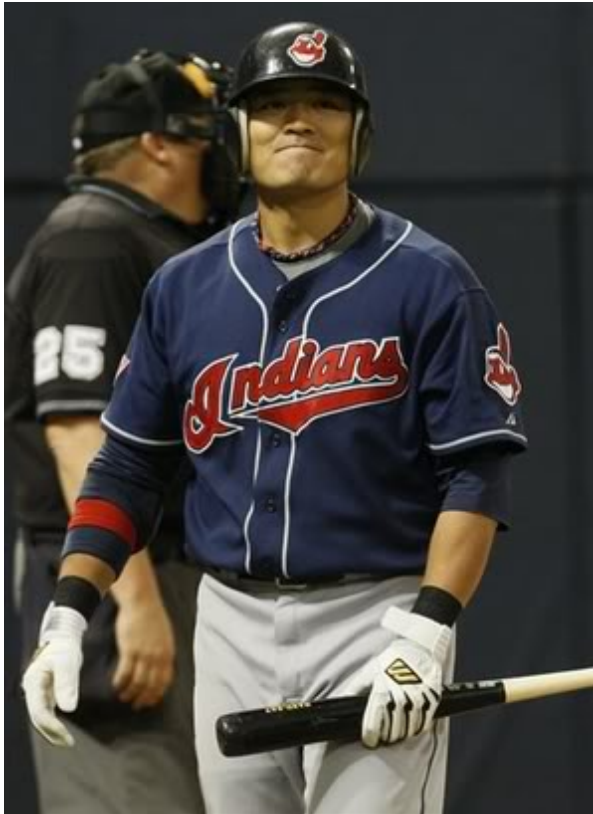


A Lazy Sunday Playing Out The String

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}
Saturday, September 19 2009 7:00 PM -

Losers of seven straight and now just one game ahead of the hapless Royals at the bottom of the AL Central, does anyone else find it amazing that this team continues to find itself sinking to new lows even now? For a team that hasn't shown signs of life with a stable full of rookies operating under a lame-duck manager, let's take a quick trip around a Lazy Sunday before enjoying a beautiful Fall afternoon filled with football and outdoor activities and...maybe, just maybe some Indians' baseball.



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Starting off, SI.com's Jon Heyman has [a fairly succinct look at what occurred in 2009 for the Indians and what 2010 looks like](#)

. I'm not quite sure why he believes that, *"They will still need to go out and get another innings eater after also sending Carl Pavano away in the purge, and the trades of Martinez and Lee should give them a few dollars to spend (it saved them \$21 million between this year and next)"*

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, but he presents a fair synopsis of where the Indians have been and where they may be going, concluding with the obligatory John Farrell for manager mention, which Paul Hoynes doesn't seem to be on board with,

[asserting that bench coach experience may be at or near the top of Shapiro's list of notable bullet points necessary on a new manager's](#)

Keeping it in the SI family, a couple of Tribesman make [SI's 2009 Overshadowed All-Stars team](#)

in the most recent print edition and it shouldn't come as a surprise as to which two Ben Reiter picks:

SS: Asdrubal Cabrera, Indians *The 23-year-old has blossomed in his first year as Cleveland's shortstop: He was hitting .313 with 63 RBIs and 16 steals through Sunday.*

--snip--

OF: Shin-Soo Choo, Indians *He's emerged as an all-around threat in his first full season as a major league starter, hitting .299 with 15 homers and 19 steals.*

In a season with few bright spots, the two former Mariners stand head-and-shoulders above the rest of the Indians' players in terms of meeting and exceeding expectations on a team that didn't have many players that hit either of those criteria.

On the topic of bright spots, and specifically The BLC, ESPN.com's Jerry Crasnick put together a list listing ["Under-the-radar OF who've emerged"](#), Choo-Choo-Choosing a certain South Korean RF for the list:

Shin-Soo Choo, Indians (.393 OBP, 16 homers, 19 steals)

Choo's numbers have actually dipped a bit from 2008, when he posted a 1.038 OPS after the All-Star break. But he deserves credit for sustaining it over the long haul this season, without a lot of help.

--snip--

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Choo's tools might not overwhelm you in a single viewing, but he's proficient in all facets of the game. He's developing into a 20-25 homer guy. He's improved against lefties. He's an instinctive baserunner, with 19 steals in 21 attempts. And he has 11 assists in right field to help offset seven errors.

He also plays with a quiet determination and toughness, and hangs in the box no matter who's pitching. Choo has been hit by a pitch 14 times, the fourth-highest total in the majors.

--snip--

"Cleveland did a really good job of evaluating," an AL scout said. "They always felt he was going to be this type of guy. I'm not sure the industry as a whole had him evaluated that high."

