

Playing Favorites

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}
Wednesday, August 26 2009 7:00 PM -

With the recent turnover on the Indians roster, Paulie C has been embroiled in some interesting conversations at home with his wife, who is having some difficulty picking a new "favorite player" since all of hers are essentially now elsewhere. In his latest piece, Paul talks about the Indians new roster and takes us through the thought process he and his wife went through in picking that new favorite. Who'd she pick? Read Paul's latest to find out.



While the title of this piece may immediately convey a pending denunciation (again) on the lineup stylings of The Atomic Wedgie, it is not intended to shed light upon why Ben Francisco and Chris Gimenez took playing time away from Matt LaPorta in 2009 or why the manager of a MLB team [offers deafening praise for a young\(ish\) 1B/3B](#) who has experienced some much-needed success after a few years of wandering the desert.

No, this isn't meant to throw another shovel of dirt into a grave that should have been sufficiently covered back in June, at least not today...OK, maybe a little of that intro found some gray area on the topic.

Rather, there's been an interesting conversation at home as The DiaBride is having some difficulty picking a new "favorite player"; since [all of hers are essentially now elsewhere](#) and in the mind of the 2 ½-year-old Indians' fan who sleeps well thanks to the comfort provided by a Grady Sizemore blanket under the watchful eye of a Grady bobblehead, EVERYONE needs to have a favorite player. Surprising as it may be,

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the issue has actually caused quite a bit of debate around the house over the past few weeks, and I have a sneaking suspicion that the feelings of my beautiful bride are not unlike that of many Indians' fans in the wake of the massive overhaul of the roster in 2009.

To her, who moved to Cleveland in 2000, this incarnation of the Indians is the only one that she's known as a fan and these players are the ones to which she has obviously formed an emotional attachment to. While I don't remember what it was like when my beloved Pat Tabler was traded to the KC Royals for Bud Black, the last month has been jarring for her in the way that fans a generation above us re-tell the story of Rocky Colavito getting traded or, to a lesser extent, the disappointment that was felt when Carlos Baerga made his way to NYC (in a move that was softened by the Tribe's continued success and Baerga's freefall as a player after the trade) back in late July of 1996.

Without breaking any new ground, the decision-making "process" forced upon her by our son confirms a very simple truth when it comes to following a team - people like to have their favorite players and when their favorite players find themselves playing for other teams (generally regardless of the circumstances), the boat is rocked and apathy and/or anger is often the result. I remember my uncle canceling his season tickets after the 2000 season when the team let Sandy Alomar, Jr. walk away in Free Agency and me arguing with him at Christmas about it, telling him that Sandy was a 34-year-old catcher with a lot of wear on his tires, not worth a roster spot for a team that looked to be far away from contention. He told me that I didn't understand because I had removed the emotional aspect of it - that to him, Sandy as an Indian represented that run in the 1990's and his arrival in the Joe Carter trade signified the beginning of the renaissance that marked his best days as an Indians' fan. He said that a team without Alomar didn't feel like the winning Indians' teams that were unlike the other ones that he had known in so many previous years.

No matter how much we went around and around on it, he stuck to his guns and proclaimed that his team, without his favorite player, wouldn't get his money for season tickets. It was his line in the sand and while it seems ridiculous now (Alomar posted a .663 OPS as a part-time catcher for a little more than 5 seasons after that), I was reminded of it when The DiaBride waffled and continued to waffle on her new favorite player.

For some background on this as to why a new favorite is needed, she proclaimed

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Cliff Lee to be her favorite player back when liking Cliff Lee was not the cool thing to do...and I don't mean 2007. I mean in 2003, when he had a late-season call-up and she made some comment that "he looks so serious out there, and I think that's good for a pitcher...I like him." Like him to the point that she wanted a Cliff Lee jersey, bearing the #34 that he wore at the time, purchasing it half-way through 2004. When 2005 arrived along with Kevin Millwood donning the #34 and C.P. Lee switching to #31, she became self-conscious about wearing the "wrong number" and decided to pick out Favorite Player 1a.

