

An Aftermath Lazy Sunday

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}

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The melody in this game of musical chairs that is the Trade Deadline on the North Coast has finally ground to a halt and as the dust settles, let us all rub our eyes and marvel at the fact that the Indians did, in fact, [clear the decks](#) as the roster now finds itself without Peralta, Kearns, Westbrook, and Wood with actual players (two of them, for now) coming back to the organization. After the maelstrom of activity from the Peralta deal to the Yankees basically taking the revenue from one of their home games to take a chance on the renaissance on Kerry Wood, the action was fast and it was furious.

It being a Sunday and despite the days leading up to today being far from Lazy for everyone on The Reservation, let's get off on a Lazy Sunday to hit all of the high points while attempting to figure out what the lineup, rotation, and (to a lesser degree) the bullpen are going to look like for the final two months of the season.

And with that, we're off...

Obviously, the biggest piece of the Indians' puzzle that finds himself elsewhere this morning is Jake Westbrook, who leaves the Indians with only 15 players who have ever donned the Chief having started more games for the organization as his 9-year tenure (only 13 pitchers played longer in Cleveland) with the Indians comes to an sad, if unsurprising, end.

Before getting into the "who" and the "where" with Westbrook, it bears mentioning that he – unlike most of the players of the early-to-mid-to-late-2000s incarnation of the Indians – leaves with an amount of respect and admiration that few have earned in their time with the Indians. Westbrook was never the ace of the staff nor did he ever represent the face of the franchise, but he simply contributed to this team in a manner in which few will truly ever recognize, right down to him likely leaving dollars and years that he could have attained on the open market when he signed his 3-year extension in 2007.

While that extension would never work out for either party, with Jake making only 51 starts over the 2+ years that he pitched in Cleveland (with a 99 ERA+) during that time, everything that needs to be said about Jake Westbrook as a person can be summed up in [a quote that is his](#)

[own](#), explaining why he lessened the \$2M (that was rightfully owed to him in the chance of a trade) to allow the Indians to move him to St. Louis:
"Any way that I could help out the Indians, I needed to do that," said Westbrook, "because I didn't really feel like I honored my contract as well as I would have liked to, being hurt. It was in my best interest and the Indians' best interest to do something like that."

In this age of televised debacles and [a former aCCe unsure of whom he once played with while in Cleveland](#), Westbrook's character (personal, not just professional) shows through in that quote. As his exit calls to mind the manner in which Travis Fryman exited the game with grace, it is important to remember that Jake Westbrook – injuries and all – was a quintessential Indian and should always be remembered as such, just as much as he will be remembered for the manner in which he (and not Sabathia or Carmona) tried to put the Indians' on his back in [that 2007 ALCS](#).

With that being said, the question has come up as to why the Indians traded Westbrook...why the Indians wouldn't be better served to keep him in the rotation for the remainder of the season with an eye towards re-signing him to serve as a mentor for the pitching staff for 2011. To that, I would direct anyone's eyes to [the standings](#), as the Indians' 2010 season is going nowhere and hasn't been headed in a consistently upwards direction for months now.

So the purpose of keeping Westbrook around for the final two months of the season (when he's a FA at the end of the season) is what, exactly? Is it to win 67 or 69 games instead of 65 or perhaps to serve as some sort of mentor to these young pitchers whom he has now spent nearly 2/3 of the season with?

Maybe you can buy into that, but that doesn't fly in these parts...

Westbrook was a FA at the end of the year, a 32-year-old still recovering from Tommy John surgery who had posted an ERA+ of 85 over 127 2/3 IP for the Indians, playing for a team that wasn't close to contention and likely isn't going to be close to contention in 2011. Perhaps everyone would like the Indians to turn into the Orioles or the Royals (in years past as they did actually make some moves this year), teams intent on keeping the "best" team on the field in a lost season rather than playing the self-realization game and removing emotion and sentiment from baseball decisions.

Trading Westbrook is the right baseball decision for the Indians, who are certainly free to explore re-signing him on the open market after the season for the 2011 season (as every team will have the opportunity, assuming the Cardinals don't extend him in the next two months on the basis of two months), so the Indians save some money, get a prospect, and (most importantly) open up MORE innings and opportunities in their starting rotation for their in-house options.

