

Indians 40-Man Review: Who Could They Still Remove?

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Friday, November 13 2009 7:00 PM -

Now less than a week away, the November 20th 40-man roster deadline is quickly approaching. This is a key date in the offseason in that it is the first official 40-man roster for the next season, and is also when teams add very valuable prospects from their farm system onto the roster in order to protect them from the Rule 5 Draft in December. In Tony's latest piece for us, he takes a look at the big decisions the Indians have when it comes to setting the 40-man roster.



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For the Indians, when it comes to filling out their 40-man roster at this time of the year it is done so based on a combination of need and talent, though it almost always comes down to talent. When adding "unknowns" from the farm system, it is about evaluating and making a decision to roster who they view has the best ability to be a major league player (or is already viewed a major league player) and has the most upside.

For the Indians and almost every other team, the finalization of the roster almost always goes down to the last minute. In some cases this may be because a team is still discussing who to add or they may have other potential moves in the works which could create roster room, but the main reason this happens is there is no reason to roster a player until a team has to. Rostering a player before the deadline when there is no rush to do so could result in disaster. What if the player

is playing winter ball then goes out the next day and gets seriously hurt? This is why it typically always goes down to the last minute, as we saw last year with the Indians when they formally announced the roster decisions at around 10pm on the roster deadline date.

Trades at this time of the year involving Rule 5 eligible players that teams may not have room on their roster to protect rarely if ever happen because of the timing as all the other teams are mostly in the same dilemma where they have a roster crunch with comparable players themselves. As we have seen in the past, sometimes a team can open up a roster spot by trading a player already on the 40-man roster in exchange for a non-roster player that is not required to be protected. Bottom line though, the bubble guys are almost impossible to trade and “get something” for them before they are potentially lost in the Rule 5 Draft.

With that in mind, let's take a look at what decisions the Indians may still make with regard to the current 40-man roster and what type of maneuvers may still be available to remove players from the roster. In a follow up to this piece on Monday, we will take a look at what the Indians likely do as far as who they decide to add to the 40-man roster from their minor league system.

Roster Analysis

The Indians currently have 33 players on the 40-man roster, though this does not include pitchers Jake Westbrook and Anthony Reyes who both are on the 60-day disabled list. By the same token, the roster includes Jamey Carroll and Tomo Ohka who are both free agents and will be officially removed from the roster in the coming days.

Since there is no disabled list in the offseason, all players on the 60-day disabled list have to be added back to the 40-man roster (or released) by the November 20th roster deadline. Westbrook will certainly be added back to the roster, though I have heard it is a possibility that the Indians could very well consider designating Reyes for assignment to remove him from the roster and create a roster opening. Before we get into the Reyes situation, with Carroll and Ohka coming off and Westbrook and Reyes coming on it puts us right back at 33 players on the 40-man with seven roster spots open.

Looking at the rest of the current 40-man roster, the following players appear to

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have a questionable status on the roster: Andy Marte, Chris Gimenez, Wyatt Toregas, Jose Veras, and Adam Miller. When the Indians removed left-handed pitcher Scott Lewis from the roster over a week ago, it looks like the remaining questionable players on the roster survived the cut; however, things can always change. So, let's take a quick look at each player and explain why they stay on the roster or why they still may be removed.

Anthony Reyes: Considering that Reyes is still in the middle of his return from Tommy John surgery and unlikely to pitch anywhere in the big leagues next year, it seems unlikely anyone would claim him off waivers right now and if he did clear that he would almost certainly be resigned by the Indians to a minor league deal.

At this point, his value is very low, especially for 2010. Even if he returns healthy in 2011, he still has a questionable future in the big leagues as even before the injury he had not shown much in the big leagues to date. He has shown flashes of being a good pitcher, but his inconsistency and current injury status to me makes him an ideal candidate to be removed from the 40-man roster in order to instead use the roster spot to protect a player from their farm system they may be high on. I would not be surprised if he is removed from the roster.

Wyatt Toregas: There is always the possibility the Indians may make a trade to clear a roster spot or two, and if that happens it would almost certainly seem to be one involving a trade of one of their surplus of catchers. Everyone knows Carlos Santana is the starter in waiting - likely as soon as mid-season next year - but in the meantime they have Kelly Shoppach, Lou Marson, and Toregas on the roster and teams don't typically have four catchers on the 40-man (Chris Gimenez is listed as a catcher, but he is more a utility man). At some point this offseason it seems very possible the Indians will pull the plug and let go of or trade one of those three catchers.

Considering that Shoppach is arbitration eligible and will be somewhat costly he is the most likely candidate, so he could be traded or just be non-tendered in December which would make him a free agent. The Indians seem inclined to go with Marson as the everyday guy until Santana is ready, so Shoppach appears on the outs. There is a remote possibility that Marson could be traded this offseason since he is valued around the league, but it seems unlikely until Santana establishes himself at the major league level.

