

Tomahawks Coming Down The Stretch

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}

Friday, September 18 2009 7:00 PM -

Since most people have checked out on the 2009 season and the recent performance of the team has made it increasingly difficult for those that just love baseball to find a reason to care, Paulie C checks in to release a couple of tomahawks aimed squarely at 2010 ... which is all we have now. Paul looks at the likely 2010 roles of LaPorta, Brantley, Peralta, and Marte ... and also examines the second half performance of the Indians young and remade starting rotation.



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In case you haven't noticed, Matt LaPorta has posted a .292 BA / .303 OBP / .531 SLG / .834 OPS line since being promoted (ahem...two months too late) with 13 XBH (8 2B, 5 HR) in the 25 games he's played since coming up from Columbus. While his BB total is confusingly low (only 2 BB in 99 plate appearances after averaging a BB about every 10 plate appearances in Columbus), there doesn't seem to be much question that LaPorta fits into the 2010 mix somewhere on the field.

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Why it took the team such a long time to allow him that opportunity will remain a great mystery, but his position for 2010 will hopefully become a little clearer through the off-season. That is, does LaPorta figure to start 2010 as the 1B or as the LF when the club breaks camp next Spring?

Ultimately, it could be a decision that isn't affected as much by LaPorta's defensive acumen as it is by where the organization wants Mike Brantley and Andy Marte to start the year in 2010. Brantley's performance in AAA certainly looked like he needed more seasoning there to start 2010, though he has continued his high-OBP approach in Cleveland while filling in for Grady. Meanwhile, Marte has officially fallen off the radar as his 18 consecutive start streak (during which he posted an .861 OPS with 5 HR and 14 RBI) certainly looks to be over as Marte has now come to a screeching halt, as he's started 3 of the last 8 games.

How much of that is a function of who's filling out the lineup card and who legitimately figures into plans for next year is certainly an open-ended question. But, Brantley's on-base ability and speed are putting me on the fence as to whether he should seriously be considered for LF out of Spring Training next year. If Brantley kind of "is what he is" for now (high OBP, non-existent power...with a BA not too far below his SLG), I'm more than willing to listen to the argument to see him on the parent club from Day 1 next year, moving LaPorta to 1B and Marte into a back-up 1B/3B role, allowing LaPorta and Peralta to spell Hafner at DH while providing a RH bat to what looks to be a very LH-heavy team next year.

Where does the conglomeration of LaPorta, Peralta, Brantley, and Marte fit for 2010?

In mid-September of this year, it's anyone's guess...but at least there are options.



Speaking of options, taking a look at how the 6 pitchers in the recent Indians' rotation have fared, are you getting the idea that we're getting a sneak peek at what the starting pitching is going to look like for 2010?

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I don't just mean the names associated with games started, I mean the performances and the lack of consistency from the young (and not so young anymore) starters that we've seen for the last month:

Consider the stretches we've seen from the Indians' six starters over the past few stretches of starts for each going into Thursday's game:

Justin Masterson's last 2 starts

1.50 ERA, .685 OPS against

Justin Masterson's 2 starts prior to that

6.17 ERA, .874 OPS against

Dave Huff's last 3 starts

2.84 ERA, .564 OPS against

Dave Huff's 3 starts prior to that

6.75 ERA, .994 OPS against

Jeremy Sowers' last 3 starts

2.04 ERA, .678 OPS against

Jeremy Sowers' 3 starts prior to that

5.68 ERA, .716 OPS against

Aaron Laffey's last 4 starts

6.75 ERA, .998 OPS against

Aaron Laffey's 4 starts prior to that

2.00 ERA, .665 OPS against

Fausto Carmona since being recalled

5.48 ERA, .859 OPS against

Carlos Carrasco since debut

9.64 ERA, 1.286 OPS against

Youth...inconsistency...let's get ready for 2010!

Seriously though, that's the biggest issue that the Tribe figures to face next year as these young pitchers could either excel or fall flat on their face from one start to the next and while that may answer questions going forward about these six (and Westbrook and Rondon, the other two that figure in the 2010 mix), it certainly is going to look like a mixed bag from game to game.

Finding answers to questions about all eight of the pitchers that figure prominently into the 2010 plans is something that I e-mailed back and forth with reader Kevin Holz about, who wondered if augmenting a questionable rotation with a FA might be a way to bridge the gap to 2011 readiness for contention.

They way that I look at it, we should have Westbrook, Carmona, Masterson, Laffey, Carrasco, Sowers (and who was that crazy person suggesting he should be the long man), Huff, and Rondon that all figure into the 2010 rotational mix that all have SERIOUS questions or issues surrounding them:

Westbrook - healthy...and if so, worth anything in a July trade?

Carmona - just what the hell happened and is 2007 Fausto ever coming back

Masterson - can he be a starter or is the bullpen the spot for him?

Laffey - middle-to-back-end-of-the-rotation or a potential FOR pitcher?

Carrasco - will he ever reach that potential or will the frustration roll on?

Sowers - he is out of options...so here's your long leash Jeremy

Huff - anything more than the back-end-of-the-rotation guy he looked like this year?

Rondon - how close is he?

That's eight guys that should factor into next year with answers needed for each one going forward. To me, I'd rather see those eight guys start all 162 games to figure out what we have and if we need anything for 2011 (which is when the team

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realistically could contend) instead of trying to pacify any portion of the fanbase with a re-tread signing that's going to take IP away from these guys and not be around if he does succeed.

Once some of those questions above start to find answers, then you figure out where outside help may be needed so the team can augment the team via FA or trade where the holes reveal themselves next year for that move for contention in 2011. In terms of examining the FA market for a starter this off-season (not even thinking about the payroll ramifications), there are just too many variables that can happen with the youngsters next year for me to think that they're going to steal IP from a young (and perhaps cheap) player in a year when they're likely another year away from contending.



After the sweep of the Indians by the Twins, anyone see that Minnesota's record is now sitting at 74-72, 4 ½ games back of the AL-Central-leading, but faltering Tigers?

What was it that was said when the season started?

If the Indians can stay close to .500 until some of their young players arrive to supplement the lineup, the rotation, and the bullpen, maybe they can make one of their patented late-season pushes to perhaps even take the AL Central?

Memories...like the corners of my mind...misty water-colored memories...

Sorry, didn't mean to go all [Hector Savag](#)e on you there...

By no means am I saying that the Twins are going to catch the Motor City Kitties, but they're in the conversation with a couple of weeks left in the schedule and the opportunity to make things a little more interesting down the stretch as they play Detroit in 7 of their final 16 games.

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Finally, Tony Lastoria and I were happy to be [joined by Jordan Brown for this week's episode of "Smoke Signals"](#), which puts a window into the personal story involved while hitting on all of the high points that have been covered here and elsewhere and...well, everywhere.

If you have the time, it's definitely worth your time...which is all we all have until this season mercifully comes to an end.