

## Offseason Happenings: Westbrook To Pitch Winter Ball

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Wednesday, November 11 2009 7:00 PM -

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Over the course of the next few days Tony is going to be breaking down the Indians 40 man roster, and also offering some analysis on who he feels will still be added and removed from it. In advance of those columns, T checks in today with a veritable smorgasbord of information on the team as the 2010 team becomes to come more into focus. Amongst other things, T hits on Jake Westbrook's encouraging progress, winter league play, and the Indians exploits in international scouting.



In the next few days I will be breaking down the 40-man roster and discussing who may still be removed and who will be added, but in the meantime here are a smorgasbord of news and notes regarding everything Indians related:

- It appears that if right-hander **Jake Westbrook** continues to progress well with his throwing program he is currently doing out in Goodyear, Arizona that he will pitch winter ball in Puerto Rico this offseason. The Indians have not confirmed when he will pitch in Puerto Rico, but it is expected to be sometime in the last week of this month.

He is only expected to make four or five appearances.

- The Puerto Rico Winter Baseball League starts up today, and the plan at the moment for the Indians is to send Westbrook out there to make some starts to evaluate his health in a game setting. Earlier this year Westbrook twice looked strong in his rehab from Tommy John surgery, but both times broke down after making a few starts in games. Sending him out to get some game action now will not only help the Indians get an idea how far along he

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is in his rehab and if he is finally on the road to recovery, but it could also have a big impact on their decision to sign a veteran starting pitcher.

If Westbrook shows signs of a lingering elbow issue, it may green light them to go after a veteran on a one year deal.

- If Westbrook can show he is healthy, it would lessen the need for the Indians to pick up a reliable veteran starter, though there is certainly a chance they could go out and sign one regardless. As reported by the Plain Dealer earlier this week, one pitcher they are already setting their sights on this offseason is right-hander **Carl Pavano**. It remains to be seen what the Indians do, but going out and spending \$4-5 million for one year on a back of the rotation starter or a reclamation project would not be a good use of their resources, especially after they could have kept left-hander

**Cliff Lee**

around for this year and only have to pay him \$9 million.

Not to mention that unless they can find a legit front of the rotation starter to slide into the one or two spot in the rotation that they should not be bothering with any reclamation projects or veteran back of the rotation guys.

They have enough of their own guys like this already to sort through.

- On the International front, the Indians have made some significant changes that they hope give them a better feel in Latin America and the Pacific Rim. **Ramon Pena** was hired as the new Director of Latin Operations while former director Lino Diaz has remained in the organization in a much more specialized role assisting young Latin players in their transition to life in the United States.

The main reason behind the changes in Latin America is they wanted someone home-based and on the ground in the area year-round.

Previously their Director of Latin Operations commuted from the United States to the Dominican Republic.

By operating like this it was difficult to really get a true pulse of anything as these people were not in those countries day to day.

This is most important in Latin America where they are signing and developing players, and it is just something the Indians feel they can be more efficient with some one living there year round.

Most teams have their Latin Operations Director living in the Dominican Republic, so the Indians finally felt it was time to make a move in this regard.

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- The Indians also made some significant changes with their scouting operations in the Pacific Rim when they fired scouts **Jason Lee** and **Nate Minchey**. The promoted Japan scout **Dave DeFreitas** and made him their Supervisor of Pacific Rim Scouting Operations.

He speaks Japanese and like Ramon Pena in Latin America, DeFreitas will be home-based in Japan.

He will supervise a small team of scouts in the Pacific Rim where he will be given a part time scout in Korea and a part time scout in Taiwan and they will report directly to him.

By being based in Japan, DeFreitas will be able to easily get to those countries when needed.

Overall, the Indians reshuffled things but think they are now better situated in the Pacific Rim.

- Speaking of changes in the Pacific Rim, part of the reason for the changes is the bust that **Masa Kobayashi** was for the Indians.

Back when they signed him two years ago it came on the recommendation of Scouting Director John Mirabelli after he had consulted with his scouting staff over in Japan and seeing Kobayashi himself.

Obviously the signing did not work out as they had hoped, and what the Indians learned from it was whether the player is an amateur or pro that they need multiple and much more thorough looks at a player.

Previously they would only get a snapshot of a player and then jump back and forth between the states and Japan to see them.

Having someone on the ground in Japan who can get a staff around him and get multiple looks at players they have interest in will help them make better decisions.

