

Lazy Sunday Rolling Right Along

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}
Saturday, August 29 2009 7:00 PM -

It's a rainy and chilly late August Sunday on the North Coast. Brady Quinn and the Browns gave us some hope for the coming football season last night, and Paulie C sees a lot of reasons to be hopeful about the Indians going forward into 2010 and beyond. Carlos Carrasco will be making a start Tuesday, Any Marte is raking, and the Indians have won eight of their last 11 series. Paulie also takes a look at recent PD interviews with Paul Dolan and Cliff Lee, and takes a look at a good piece about Indians fans' nightmare 2009 playoff scenarios.



While most of the North Coast feels more comfortable with the Brady Quinn jersey in their closet, I'm spending the morning thinking about another player trying to lay claim on a starting job - the guy whose numbers in the 9 games since he's been inserted everyday into the starting lineup (.444 BA / .473 OBP / .777 SLG / 1.250 OPS with 3 HR and 12 RBI in 36 AB) - have certainly placed Andy Marte into the mix for 2010 because if judgments are going to be made based on small doses that Marte is AAAA fodder, how about weighting the same small samples in the other direction?

While Marte's success has certainly come as a nice surprise, let's not let it overshadow the contributions of Matt LaPorta, who over that same 9-game stretch has posted a .343 BA / .333 OBP / .657 SLG / .990 OPS with 3 HR and 10 RBI in 35 AB while proving that his glove can, in fact, play in LF (as evidenced by the diving catch last night that you may have missed) if that's where he eventually ends up.

But with the Wonder Twin power coming from a somewhat unlikely duo at the bottom of the lineup ([perhaps begrudgingly](#)) let's get rolling into a Lazy Sunday:

While the focus on the North Coast for the remainder of this season is on 2010 and beyond (with Carlos Carrasco being scheduled for Tuesday's start for the parent club) in terms of watching players like LaPorta contribute with more on the way, ['64 and Counting's Vince Grzegorek lays out some worst-case scenarios for playoff time for Indians's fans](#) that have to do with some of the ex-Indians who turned into LaPorta and Carrasco, among others:

Ranked on a scale of 'Better Not Happen Because I Might Punch My TV And Thusly Be Unable to Watch the Cav' to 'Wouldn't Care.'

1. Victor Martinez Hits a Game-Winning Homer in ALCS or Later at Fenway

Mainly because the Red Sox 'nation' is unbearable to begin with, and to see them celebrating wildly while Martinez circles the bases and slowly (remember, this is still Vic we're talking about) approaches the awaiting mob of Papelbon and Ortiz and Youkilis at home would be simply disgusting.

2. Cliff Lee vs. C.C. Sabathia, Game 1 of the World Series, Yankee Stadium.

Gut punch. Only possible way to describe this scenario.

As those very plausible scenarios have you grabbing for the antacid, let's segue that right into [the Cliff Lee interview that appeared in the PD](#) this week. Much of the attention that has been paid to the interview focuses on Lee's comments regarding fan support, or lack thereof (with a terrific retort by Dennis Manoloff) over the past two years:

DW: Do you feel bad for the fans who see the core of their team traded, fans who wonder, 'Why can't Cliff Lee and Victor Martinez still be around in 2010, to try to make another run at it?'

CL: Uh, it would help if the fans showed up and came to the games. That's why the team didn't make money, because the fans weren't there, supporting the team. That's what happens when the fans don't support --

DW: But you guys weren't winning.

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CL: Right. It goes hand-in-hand, though. It definitely goes hand-in-hand. Yeah, I feel sorry for them. I wish we were all still there, that we had won the World Series in '07, come back and won it again last year and were going to win it this year. That's not reality. That's not...It's a business. It's a total business.

While this is seen by many as the most compelling exchange in the interview on the most provocative topic (and my well-stated feelings on that situation, which I don't have time to look through the "archives" for are summed up better than I probably ever did in [Castrovince's mailbox last week](#)), the portion of the interview that I found most fascinating was the talk of contracts and the story regarding negotiations on a possible extension in Spring Training of this year:

DW: After the trades, Indians President Paul Dolan said you were not going to re-sign with the Indians after 2010. Did Dolan present it accurately?

