

## Stepping Into the Second Half

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}

Friday, July 16 2010 10:30 AM - Last Updated Friday, July 16 2010 9:15 AM

---



After a nice respite from the 2010 season, the second half begins in earnest again on Friday as the Indians welcome the Motor City Kitties to the North Coast as the Tribe attempts to build some momentum for the 2011 season and beyond in the final three months of the season. Given that we know what we've seen so far from the Tribe, the question becomes – what SHOULD we see from the Indians to finish off the 2010 season that puts the team in the best position to look back at 2010 as rock bottom, or the low point, instead of the beginning of a linear path along the bottom?

As you might imagine, I have a couple of thoughts on this to make baseball as palatable and enjoyable (and it has been both in the past month, in terms of comparison to the first two months) for July, August, and September that allows the Indians the best shot of shortening this rebuild/reload/whatever as quickly as possible. Most of this is fairly obvious (to some at least), but it needs to be said in light of what we've seen and what we should see...

### **#1) Clear the Decks**

While this is sure to be portrayed as “just another Fire Sale for an organization that runs one every year” by some in the local and national media, the 2010 season was entered as a “season to build upon”, something that certainly couldn't be said in 2008 (coming off of a ALCS appearance) and in 2009 (when the team inked Wood and traded for DeRosa). Thus, this isn't really a Fire Sale so much as the final step in jettisoning the veterans that aren't under contract for 2011 and don't obviously figure into next year's plans. Think of it more as saying goodbye to the some of the last vestiges of the 2007 team that was once thought to be “headed for greatness”.

It's a new day on the North Coast and while the “window of contention” slammed shut back in 2008, the Indians are attempting to (ever so slightly) inch that next one up with an eye past 2010...maybe even well past 2010.

Thus, the Indians should trade Westbrook, Wood, Kearns, and (if possible) Peralta and not worry as much about how much money they'll have to include to cover the cost of the remaining salaries to see if they can get prospects that have a serious chance of making an impact instead of simply providing organizational filler. Of course, it's possible that the market for the

## Stepping Into the Second Half

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}

Friday, July 16 2010 10:30 AM - Last Updated Friday, July 16 2010 9:15 AM

---

players that figure to be available isn't all that great (and [my TCF colleague Steve Buffum contributed to a phenomenal Trade Deadline Primer](#)

, that's available

[here](#)

), but moving these players OFF of the 25-man roster could be viewed as just as important as getting something of value for them.

Wood, Kearns, and Peralta unquestionably have no future with the team and should be moved to any team willing to take on their inconsistent performances. If the Indians can pull a couple of lottery tickets in the process, so be it...but there should be nearly no trade refused for those three.

As for Jake, if you've been here for any amount of time, you know of my opinion that maybe the Indians really are serious about having Westbrook in the 2011 rotation, but that shouldn't affect whether they trade him as re-signing him for 2011 isn't affected by which uniform he's wearing on the final day of the 2010 season. Of course, there is the possibility that Westbrook simply isn't garnering any interest on the trade market, which is why the Indians are out in front of this, putting forth the idea that Westbrook might be kept around for the remainder of the season to provide that "veteran presence" when, in fact, there simply isn't a trade market for him.

The impetus for bringing this up comes [from John Perrotto at B-Pro as he relays what the scouts \(or at least one scout\) are saying about Westbrook](#)

, with the scout on the record saying, "If I'm a contender, there is just no way I trade for him for the stretch run. He's been too inconsistent. He is not the pitcher he was before he had Tommy John surgery."

To that I say – pay no attention to this, ye who populate the Front Offices in St. Louis and Los Angeles and Cincinnati while you're looking to add to your rotation in a push for the playoffs...

That's said in jest, but the veterans that the Indians figure to have on the block (Westbrook, Wood, Kearns, and Peralta) aren't necessary to this team for the second half of the season, one that should be devoted exclusively to development and with an eye to 2011 and beyond.

What kind of Trade Market exists for that quartet?

That's hard to say as the Indians' willingness to eat money will play a role as will recent performance (um...Austin, Jhonny...we could use a little "bump" in production about now) of each player. If the Indians are able to find dance partners (and remember, it takes two to tango in this) in the next two weeks, they should move all of these players and not give a second thought to trading all of them. Reason being (even more so than adding more young talent to the mix) is that the crux of the final 2 ½ months of the season should be to...