After much spirited debate and consideration, I remember her walking out of the Team Shop in 2005 with a #41 Martinez jersey (because "he's always having fun and smiling") came at the expense of what I presumed to be the favorite going into the store, a #1 Blake jersey, which didn't quite make it to the sales clerk despite the fact that Blake "just goes out and does his job, even as everyone hates him". If you're following the names involved so far, 2008 was not an easy time for her fandom, what with Blake getting moved and CC (who she liked but thought too many people liked him) making his way to her native Milwaukee.

But 2009?

That's been a whole other story as her two favorite players (as well as Garko, who she once saw picking up trash in the dugout after a game on TV, immediately vaulting him into that rare stratosphere of favorites) were traded in the course of three days and the anger took over, leading to proclamations that she was done with the Indians and done with baseball.

Back to the story though, as a 2 1/2-year-old does not easily compute that someone could possibly not like the Indians and certainly could not grasp how someone could not like baseball. Thus, the questions continued as to who her favorite player was now that "Bicker on 'nother team". While she placated the Boy Wonder with the old "still thinking about it" lines, I told her one night that this wasn't going to go away until she picked a player.

When I asked her then, who her favorite player was (if only to help the little man's quest out), the answer that came from her echoed what I think a lot of Indians are feeling (and still feel), essentially calling into question why she should root for the Indians, why she should pay more than just a passing interest in a particular player or players if (as I explained to her) the reality in which the Indians operated

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was going to see players get moved regularly, often before the end of their line as productive players.

As hard as the idea of backing Asdrubal or The BLC was pushed, she backed away from it, not wanting to stick her hand even close to the fire with the memory of getting burned so fresh in her mind. I showed her the text from my buddy t-bone that the Indians had painted over the Lee and Martinez murals at the corner of Carnegie and Ontario with those of Cabrera and Choo in support of my lobbying, but the result was the opposite of the intent as she grew more dissatisfied that the Indians could so callously turn the corner on the players that had given her so much enjoyment as a fan.

She didn't want to hear about payroll disparity in baseball or pick her player because she'd be able to root for them for a finite amount of time, she wanted something...someone to believe in again, and the current crop of options underwhelmed her.

After much prodding and a brief foray into "Crowe as favorite player" territory (which my son quickly dismissed, exclaiming correctly "but Mommy, nobody likes Crowe"), she settled on Chris Gimenez, if only because she thinks that his last name doesn't look like it sounds and because we saw him at a function at the Cleveland Metroparks Zoo at which he could not have been a friendlier, more engaging person.

Despite the "choice" though, the bitterness and sadness remains as she sarcastically asks me (the one who has "removed the emotional aspect of it" in my uncle's words years ago) how long I'll be able to wear the Grady throwback that she got me last year because he's surely the next to go. At that time, even I wonder if I'll be able to wear the Sizemore jersey without the tinge of sadness all the way through the 2012 season, the last season his current deal runs through. After that, does it become as much of a memory as the Lee and Martinez jerseys currently are?

It gets to the greater point of how the separation of the name on the front of the jersey from the name on the back is much easier in one's head than it is within one's heart. As fans, we want to cheer for a particular player or group of players, not a faceless group of talent that merely dons our favorite laundry. From the standpoint of kids just learning to love the Indians and for people who want (no...who need) that familiar face to cheer for, the effects of the trades of 2009 are

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cataclysmic and force an examination of how emotionally attached one wants to become with this new crop of names and faces that we're starting to see.

My wife argues that she shouldn't start to like guys like Louie V.B. or Matt LaPorta (and it's not because she says that she can't say "LaPorta" without thinking "Porta-Potty") because she doesn't want that day to come when they stop wearing an Indians' uniform and this whole charade continues in earnest.

While that line of thinking certainly has some merit - particularly given the still-gaping wound for fans that the departure of Lee and Martinez, among others, caused - it has become a reality of baseball in this day and age. Like it or not, these players are fungible assets whose value is tied more closely to production, salary, and contract status than it is to likeability, personality, or popularity among the masses.

It's not a pleasant reality and it's not one that I remember having to face as a young fan, particularly in the 1990's. But it's one that I'm going to have to come to grips with relatively soon, because the conversation with a son who will be 5-year-old son in 2012 who sleeps under the protection of "His Grady" every night is a conversation that I'm going to have to ready myself for.

Until that day though, maybe I'll start telling my wife and son about this Weglarz kid...