

An Indian Summer Lazy Sunday

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}

Saturday, November 07 2009 7:00 PM -

70 degree temps on the North Coast on November 8th? Christmas Ale on store shelves. AND no Browns game today? Seems almost too good to be true. Before I pack up the kids for a day at the zoo and a stop at the West Side Market ... let's unleash another Lazy Sunday piece from Paulie. Today our trusty Tribe scribe hits on the Yankees 27th title, the selection of Tim Lincecum as pitching coach, the Indians pursuit of Sandy Alomar for Manny Acta's staff, and the Twins recent trade and what it means for Jhonny Peralta.



As Indian Summer has descended on the North Coast and fresh off a clam-bake last night (that boasted lobsters and growlers of Christmas Ale) let's get rolling right into a Lazy Sunday so raking duties can be completed quickly and enjoyment of a 70 degree day in November can be maximized. With that, and attempting to shake the Christmas Ale out of my system, we're off:

With the Yankees winning their 27th World Series and with everyone having an opinion on what exactly the championship means in the context of Yankee lore, current Yankee players, and MLB in general, I'm reminded (not surprisingly) of a line from "Seinfeld":

If you'll remember the episode when a married couple (played by Debra Messing and Cary Elwes) approaches George, Jerry, and Elaine at the coffee shop, the conversation ends awkwardly after George tells his wife that she "coulda done a lot better than" her husband. It sets into motion a whole number of story lines, but the wonderful line as the stories played out that always stood out

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to me was when George visits the wife (now broken up with her husband), attempting to take his comment back with the woman telling him, "Sometimes you don't know how you're really feeling about something until a person like you comes along and articulates it so perfectly."

Since we all have a pretty good idea of what this Yankees' championship feels like and how frustrating and gut-wrenching it is, I thought I would pass along the piece that realizes the situation and "articulates it so perfectly", almost to the point that it just can't be improved upon. Not surprisingly, [it's from Joe Posnanski and I implore you to read it](#)

. Print out a copy and read it and share it with every baseball fan you know or forward the link to those same baseball fans. I would re-post the whole thing if I thought that was the best use of this space, but if you do nothing else today...read

[this article](#)

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The piece is well-thought-out and cogent and gets to the crux of why baseball may be a beautiful game, but why the current state of MLB may make you want to throw up.

Again, read it because in the immortal words of James Carville, after staring open-mouthed at Frank the Tank, "...that was perfect".

Moving onto The Reservation, the big news (and trust me, "big" is a relative term) of the week (other than the revelation that [Kirk Gibson was among those interviewed for the managerial gig and that Raffy Betancourt may be one of those Type A Free Agents that nobody wants to forfeit two draft picks for](#)

) is that Tim Belcher was named the new pitching coach, with [his previous duties within the organization stated thusly](#)

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The 48-year-old Belcher spent the past eight seasons as a special assistant in Cleveland's baseball operations. He worked extensively with pitchers at each level of the Indians' Minor League system and worked closely with the Major League pitching coach during Spring Training. He also doubled on the scouting side by giving advance reports on Major League teams.

It does seem strange for a team that has had a difficulty seeing minor league

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pitching success translate to MLB pitching success to hire someone who "worked closely with the Major League pitching coach during Spring Training", particularly given the slow starts of everyone not named CP Lee for the last two years. But maybe there's something tangible that Belcher offered in an organizational interview in terms of how he would take each of these specific Indians' pitchers that he's familiar with and use a certain strategy to maximize talent. Belcher has been part of the inner circle of the Indians (an inner circle that once included Bud Black in a nearly identical role and John Farrell in a different role) for nearly 8 years now, so he's not an unknown quantity at the corner of Carnegie and Ontario in terms of his opinions on players already in the organization or pitching philosophy.

Belcher likely had a hand in the decisions made over the summer, particularly in the additions that the Indians made to the pitching ranks via trade (and, outside of Ant Reyes, I can't remember a time before this summer the Indians added arms via trade), considering that he was a forward scout for the club and his input was almost certainly considered in the additions of Masterson, Carrasco, and the like. As reader Richard Sheir pointed out, "Shapiro's career is on the line now and you go with people you trust when the stakes are highest" and whether that's a good thing or not remains to be seen, but the fact that he's impressed both those that have known him (Shapiro, etc.) and those that just met him (Acta) mean that there's something he brings to the table that impresses.

All of that being said, nobody really knows whether Belcher will succeed and it can be debated as to what he did in the organization and why Fausto hasn't been fixed with him already in the organization or why certain players have not been able to make that leap to MLB success with him as an available sounding board, just as it can be wondered how much input he had in the day-to-day coaching of the pitching staff, or if these tasks even fell under the umbrella of his still unclear day-to-day duties. It quickly becomes a circular argument, but if I can make a suggestion to Belcher that would endear him very quickly to hearts across the North Coast, here it is - fix Fausto and get one or two of these young guys (perhaps [this guy](#) , who you probably were watching in Lehigh Valley in mid-July would be a nice start) to develop into more than back-end-of-the-rotation fodder in short order while cobbling together something that resembles a consistent bullpen.

There's your task, Mr. Belcher...good luck.