### #2) "Line Up" 2011

A little wordplay there as the shape of the 2011 position players is starting to come into view and should come further into view with the returns at the end of the month (presumably) of Asdrubal and The BLC. Once those two re-emerge, the lineup (assuming Kearns and Peralta are dealt) starts to take the shape of the 2011, with the only exception being Sizemore's

## Stepping Into the Second Half

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}

Friday, July 16 2010 10:30 AM - Last Updated Friday, July 16 2010 9:15 AM

---

omission and the gray cloud hanging over 3B. Truthfully, this is what the lineup could/should look like on August 1st (or sooner) and shouldn't look that much different come 2011:

C – Santana

1B – LaPorta

2B – Donald

SS – Cabrera

3B – Nix/Valbuena/Marte/Goedert

LF – Crowe

CF – Brantley

RF – Choo

DH – Hafner

There are those that are unsold on Donald as an everyday player and of Brantley's readiness for an MLB spot, but if I'm the Indians, I let that mix play out until dipping into the likes of The Chiz, Weglarz, Cord Phelps, Jason Kipnis, and the gaggle of Crowesque 4th OF that populate the upper ranks of the Minors.

What happens with Sizemore (CF or LF, with Brantley moving accordingly) and with the 3B situation are certainly up in the air, but that lineup has potential to mature as a group over the course of the end of the 2010 season and into the 2011 season and should be given every opportunity to.

### #3) Rotate the Rotation

Similar to the lineup, the rotation for the end of 2010 should really be the springboard to 2011, with the starts being meted out to the pitchers who have the potential to figure prominently past 2010. Thus, as I said above, moving a guy like Westbrook has less to do with Westbrook as much as it has to do with making sure that the likes of Carmona, Masterson, and Talbot are handed the ball every 5th day as well as to get better reads on the dyspeptic duo of Dave Huff and Aaron Laffey to see if either should be considered as an option for the 2011 rotation as well as giving opportunities to players like Carlos Carrasco and Josh Tomlin and (assuming health) Hector Rondon down the line.

For all intents and purposes, this is what the Indians' rotation should look like once Westbrook is sent off to a contender, assuming a contender is interested in him:

Carmona

Masterson

Talbot

Carrasco

Huff/Laffey/Tomlin

The inclusion of Carmona, Masterson, and Talbot is fairly obvious, although it will be interesting to see how the Indians handle their inning count as the totals for each last year fall far short of the inning total they're currently on pace for in 2010. The organization has been saying that Carrasco WILL get an extended look this year and, with 74 games left, he would still have a chance to garner 10 to 15 starts if he finds himself in Cleveland relatively soon. Given that he's now thrown nearly 300 innings in AAA, the second half of 2010 represents as good of a time as any to see if he can make good on the fact that he was a Top 55 Prospect in all of MLB

## Stepping Into the Second Half

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}

Friday, July 16 2010 10:30 AM - Last Updated Friday, July 16 2010 9:15 AM

---

(according to Baseball America) from 2007 to 2009.

As for the 5th starter, the Indians should start to make some final determination as to whether Aaron Laffey is a legitimate option as a starter and find out if Dave Huff's trip to Columbus has turned him back into a strike-throwing LHP and not simply a Sowersian LHP. Just as apparent in that mix should be Josh Tomlin, whose name may not be as well known as the others listed above, but who has posted a career MiLB ERA of 3.20 and a career MiLB WHIP of 1.10. He's not going to blow anybody away with his K totals or his peripherals, but as Masterson and Talbot (in particular) start to see their innings creep up, Tomlin should be given a chance to show that he can contribute as a 6th or 7th starter for the organization going forward with the opportunity to prove that he should be thought of as more than that.

There could be plenty of starts that are available as the season wears on in a season that's only seen 6 starters in 88 games as inning counts and trades take some of the principals out of the mix. As a result, there's going to be the opportunity for the likes of Carrasco, Huff, Laffey, Tomlin, and maybe even Rondon to assert themselves into the 2011 mix as more than just an arm fighting for a spot next year in Goodyear.

### **#4) Bring the Heat**

With the exception of 2005 and 2007, the Indians of the mid-to-late 2000's have been uniformly awful in the bullpen as the flotsam and jetsam found their way to the shores of Lake Erie and the Indians' Front Office proved itself as utterly inept in building a successful bullpen from within. Realizing that relievers are the most volatile elements in the melting pot of an MLB team, the first half of 2010 has started to show some signs for optimism, none bigger than finally having a pitcher in Chris F. Perez who looks capable of being the "home-grown" young closer that the team has lacked since...well, Steve Olin.