As for that prospect (and I'm assuming if you're here you know that the Westbrook deal involved three teams, one of which was the Padres), the Indians add RHP Corey Kluber to their

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burgeoning Layer Cake of Arms. If you're surprised by the fact that they added an arm for Westbrook, that's still your alarm clocking going off in the background and, if you're surprised that the arm is a high K/highly projectable arm...well, you just haven't been paying attention.

Kluber is a former 4th round pick of the Padres who had underwhelmed in his Minor-League career, until this year in AA when, as a (slightly old for AA) 24-year-old, he has posted a line of 3.45 ERA, 3.07 FIP, 1.31 WHIP, with 136 K, 40 BB in 122 2/3 IP over 22 games. He leads his league in K (and [it's not even really close](#)) and leads all of AA in K (and I will note here that Kyle Drabek – that “one that got away in the Cliff Lee deal” – has [100 K in 130 IP in AA](#)

), meaning that Kluber has the ability to miss bats, something that is lacking (or at least was before this smattering of trades for the past two years) in the Tribe organization.

While it is true that Kluber is 24 (DOB 4-10-86) and still pitching in AA, [here's Baseball Prospectus' widely respected Kevin Goldstein on Kluber](#)

, his repertoire, and what he ultimately projects as:

With excellent size and stamina, Kluber pounds the strike zone with an 88-92 mph fastball that he can hit both sides of the plate with, while his changeup is a plus pitch that he'll throw at any point in the count. He walked 34 in just 45 Double-A innings last year, as he tried to get too cute, and simple confidence has been credited to the breakthrough, as he's an aggressive pitcher who goes after every hitter as opposed to trying simply to fool everyone. His ceiling is as a back-end starter, but he's much closer to that projection than his was a year ago.

It is worth noting that there is no starting pitcher (above Rookie Ball) in the Indians' system who has a K/9 as high as Kluber and that Kluber's BABIP (although here's [an interesting article questioning BABIP](#)) in

AA this year is

[a whopping .369](#)

, so either the Indians are buying incredibly high on him or they're acquiring him essentially as he's figuring out how to be an effective pitcher.

The one sticking point for many has been the intimation that “his ceiling is as a back-end starter”, as Goldstein asserts (and he's not the only one on that bandwagon), but does anyone else see that this “back-end starter” thing is merely one option. Isn't it just as possible that Kluber slots very nicely to the bullpen (perhaps even the back-end in short order) as [Goldstein described him just last week](#)

as a “big righty” with a “good fastball, even better slider”?

Certainly, he's just a prospect and he's now joining a slew of them that populate the upper levels of the Indians' minor league pitching staffs, but in light of the fact that the Indians were right to move Westbrook, the fact that they received a prospect (and one with potential) rather than simply dumping his salary and calling up the next kid in line from Columbus brings a nice sense of closure to the Westbrook situation...even if it may be revisited this off-season.

As for that “next kid in line” (and before getting into the rest of the trades), with Westbrook heading to St. Louis and with Talbot to DL and Laffey already on DL, the open auditions are

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officially on in the Indians' rotation. Josh Tomlin, pressed into duty Saturday, and Jeanmar Gomez, pressed into duty today, figure to fill two of the openings for the foreseeable future, depending upon their performance, and Carlos Carrasco and Dave Huff would look to be the obvious options to take that third (yes, THIRD) open spot in the rotation.

This is not necessarily a bad thing (unless you have money in Vegas on the Indians winning more than 70 games) as the arms that project to perhaps play a role past 2010 are starting to line up in Cleveland instead of waiting for opportunities down I-71. As crazy as this sounds, 87 of the first 91 games were pitched by Carmona, Westbrook, Talbot, Masterson, Huff (with Laffey throwing those other 4 starts), and now (from Game #103 yesterday) to the end of the season, there may be any amalgamation of Carmona and Masterson with a witches' brew of Gomez, Tomlin, and...Carrasco...Huff...Pino...and, dare I say, Sowers that are going to be seeing time as a starting pitcher in Cleveland as the season winds down.