CL: They told my agent that when we got to spring training this year, we'll talk about an extension. We get there, the first half of spring goes by...nothing. We get down toward the end, they call me in the office and tell me, 'Never mind. We've changed our minds.'

At that point, I told them: 'For me, now's the time. After this year, I'm going to be one year from free agency, and you're going to have to pick up my option if I'm pitching well. Otherwise, I'm a free agent. It doesn't make sense to do it one year out when I just watched what CC did.'

DW: Sabathia, of course, was traded to Milwaukee in 2008 and signed with the Yankees over the winter.

CL: Free agency is where you want to get as a player. That's where you get strength and have control of a situation. Obviously, the closer you get to that, the less likely an extension would be. That's kind of what I told them.

As an addendum to that little recount before going any further, here's [a relevant bit of information on that topic from Jayson Stark in his latest Rumblings and Grumblings](#)

regarding Lee's signability after the 2010 season, given the Phillies' policy to limiting three years guaranteed in contracts to pitchers:

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Lee, however, will be a free agent heading into his 32-year-old season. And the buzz already is that his agent, Darek Braunecker, is looking for a deal beyond the Phillies' customary parameters.

"Darek Braunecker is going to try to kill it with this guy," said an official of one team that looked into Lee before the trade deadline. "There's no doubt in my mind. He'll be looking for \$100 million. And I don't blame him.

"But you know what? From the Phillies' standpoint, if you get this guy for a year and a half and he's motivated as hell and he's absolutely dominant and then he leaves and you get two picks, wouldn't you rather be that team than the team that has to give him \$100 million. I would. Maybe you'd rather have 2½ years than 1½ years. But you don't want six years, because those are the deals that get scary."

While Lee's telling of the Spring Training episode certainly paints the Indians in a light in which they suddenly changed their mind in terms of sitting down at the negotiating table, how relevant is the fact that OTHER teams are aware that his agent is "going to try to kill it with this guy...looking for \$100M"?

Let's remember where we were in Spring Training with Cliff Lee, with him coming off of a monumentally successful 2008 campaign, but less than two years from being sent to the Minors due to his struggles. When 2009 started, Lee was a 30-year-old with a 4.16 career ERA and a career as a whole that [looked more like Aaron Harang or Charles Nagy](#)

than Sandy Koufax. That's not to discount the fact that Lee has evolved very quickly into an utterly dominant starter; rather, it's to put the conversation of whether the Indians should have even entertained the notion of extending CP Lee into some context and into the proper timeframe.

Throw in this idea that Lee's agent probably didn't hide his feelings that Lee was likely to hit the FA market after the 2010 season, with Lee telling Manoloff, "free agency is where you want to get as a player. That's where you get strength and have control of a situation. Obviously, the closer you get to that, the less likely an extension would be. That's kind of what I told them" and the water becomes a little clearer. If Lee and his agent are known by other teams' executives to be looking for a deal that would likely cover 6 years and pay \$100M for a pitcher that will be 32 when that deal kicks in, why would the Indians even entertain that notion if their best offer to Sabathia was a 4-year, \$72M extension to

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a younger player with a longer and better track record than that of Lee?

Should the Indians have entertained signing Lee at the price of what he's looking for - an average of about \$16M for the seasons in which he will be ages 32 to 37?

Certainly not, but the exec in Stark's piece said, "From the Phillies' standpoint, if you get this guy for a year and a half and he's motivated as hell and he's absolutely dominant and then he leaves and you get two picks, wouldn't you rather be that team than the team that has to give him \$100 million. I would. Maybe you'd rather have 2½ years than 1½ years. But you don't want six years, because those are the deals that get scary."

So it gets back to whether the Indians should have been the team to capitalize on that year and a half being "motivated as hell" and "dominant" or whether the idea that the window of contention was on its way down for the Indians (with or without CP Lee) and change was needed.