While CF Perez still finds himself in the set-up role because of the team showcasing Wood, he'll move into the 9th inning soon enough (Wood or no Wood) and may actually have some help emerging to bridge those 6th, 7th, and 8th innings to him. In the first half, we've seen The Herrmannator assert himself with a 2.81 ERA and a 1.06 WHIP in his brief time with the parent club and have watched Tony Sipp show flashes of being able to get out both LH and RH hitters. As is often the case with relievers, the success has not been universal or consistent, but even Rafael Perez seems to have found himself to a degree and (stop me if you've heard this before) some pitchers in the Minors may actually represent compelling options for the bullpen.

To that end, generally I try not to get too excited about relievers before they reach and excel at AA, but some of these performances have been too good to ignore, particularly in a newfound ability among Indian bullpen arms to...you know, strike hitters out.

Starting with Bryce Stowell and his 78 K in 50 IP while limiting opposing hitters to a .540 OPS, he's flown through the system this year as he now finds himself in Columbus after starting the year in Kinston. Joining Stowell in AAA is Vinnie Pestano, who has struck out 52 hitters in 39 innings while hitters have posted a .577 OPS against him on the season.

Throwing those two on top of Jess Todd and Josh Judy (now healthy) in AAA as well as Bryan

## Stepping Into the Second Half

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}

Friday, July 16 2010 10:30 AM - Last Updated Friday, July 16 2010 9:15 AM

---

Price in AA, the Indians finally seem to have some young arms that can miss bats as among those names (Stowell, Pestano, Todd, Judy, and Price), the lowest K/9 number belongs to Bryan Price, who has struck out 45 hitters in 40 1/3 IP. Of course, these K numbers should be taken with a cup full of salt as Hector Ambriz whiffed 15 hitters in 8 IP in AAA and has only struck 19 hitters out in 27 2/3 IP in MLB since getting the call to the Bigs.

Obviously, the Indians are still going to see what they have in guys like Joe Smith and Jenny Lewis and Heck Ambriz because they're on the 40-man and, at least in the case of Smith and Lewis, can be moved on that I-71 Shuttle for the rest of the year. But the last two and a half months represent a great opportunity to promote some of these arms THIS year so they can enter the 2011 season with some MLB experience and so next April and May don't look like the last few Aprils and Mays that we've seen from the bullpen around these parts.

### #5) Check the ID's

While that title is a bit presumptuous, take a quick look at the current ages of presumed starters and players who should fit into the mix in 2011 for the Indians:

Santana - 24

LaPorta - 25

Donald - 25

Cabrera - 24

Nix - 27

Sizemore - 27

Brantley - 23

Choo - 27

Hafner - 33

Marson - 24

Crowe - 26

Valbuena - 24

Certainly not all of those names inspire a ton of confidence, but the youth is on the menu and hopefully will be served soon. Factor in that the player who will hopefully be on this list by the middle of next year (The Chiz) is 21 and you start to see how there is some optimism for the offense in terms of assembled young talent. Whether it will coalesce is the great question (just as it was in the early-1990's and the early-2000's) and there are sure to be names that fall by the wayside, but you can start to see the backbone of a solid offense there with Santana, Choo, Cabrera, Sizemore, and LaPorta with some ancillary pieces like Donald and Brantley having a long leash and younger guys like The Chiz perhaps knocking at the door in short order.

The same age factor holds true with the starting rotation and the names that figure into the bullpen mix:

Carmona - 26

Masterson - 25

Talbot - 26

Carrasco - 23

Huff/Laffey/Tomlin - 25 (all of them)

C. Perez - 24

## Stepping Into the Second Half

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}

Friday, July 16 2010 10:30 AM - Last Updated Friday, July 16 2010 9:15 AM

---

Herrmann - 26

Smith - 26

Sipp - 26

R. Perez - 28

Lewis/Ambriz - 26

Pestano - 25

Todd/Judy - 24

Price/Stowell - 23

You want the youth movement and to see if these kids can play?

While the thought was there at the beginning of the season that the kids would be given long leashes (some long enough to hang themselves with), that time seems to universally have arrived as the team now enters the second half. That may mean more growing pains and more games in which the team looks dreadfully young and inexperienced. However, it will also mean that the stars that are just now coming into view are going to start burning brighter as the season progresses.

The play on the field in the second half may not be flawless or even enjoyable to watch at times, but after the first half, the glimmers of hope should come clearer into focus as the young talent that's been assembled in trades over the last two years will finally start to be on display at the corner of Carnegie and Ontario.

The future starts now (again) on the North Coast as the Indians attempt (again) to open up that "window of contention" with a almost entirely different set of players, with the future hopefully brighter than the recent past.