- To close the book on the Kobayashi Era in Cleveland, the Indians thought process with his signing was when looking at the bullpen in 2007 it was a pretty good bullpen and they went after Kobayashi with the idea to fit him in front of Jensen Lewis in the 6th or 7th inning. There was never any expectation for him to pitch meaningful backend situations in the bullpen; it just happened that way after all the problems piled up throughout the 2008 and 2009 seasons.

He was simply looked at as an addition to what they thought was a deep bullpen.

- Where they went wrong with Kobayashi was two-fold. First, Kobayashi was never able to

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command his fastball particularly down and away like he did in Japan, and secondly he was never able to throw his slider with consistency like he did in Japan.

Some of that may have been due to better hitters in the US, but bottom line his stuff just did not translate.

They also had a lot of interest in

### **Yasuhiko Yabuta**

who signed with the Royals.

They offered a contract to him hoping to land either him or Kobayashi, but in the end neither one of them turned out to be any good.

- On a related note, the Indians interest in **Bobby Valentine** for their managerial opening always seemed kind of odd and an out of nowhere managerial candidate.

Putting two and two together, the Indians scouting of both Kobayashi and Yabuta had them cross paths with Valentine a lot over the course of 2007 and even beyond as they continued to scout in Japan.

Both Yabuta and Kobayashi played for the Chiba Lotte Marines of Japan's Pacific League, which is the team Valentine managed before leaving after this past season.

- To wrap up the happenings in Japan, the Indians are supposedly very close to signing right-handed pitcher **Takafumi Nakamura**. They are still working on completing the deal, but it is believed it is more just last minute details and an announcement may be made sometime in the next few days. Nakamura would not be a high profile pickup, but he is interesting in the sense that he is much bigger (6'5" and physical than typical Japanese pitchers.

- The Indians completed a deal back in June where they traded first baseman **Michael Aubrey** to the Baltimore Orioles for a player to be named later.

To date the Indians have not received a player in return, and from what I understand they likely will not get a player and instead the deal will just turn out to be a cash deal.

Sometimes the players to be named turn out to be cash because teams can't agree on the value of the player, which happens often.

- On the **Adam Miller** front, there is nothing new to report at this time. He had a scheduled second surgery on August 4

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and has been rehabbing the middle finger on his throwing hand since out in Goodyear, Arizona.

When I was out in Arizona last month he was supposed to start playing catch and then begin a throwing program at the end of November.

No word yet if he is still on schedule to start the throwing program or if any setbacks have arisen.

All that said, it should be noted that at this point the cold reality is the Indians have almost no expectations right now and if he pitches an inning at the big league level in 2010 it would be a pleasant surprise.

- The Indians are leaning to **Matt LaPorta** as their everyday first baseman next year. Anything can change between now and spring, but with the way the team is constructed with Michael Brantley, Grady Sizemore, and Shin-Soo Choo in the starting outfield and with Trevor Crowe as the fourth outfielder, LaPorta fits best at first base.

When he was sent back to Triple-A Columbus in late May he put in a lot of work in at first base and spent the majority of his time in games at first base to get him ready for an everyday transition there at the big league level.

The plan in spring training is to take a long, hard look at him there to make a final decision on it for the season, assuming of course he is healthy (toe and hip surgery).

- From what I am hearing, the Indians may be close to naming Triple-A pitching coach **Scott Radinsky** as the new bullpen coach, and Triple-A hitting coach **Jon Nunnally** is getting strong consideration for the hitting coach opening.

I'm also hearing that popular fan choice

**Ellis Burks**

may not be in the running for a coaching position because he has supposedly enrolled his son in a full time baseball school somewhere and may move his family there.

- From a player who had Nunnally as his hitting coach last year: "The thing I like about Nunnally is maybe not everything that he says is for a certain person, but he can go and have five different hitters working in the cage and point out and say something different to each one of the guys. He is so good about knowing what you do best. He doesn't categorize his hitting philosophy, and I think that is why he is so good.

He goes and looks at the player and knows exactly what to do to make the player better."

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- [As reported over the weekend](#) , outfielder **Nick Weglarz** had surgery last week to insert a rod into his left leg to speed up the recovery from a stress fracture to his tibia.

By having the rod put in it greatly reduced the recovery time needed and should fix the problem.

They had tried to let it heal naturally since July, but pain remained and it was starting to get worse as he played on it recently out in Arizona.

Had they shut him down and not had the surgery and let it heal naturally, he would have been out for as many as four months, and even then there would be no guarantee he would be 100%.