Evaluating starting pitchers is necessary for this organization going forward and there will be no shortage of opportunities for these players to assert themselves into the rotational mix of 2011 and beyond...I'm just warning you, it's not going to necessarily be pretty or pleasant to watch. If you want an idea of what's coming, just look at the last week and realize that there are going to be peaks (like Tomlin recently) and valleys (like Masterson recently) along the journey.

Moving on to the other two deals consummated over the weekend (both with the Yankees), [the Indians miraculously moved Kerry Wood](#)

and thankfully moved Austin Kearns as the two players now find themselves in the Bronx and in the throes of a playoff hunt.

Just to close the book on his career with the Tribe, Kerry Wood leaves the Indians after throwing a TOTAL of 75 innings, posting a cumulative 4.80 ERA and 1.44 WHIP while he compiled 28 saves as most fans mainly rooted for his 2011 option NOT to vest. The Indians find a landing spot for Wood despite the fact that he hasn't pitched since July 11th and with an ERA of 6.30 compiled before that as opponents posted an .816 OPS against him with the Indians in 2010.

Truthfully, the fact that the Indians were able to move Wood (made unnecessary on the Indians' roster from his own health/performance and from CF Perez's emergence as a closer) is nothing short of miraculous, though it certainly looks like the Indians almost paid the Yankees (of all teams) to take a chance on Wood as a late-inning reliever. According to most reports, the Indians will reportedly pay \$2.17M of Wood's remaining \$3.6M salary, with \$500K of that money perhaps coming back to them if they choose not to select a PTBNL by October 15th, meaning that the Indians will end up paying between approximately \$1.5M to \$2M to the Yankees to not pitch for the Erie Warriors again this season.

As for putting a bow on the final deal, the [Indians sent Austin Kearns to the Yankees for a PTBNL](#), that will be decided upon in the next three weeks with Tribe GM saying that "it will be a player we like and who has Major League value."

Not to take cheap shots at anyone, but the Indians' current roster is full of players they "like" and

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who have "Major League value", but Chris Gimenez and Heck Ambriz and even Trevor Crowe aren't going to make the world go round, which speaks to the idea that the Indians are likely to add another lottery ticket to their wallet full of them in the hopes that one (or more) of these prospects pans out in a Major League capacity, but that will obviously take some time.

All of that being said, I'm surprised at this outpouring of sadness over this Trading Deadline as anyone who didn't see this day coming wasn't around LAST year when CP Lee and El Capitan were dealt with 1 ½ years of club control left on their contract and the trades of Peralta, Westbrook, Wood, and (kind of) Kearns just means that the Indians have completed this complete overhaul that began in earnest in early July of 2008 when CC found himself heading to the Cream City.

Maybe I'm callous after all of these trades and watching sports in general in Cleveland (and let me use that to drop this link to [Joe Posnanski's latest on the city's anger](#)), but after today, there is a sense that this ugliness is finally complete. There are no players on this roster that aren't under club control through the end of the 2012 season, so it feels like this is it...that the final dirty work is done for the Indians in tearing down that incarnation of the team that existed from 2003 to 2009.

The sadness obviously remains as a good portion of the emotional investments that were once attached are essentially gone as the days have long passed from when The DiaBride has attempted to figure out what to do with her Lee and Martinez jerseys and as I attempt to sing the praises of Santana or LaPorta, with the answer always coming back that she's not sure if she can become attached to the back of the jersey the way that she once was.

Maybe that's why this whole process is so difficult for people, with the departure of Westbrook and Peralta (I guess) signifying that the team that grew on them in the mid-2000s, that captivated them in the Fall of 2007 is no more. As much as the previous departures should have served notice of that fact, the presence of those players, who represented something more than just a spot on the roster, provided comfort.

That comfort is gone now and jarring reality that the Indians are back to building from scratch is front-and-center, although the wheels have been in motion since the CC trade, which was (amazingly) nearly 25 months ago.

Consider the page turned...