So how does Toregas factor into all of this? Well, Toregas is viewed strictly as a

backup catcher and would backup Shoppach or Marson next year assuming one of them is not with the team in 2010. If for some reason the Indians plan on keeping both Shoppach and Marson around next season, then Toregas would appear a strong candidate to be removed from the roster at some point and quite possibly by next week.

Chris Gimenez: For as awful a professional debut season as he had, Gimenez offers up a ton of versatility being able to play anywhere on the diamond except shortstop, second base, and center field. His versatility, makeup, and power right-handed bat off the bench may be something the Indians want to hold out a little longer on. Yes, his .144/.256/.243 batting line this year in 111 at bats was pretty horrific, but in the past he has always seemed to struggle in his first taste at a new level. He showed this in 2007 at Double-A Akron (.221/.285/.434) and then in Akron in 2008 (.339/.487/.537).

So it appears the Indians are going to stick with Gimenez in the short term and see how he bounces back this upcoming season. Things can always happen later this offseason with him being removed from the roster if they need a spot for a player they may acquire in a trade or in free agency. If this happens and the Indians have a full 40-man roster, he would certainly be one of the top candidates to be removed to create space. He is very much a bubble guy, and on a very short leash.

Adam Miller: Miller is really a great unknown. It appears the Indians will not gamble with removing him from the roster and trying to get him to clear waivers even with his career in such doubt at the moment following reconstructive surgery to the middle finger of his throwing hand.

Since Miller is currently only playing catch and not yet throwing off a mound, there is limited information at this time to properly evaluate him and his possible return to some semblance of the pitcher he once was. He had his second of two scheduled surgeries performed on his finger on August 4th, has been rehabbing the finger out in Goodyear ever since, and hopefully soon will begin a throwing program. This lack of information regarding his current health status to me is key in that not being able to properly assess his potential return next year or beyond puts the Indians at risk to lose him if they were to release him and try to get him through waivers. Another team can simply claim him and then put him on their 40-man roster and 60-day DL him all year next year when the season starts and wait and find out. All for the cost of a minor league contract and little risk at all on

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one of the top young talents in the game up until last year. Knowing this, there appears to be no way the Indians will remove Miller from the roster at this point.

Also, having Miller or even Reyes on the roster really doesn't hurt the Indians much as if they can't pitch they will just be put on the 60-day disabled list when the season starts. It really only hurts them right now in making roster decisions on young players to add, and it comes down to evaluating whether or not it is worth dumping them over a minor leaguer who maybe has fringe major league potential.

Andy Marte: From what I understand, Marte is in no danger of being removed from the roster as the club seems inclined to carry him with the team into spring training and potentially next season as a right-handed bat off the bench that can play third base or first base. He is a suitable backup for Jhonny Peralta at third base and Matt LaPorta at first base, though it is possible that he and Gimenez will be in a spring battle for that role.

If LaPorta is slow to recover from his toe and hip surgeries and starts the season on the disabled list, then Marte could be the short term everyday fill in at first base and in some sort of platoon with Jordan Brown (more on him Monday) to start the season. Also, if the Indians happen to deal Peralta in the offseason, Marte would become the stop gap at third base until they are ready to hand the job over to third base prospects Wes Hodges or Lonnie Chisenhall. Marte's standing on the 40-man looks to be very safe at the moment.

Jose Veras: At first glance, Veras would seem really iffy to keep on the roster; however, with his power arm and some experience as a major league reliever it looks like the Indians appear satisfied in bringing him into spring training as part of the roster and a candidate for one of the two to three bullpen openings next season.

With really only Kerry Wood, Chris Perez, Joe Smith and Tony Sipp having a bullpen spot locked up for next year, it should be an interesting camp battle in spring to see who fills the other two to three spots in the bullpen. Jensen Lewis, Rafael Perez, Jess Todd, and maybe even Jeremy Sowers are the only other candidates to fill those roles at the moment, so keeping Veras around has some value due to the limited options in the pen at the moment.

Final Decision(s)

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Considering the possibilities above who the Indians may still remove from the roster, it looks very likely that barring a trade of Shoppach or Marson between now and next Friday the 20th that at most one player will be removed from the roster. That one player is Reyes, and I think it may indeed happen provided such a move can be done within the rules of the CBA considering he is on the 60-day disabled list and recovering from a serious injury.

In any case, going by the analysis of the current roster above it looks like the Indians will have at least seven and as many as eight spots open to add players to the roster.

On Monday I will break down the list of roster protection candidates and give an idea as to who the Indians will add to the roster from their farm system and who they will expose to the Rule 5 Draft.