Also making Crasnick's list is Frank the Tank, whose defense in the CF expanses in the Emerald City have certainly put him on the national map, thanks in part to his seemingly-nightly inclusion in "Web Gems". While Franky is still struggling against RHP this year, posting a .678 OPS vs. RHP (and with the caveat that I think I'd still make that trade today given Louie the Fifth's potential), it's tough to see the 26-year-old smooth-fielding CF run down balls in a uniform that doesn't read "Cleveland".

Anyone else find it strangely compelling that Frank and The BLC make this list wearing the laundry of the opposite organizations for whom they made their MLB debut?

Why do I start with all of this (relative) good news?

Well, frankly...we need it right now, particularly given what we're seeing on a nightly basis and in the box scores and as easy as it is to simply pile on, I'm going to try my best to see this barely-filled cup as half-full, if only for a little bit of this beautiful Sunday morning.

Because, trust me...there's plenty of sobering news with today's contribution coming by way of John Fraase's "Waves of Arms", which has [an interesting look at how the performance of the AL Central rotations stack up in terms of starts that last 7 innings with fewer than 3 earned runs allowed](#)

. It goes a step past the old "Quality Start" with the moniker of the

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"Nolan Standard" after Ranger's exec Nolan Ryan:

In Texas, Ryan and his staff have upped the ante. They have added an inning and deemed a Quality Start an effort in which a pitcher goes at least 7 innings and allows 3 earned runs or fewer. The industry wide accepted 6/3 QS is fools gold.

John analyzes the Indians' totals (35 of the 145 starts), who contributes to those totals, and how they stack up against the rest of the Central:

Lee and Pavano accounted for 21 of the 35 total starts. And neither managed to stick with the team beyond 22 starts. The so-called "core" of guys whom the Indians will have to choose from internally for the 2010 rotation are Jake Westbrook, Carrasco, Masterson, Laffey, Carmona, Sowers and Huff. This group (not including Jake) made just 12/87, or 13.8% of their starts, a Nolan Ryan standard quality outing.

--snip--

Overall, the division in order from top to bottom goes like this.

Chicago: 47

Minnesota: 45

Detroit: 40

Kansas City 37

Cleveland 35

Realizing that pitching, and more specifically starting pitching, will determine how the 2010 season unfolds for the Tribe...this...this is not exactly anything on the bright or sunny side. It is fascinating research and sound conclusions, but it is not good (at all) for the 2010 Indians.

Of course we could always hope that the 2010 Tribe will be shined on by the same "Baseball Gods" that [Joe Posnanski believes may have affected the Cardinals season this year](#) :

The Baseball Gods have been good to St. Louis this year. The Cardinals came into the season with an ace who had not won a game in two years, a closer who not long ago was a middling starter, a starter who not long ago was a dominant closer, an outfielder at second base, a pitcher in centerfield and one superstar-the

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game's best player, really-who was coming off elbow surgery last October. They have since added a discarded legend, an unwanted middle infielder and a three-time National League All-Star who suffered a power outage in the American League. Picked to finish anywhere but first in the National League Central, the Cardinals probably will be the first team in baseball to clinch a division title, perhaps as soon as next week.

Then again, coaching and player development may have something to do with that and, not knowing whose going to be filling out the lineup cards (or doing any other sort of coaching for the Tribe next year), it all looks fairly unlikely to assume that type of "divine intervention"...particularly seeing what we've seen for the past few years.

From the JoePos file (and apropos of nothing Indians-related), [he weighs in on the MVP "debate"](#); and Ken Rosenthal's assertion that the award shouldn't just be handed to Joe Mauer...which it should.

Finally, Kevin Goldstein at Baseball Prospectus took a look at [which player in each organization saw their stock rise the most this season](#)

:

Cleveland Indians: *Some teams wondered if third baseman Lonnie Chisenhall was truly worthy of a first-round selection last year, but he responded to the challenge of a High-A assignment with a .276/.346/.492 line for Kinston before finishing the year at Double-A, and finishing among the organizational leaders with 22 homers and 92 runs driven in.*

Runner-Up: *The Indians always had high hopes for 21-year-old Venezuelan righty Jeanmar Gomez, and their patience finally began to pay off as he put up a 3.43 ERA at Double-A Akron while flashing two above-average pitchers with his fastball/breaking ball combination.*

Speaking of prospects and the future (and, really...isn't that where we've been for a while), if we're looking for silver linings in this lost season, the recent performance of the parent club has now put them in position to draft 5th in next year's amateur draft, with the 5th overall picks from 2005 to 2008 being Ryan Braun, Brandon Morrow, Matt Wieters, and Buster Posey, all of whom made their MLB debut less than two years after being drafted.

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Is that "silver lining" a reach?

No question, but so is the idea that they won't be drafting lower than 5th the way they're playing these days.