The hire from the Indians Front Office to the dugout as a first-time MLB pitching coach had me searching out the [coverage associated with the announcement three years ago in Boston when John Farrell was named the Sox's pitching coach](#). Most interesting is this quote from the man who is not the Indians' new manager in terms of making the transition from a Front Office role (and realizing that Belcher's role with the Indians was different than the one that Farrell held) to the dugout:

"The newness to the position will be the in-game information and information given to Tito," Farrell said. "In terms of evaluation and giving recommendations to individual pitchers, in this [former] role, that has been done on a daily basis. Whether it's with a young guy in the system or a guy making the transition to the Major Leagues, those relationships and that communication has been ongoing for the last five years."

--snip--

"The way to communicate that is through a detailed or consistent framework that gives each pitcher a consistent starting point that's very routine-oriented and team-based so that their consistency and day-to-day approach will play out on the field," Farrell said.

Sounds great...just like [everything that was said on Friday](#), right?

Putting it into practice is what Farrell has been able to do in Boston (the talent at his disposal hasn't hurt either) and whether Belcher is able to do the same (without the luxury of an in-house Beckett and Lester, among others) is something that will play out over the next couple of years...yep, years.

And therein lies the rub with these coaching hires that are unquestionably important to maximize the talent on hand - that there's really no way for one to quantifiably assert that Belcher will be a good pitching coach or that he won't. That uncertainty can be applied to any of the coaching hires that are yet to come as the as-yet-unnamed coaches are sure to be disparaged for a lack of acumen because of a lack of perceived progress by some player in the future, as that's just the nature of the beast. Just ask oft-maligned former hitting coach Derek Shelton (who was a favorite whipping boy, particularly at the beginning of the 2008 season), who took all of 16 days to find another MLB hitting coach gig for a team that figures to be better than the Indians for the foreseeable future.

Staying on the topic of the coaching staff, seeing as how [it was reported on Tuesday](#) that

"Indians manager Manny Acta would like to name a pitching coach and infield coach first" and with Tim Belcher now in the fold, isn't it pretty obvious that those were two of the positions that were going to be filled internally? Let me know when it's time to say, "Torey Lovullo...come on down" to manage the infielders and take on some role as a base coach, then turn our attention to other names that we know little about and whose resumes are sure to be pored over unnecessarily to fill the positions of bench coach, hitting coach, outfield coach, bullpen coach, and catchers' coach.

Regarding those last two roles, there was [a little blurb reporting that the Indians have an interest Sandy Alomar, Jr.](#),

possibly for one of those aforementioned positions. Of course, there is the whole matter of Alomar being a member of the Mets' coaching staff perhaps standing in the way:

Alomar has been added to the Mets' big-league staff after serving two years as their bullpen catcher and catching instructor, but his job hasn't been finalized because of other changes on the staff. One of those changes included the firing of Alomar's father, Sandy Sr.

--snip--

Going from one similar coaching job to another is seen as a lateral move, which may prompt the Mets to keep him.

Generally, coaches do not make lateral moves so it remains to be seen what comes of this, but let's all remember that adding Sandy Alomar, Jr. to the coaching staff does not bring back the days of 1995's "Wahoo, What a Finish" or of 1997's "A Sock-Cess Story". I can't imagine that people would legitimately go to games or have different feelings about the 2010 Indians based on whether Alomar was the bullpen coach...but I've been wrong before.

In essence, adding a guy like Sandy (or seeing if Charles Nagy is interested in filling the Special Assistant to Baseball Operations post recently vacated by Belcher) is fine with me as long as the main reason that he's getting the gig has nothing to do with the fact that he was the player for the team in the 1990s. If the

wisdom that Alomar brings to the role sets him apart from the other available prospective coaches...terrific, bring him in. If the fact that he hit a HR in the 1997 All-Star Game plays a role in the decision, color me uninterested.

Changing gears, in case you were thinking that Jhonny Peralta could be trade bait for an arm this off-season, I direct you to the trade of JJ Hardy for Carlos Gomez that was consummated this week. While I like the deal for the Twins in that it upgrades their offense significantly with a player under their control through the end of 2011, it sheds some light on what the market for Peralta might look like...and it's not too pretty.

Take a quick look at [how Evan Bruell summed up the trade for The Hardball Times](#) :

*At first, I was incredulous over this deal, believing Hardy should have been shopped for a pitcher. While I still feel the Twins come ahead in the deal, I've come to realize that shipping Hardy out for a bat is actually rather logical. **It's far easier to get a position player in a deal than a pitcher, especially ones of like talent.***

Even if Gomez is the equivalent of a 5.00 ERA pitcher, the latter comes with a higher price tag.

Admittedly, the sentence of interest was bolded by me, but is anyone else interested in using this logic to justify NOT getting an arm in a deal that would involve Peralta, particularly considering their current needs?

What they need of course, is pitching...the key to 2010 and beyond. While the man in charge of making sure that the pitching on hand (and perhaps to come) has been identified, whether or not he succeeds in his task isn't an answer that's going to crystallize quickly, or even be agreed upon.

So, while Tim Belcher pores over tape to rectify Fausto's mechanics, I'm going to enjoy a beautiful NFL-free day in the best location in the nation on a November day that just doesn't happen in Cleveland.