While we're all watching that page turn, it merits visiting what this whole thing going to look like going into the final two months of the season now that Peralta, Kearns, Westbrook, and Wood have exited stage left. Before getting into that however, let's dispel the notion that the quartet of players dealt by the Tribe were largely responsible for much of the Indians' success to date:

Peralta

.246 BA / .308 OBP / .389 SLG / .698 OPS

Kearns

.272 BA / .354 OBP / .419 SLG / .772 OPS

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*Kearns' OPS since May 8th has been .701 over 64 games

Westbrook

4.65 ERA, 1.39 WHIP, .772 OPS against with 73 K, 44 BB in 127 2/3 IP

Wood

6.30 ERA, 1.60 WHIP, .816 OPS against with 18 K, 11 BB in 20 IP

This quartet may have been veterans, but they weren't carrying this team in any sense and the money owed to them when 2010 started represented \$26.85M of the \$61M Opening Day payroll (that's 44%!) of the team...so, no the return on investment with any of them did not...um, meet expectations.

Does that mean that the players that figure to replace them will represent upgrades, much less significant upgrades, for the final two months?

Probably not, but at least will allow the Indians to get a read on Nix, Brantley (when he can be called up 10 days after his last demotion), that gaggle of starters, and CF Perez in the closer role in the next two months as the Tribe attempts to find which players are worth keeping (and which are not) for 2011 and beyond.

Nevertheless, with the [news that Jayson Nix is going to become the main 3B](#) (and [where have I read that as a good first plan of action](#)

before...where was that), the make-up of the Indians' lineup for the last two months is not hard to discern:

C – Santana

1B – LaPorta

2B – Donald

SS – Cabrera

3B – Nix/Marte/Valbuena with a possible Goedert sighting in September

LF – Crowe

CF – Brantley

RF – Choo

DH – Hafner

Any kind of “lingering” issues with Hafner (as if they aren't all lingering) would affect this, but any issues with that going forward through October?

As [Chris Antonetti said after the trades](#) , “we have a solid nucleus of starting position players who are developing at the major-league level...we'll get an impact major-league player back next season in Grady Sizemore. We're now trying to line up the pitching, around it.”

That's something that's been talked about here for quite some time (and [as recently as this week](#) prior to the additions of Soto and Kluber), so now that pitching that they're “now trying to line up” gets a chance, with the first opportunities (at least in the rotation) probably looking something like this:

Carmona

Masterson

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Tomlin

Gomez

Carrasco/Huff

Did anybody have THAT sextet as options for the rotation in August coming out of Goodyear?

If you want to include Ant Reyes, go ahead as I'm not bullish on him only one year removed from TJ; but truthfully, the Indians can massage that list pretty freely, particularly if Masterson's innings creep up or if Talbot returns from the DL, but those names (past Carmona, really) feel like an open audition for 2011...but is that such a bad thing?

As for the bullpen, who knows...throw it all against the wall and see what sticks:

CF Perez

Sipp

Herrmann

Smith

R. Perez

Ambriz (Rule 5 means he sticks)

Todd/Lewis/Germano/Pestano/Pino/Stowell/Putnam/Lindsay

Other than CF Perez and Sipp (who has also gone through his down periods), this looks like a fungible group that could include a couple of useful pieces, assuming the starting rotation doesn't pull the 2 inning shuffle on consecutive nights as it did against the Yankees.

Who are those useful pieces?

I gave up a long time ago attempting to predict success and failure for relievers and I have the Fernando Cabrera jersey to prove it.

Regardless, the remainder of 2010 is now rightfully dedicated to the discernment of which of the young players are (or will be) useful pieces and youth is really the only thing on the menu for the final two months in Cleveland. The trades of the last week unquestionably and definitively close the book on the incarnation of the Indians from 2003 to 2009 as the Indians'

"rebuilding/reloading/whatever" rolls on as the Indians attempt to discover the next Westbrook or Peralta (v.2003, not v.2010) from among the young talent that occupies their current roster.

Whether that young talent is able to emerge on this road back to contention will determine what the next few years look like on the North Coast, but after the weekend, any roadblocks impeding their progress have been removed.