele, Jeff Branson, or Bill Selby out of a line-up. Similarly, if Eric Wedge sent in David Bell to pinch run for Pronk tonight, even the most devoted Jamey Carroll fan probably wouldn't notice the difference for at least a few innings.

Such is the plight of David Bell and his place in Indians lore. Despite his fine pedigree (son of Tribe great Buddy Bell and grandson of Gus Bell) and lengthy Major League career (12 seasons), Bell's Cleveland days just seem kind of hazy.

Drafted straight out of high school by the Tribe in the 7th round of the 1990 draft, Bell worked his way to the Big Leagues in pretty standard time (5 years), improving his prospect status during each year of his minor league service. His bloodlines (or genetic engineering, if you will) gave him an obvious edge, but Bell put in the work, too. Initially considered an offensive liability, he gradually improved from a .230 hitter (class A Columbus in 1991) to .252 (class A Kinston in 1992) and eventually .292 and .293 at AA Canton-Akron (1993) and AAA Charlotte (1994) respectively. He even showed a surprising power stroke in Triple-A, slugging at a .457 clip with 18 home-runs in the '94 season.

With little left to prove on the farm, Bell finally reached the Majors in 1995 at the age of 22. Of course, as you might recall, that was not a great time to be a youngster looking for playing time in Cleveland. Bell's infield positions were being patrolled by guys named Thome, Vizquel, and Baerga, making the third generation utility man an instantly expendable property. And by instantly, I mean instantly

. David had only two at-bats for the Tribe in 1995. On July 27, he was traded to St. Louis along with two other minor leaguers in exchange for pitcher Ken Hill. Yes, the Indians used to be the ones trading mediocre prospects for top arms.

If you're thinking, "gee, I could have sworn we had David Bell for more than 2 at-bats," you would be right. Three years later, in 1998, Bell's prospect luster had faded considerably, and the Cardinals had little interest in retaining his services. In three seasons in St. Louis, Bell had been used mainly as a defensive replacement, managing to hit only .250, .214, and .211 in limited duty. The Cards waived him in April of 1998, opening the door for the prodigal son's first return.

Back in 1995, David had been traded despite his father, Buddy, being one of Mike Hargrove's bench coaches. In 1998, the Indians reacquired David despite his father being the manager of the Detroit Tigers. Apparently, David's less than impressive numbers in St. Louis hadn't registered with the Indians, either, as they had a far greater plan for him than during his first literal cup of coffee in Cleveland. With Baerga long gone and Robbie Alomar yet to arrive, second base was a problem position for the Indians, and they decided to give the kid a crack at it.

Believe it or not, all of your fond memories of David Bell were forged during a few months in 1998. While it seems like the guy floated in and out of the Tribe line-up for four or five years, he actually appeared in only 109 games in an Indians uniform during his entire 12-year career, and 107 of those came in 1998. It was a pretty successful campaign, too, starting with his very first at-bat back in Cleveland: an unforgettable inside-the-park home-run off none other than Randy Johnson (you just remembered that, right?) From there, thanks to Cleveland's faith in him, Bell was proving that he could evolve beyond his own utility-man wiring and become a serviceable everyday player. Through August, he hit .262 with 10 HRs and 42 RBI, impressing the Indians with his performance and his clubhouse presence. Unfortunately, they were even more pleased with the idea of making an unnecessary waiver wire trade for a new leadoff man, so on August 31, they dealt Bell to Seattle for second baseman Joey Cora. Yes, that's the same Joey Cora who had to have his tears wiped away by an 18 year-old A-Rod in the 1995 ALCS. It's also the same Joey Cora who would hit .224 for the Indians in September and .059 in the 1998 playoffs, never to play in another Major League game afterwards.

So, just to recap, the Indians traded David Bell not once, but twice, for what they hoped would be valuable postseason help. Is it a leap to say that Bell was the missing piece that slipped through our fingers in two possible championship seasons? Yes, it's an incredibly stupid leap. But now that the Tribe brass has elected to bring him back to help develop their baby birds, perhaps the curse of David Bell can finally be lifted.

As for his own personal nostalgia, odds are that David Bell spends a lot more time thinking about Seattle than Cleveland. After essentially stealing him from the Indians (they apologized years later with Asdrubal Cabrera), the Mariners found a real gem in Bell. In 1999, he appeared in 157 games, hitting .268 and totaling career highs in homers (21) and RBIs (78). Moving to third base, he had two more solid seasons in Seattle before heading to the Giants and eventually the Phillies.

Bell was Philadelphia's everyday third baseman for three years, including a 2004 season in which he hit a career best .291 with 18 HRs and 77 RBIs. Two years later, though, Bell was done, finishing up his career in Milwaukee at the age of 34. His lifetime average wound up at .257, with a .716 OPS and 123 homeruns. Sadly, those unusually good utility-man power numbers will forever be observed with speculation, as Bell was later named in the infamous Mitchell Report, with evidence linking him to HGH purchases during his final season in the Majors. Hopefully, in the Arizona Fall League, a wiser Bell can now help educate the next generation of utility infielders about the dangers of mixing steroids and scrappiness.