If you believe [some of the numbers that were relayed to Terry Pluto by Paul Dolan](#) (that the team was going to lose \$20M this year before the trades and were likely to lose \$30M next season if the trades weren't made), it certainly looks like the trades were financially motivated, not even getting into the notion that extending Lee was entertained at any point. Thus, when the decision was made to act quickly, it was done with an eye to not only keep some of that money but with an eye towards also to creating that next window of opportunity because of a surprising lack of talent on the horizon. As Dolan tells Pluto regarding marketing the team in 2010, "it still would have been a challenge because we could not have improved the team, and been in even bigger trouble in 2011 because we would not have added any of the young talent that we did in these deals."

Why that "bigger trouble" was coming is the MUCH bigger question in the equation as to why the pipeline ran dry, but the ">window of opportunity" concept is one that [Ken Rosenthal gets into when discussing the quandary that the Rays face with Carl Crawford](#) and whether to trade him this off-season or take another run at the AL East next year and how it relates to the ">window" for the current Rays team:

The psychology of team building is different in the low-rent district of the AL East. The Rays, like the Blue Jays and Orioles, operate with virtually no margin for

error.

"You've got to pick and choose your windows," an executive from one of those clubs says. "And when you pick one, you've got to nail it. You can't miss."

The defending AL champion Rays, who visit the Tigers this weekend...already are peeking out of a window that is rapidly closing.

While wrapping your head around the notion from Rosenthal that the Rays (yes, the ones that burst on the scene just last year with so much promise ahead of them) are "peeking out of a window that is rapidly closing", let us all thank heaven that the Indians find themselves in a better situation than the three teams that Rosenthal references, if only for the fact that the Tribe doesn't reside in the AL East.

Couple that piece by Rosenthal with the news that the Rays traded 25-year-old Scott Kazimir to the Angels with [Rob Neyer putting the Kazimir move in context in terms of team expectations and the inevitable fan backlash](#)

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The Rays don't play their games on paper, though, and I'm surprised they would make this deal. Yes, maybe the performance hit they're taking is negligible. But try explaining that to the fans, particularly when the guy you're dealing is arguably the franchise's all-time pitcher. Would Kazmir really have been worth less on the trade market this winter, or next spring, or next July?

What is it again that we've been saying about these small "windows of opportunity" for the majority of MLB teams and how they have to manage assets on their team without regard for fan reaction to not go into an extended organizational tailspin with no bottom in sight, like [the one in Kansas City that Joe Posnanski speaks of...at length](#)

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Suddenly, we have this "Brave New World" question facing teams like the Indians - what is the best way to compete and contend in a league in which the margin of error is razor thin, is it better to allow your own talent to run its course (as the Royals are doing) or is it more prudent to remain pro-active with a roster, to inject talent into a system at the expense of known quantities (as the

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Indians are doing, among others with teams like the Rays nearing that point of critical mass)...even if that talent is far away from contributing at a MLB level?

Obviously, that's another topic for another day - but it certainly is something to ponder on a rainy Sunday.

Finally (and apropos of nothing), from the Department of Probably Interesting to Me and Nobody Else, how about [this article on the New Era company who is the exclusive manufacturer for MLB hats](#), which mentions that the Rochester, NY-based company's first contract with an MLB team was with the Cleveland Indians in 1934.

It provides more information that you would ever really need to know about hats and as a recovering hat-aholic (back in the day when the ["Three-Bar Game Hats"](#) were all the rage, before they became standard issue as part of the fraternity dress code) who hasn't worn a hat regularly in quite a while (despite the fact that The DiaBride sweetly tells me on summer days to wear one to "block the sun from your head where your hair doesn't anymore"), I find the whole thing quite fascinating...even if New Era is responsible for some of the off-color and giant logo monstrosities that you see around these days.

As for now, it's time to get that Marte jersey on order to hang next to my Quinn jersey in the closet because The Dominican Dandy is back...for now, at least.