

Shopped Out

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}
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As the first player-related news of the off-season has finally arrived, Kelly Shoppach has been traded to the Tampa Rays for a PTBNL that must be decided upon by the Indians by December 20th. The trade was neither unexpected nor unwelcome as the Indians had made it clear that Shoppach would not be a part of their future, immediate or long-term, with the inclusion of Lou Marson in the CP Lee deal and the emergence of mega-prospect Carlos Santana. Paulie C talks about the deal in his latest.



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As much as Kelly Shoppach looked like a potential long-term answer behind the dish in the second half of 2008, when he posted a line of .273 BA / .366 OBP / .564 SLG / .930 OPS with 19 HR and 23 2B as he started 74 of the last 82 games of the 2008 season, that optimism quickly waned in 2009. His playing time lacked consistency, as

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Shoppach started 5 consecutive games once throughout the whole season, as did his approach at the plate and behind it. During his sporadic use this past year, ShopVac struggled to repeat the success that he had enjoyed down the stretch in 2008 and the answer to the question of whether the league had adjusted to Shoppach, causing his struggles, or whether the inconsistency of his playing time played a larger role won't come with Shoppach in an Indians' uniform.

His 2009 performance however, is not the main reason that Shoppach finds himself calling Tampa his new team. The main culprits for that turn of events are the facts that Shoppach is entering his second year of arbitration, with an increase in salary that will likely border on \$3M for the 2010 season, as well as the fact that the Indians' top prospect, Carlos Santana, is likely to be promoted at some point in the middle of the 2010 season to assume catching duties...duties that the Indians hope he can hold down for the next six or seven years. Thus, Shoppach finds himself in Tampa, where the Rays will now deal with Shoppach's arbitration issue and where he finds himself re-united with Derek Shelton (though I wonder if you can really call it a "reunion" if Shelton will simply remain Shoppach's MLB hitting coach), who was hired by the Rays and will continue to attempt to refine Shoppach's all-or-nothing approach.

To me, Shoppach does present some value in his ability to drive the ball from the catching position and, while he became somewhat of a poster child for the strikeout-prone Indians (not that it wasn't earned with his prodigious K totals), Mr. Show Pack remains a viable everyday MLB catcher...just not in the situation in Cleveland as 2010 dawns. That was made clear in late July as the inclusion of Lou Marson signaled the end, for all intents and purposes of Shoppach's time on the North Coast. Given that it was a foregone conclusion that he would be outside of the

organization at some point this winter and, while I thought the non-tender rumors didn't make too much sense as he retained some trade value if only by virtue of his 2008 second half (and I thought he'd be a better fit in the NL), it would seem that the Indians moved him for the ubiquitous PTBNL for no other reason than that his projected production did not justify his price tag, particularly in light of the impending arrival of Carlos Santana.

What's coming in return is likely an arm from Tampa and, in all likelihood a lower-level arm, that the Indians can add to their layer cake of arms. Whomever that PTBNL ends up being (and who knows, maybe it is a 40-man replacement for Shoppach to bring the 40-man whole again), the return is secondary to the idea that the Indians won't be on the hook to pay Shoppach's salary and can utilize their roster more efficiently with Marson and, later in the summer, Santana donning the tools of ignorance on the North Coast.

Truthfully, I don't care if the PTBNL is a low-A arm that may never project to MLB, as Shoppach's usefulness to the organization diminished the day they got Marson (and it was already tenuous with Santana in the wings) just as his usefulness drops proportionally to the raising of the number on his contract. Since he was due another pay raise and since less expensive options (a combo of Marson/Torregas to start the season, followed by a combo of Santana/Marson to finish it) were readily available and nearly MLB-ready, the sands in Shoppach's Indians' hourglass were falling quickly and have finally run out.