

Tomahawks Looking For Hope

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}
Wednesday, August 25 2010 9:08 PM -



As the dog days of summer have Indians fans feeling tired and lethargic (and not just from the humidity) and the Indians attempt to plant their feet on the bottom in the midst of their descent down the abyss, the 2010 season has slipped into nearly unwatchable territory. For most, the Indians' season became unwatchable on the night that Santana was carted off of the field, and if that is the case...consider yourself lucky as the team has gone 5-15 since that night in Boston. Interestingly, the Indians were 23-36 before Santana's promotion, were 22-25 with him on the team, and have been the aforementioned 5-15 since his injury, but let's not chalk up the misery of this season to one play on one night as the reasons are too numerous to count.

Instead of reaching into the depths of our minds to count them, we spend our nights fighting the urge to catch up on episodes of "Mad Men" or "Entourage" from the DVR or watch "The Dark Knight" on whichever directional HBO is playing it that night, and subject ourselves to the remainder of an Indians' season that rolls on in earnest as hope is sapped from even the fullest of glasses.

With the mood suitably set and with you likely pouring a drink after that little intro, let's get some Tomahawks in the air...

One of the most frustrating aspects of the last month has been the lack of young players asserting themselves into the teams' future plans, with LaPorta, Donald, and a whole gaggle of pitchers being among the most disappointing. While this makes it awfully difficult to find silver linings, I continue to hold out this irrational hope that Carlos Carrasco is able to place himself

Tomahawks Looking For Hope

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}

Wednesday, August 25 2010 9:08 PM -

into the mix for the 2011 rotation with the opportunity that is likely coming his way in the next week or so.

With full realization of just how bad Carrasco looked last year in Cleveland and knowing that Carrasco's promotion has been a hot topic as of late, I bring this up because of something that [Kevin Goldstein wrote about Kyle Drabek in a recent piece at Baseball Prospectus](#)

. Goldstein wrote of Drabek:

While a 2.98 ERA and 123 strikeouts in 154 innings is good; it's not the kind of numbers one gets from an elite prospect, but a quick run through his game log shows no bad night. Drabek has gone at least five innings in all but one start, when he went four, and to find a pitcher like that is at times as hard as finding one with those elite numbers.

The idea of consistency is certainly something that has eluded Carrasco and is well-worn territory in these parts. However, let's not forget the ages, levels, and performances of the two players to date in MiLB:

Carrasco AAA – DOB 3-21-87

3.77 ERA, **3.89 FIP**, 1.25 WHIP, **127 K**, **45 BB** in **143 1/3 IP**

Drabek AA – DOB 12-8-87

2.98 ERA, **4.01 FIP**, 1.20 WHIP, **123 K**, **63 BB** in **154 IP**

Admittedly, that bolding is done by yours truly, but it needs to be pointed out at every possible moment that Carrasco is 8 ½ months older than Drabek...you remember, the pitcher the Indians SHOULD have targeted in the CP Lee deal. Given that Jason Knapp has returned to pitching and could find his way up to Kinston as a 20-year-old, it will be interesting to see how the careers of Carrasco and Drabek compare going forward in the context of the Lee/Halladay deals made months apart from each other.

Back to Carrasco and the youngsters asserting themselves, given what Carrasco has accomplished in AAA and given his pedigree (plus the fact that he was part of the Lee deal), one would have to think that if Carrasco is able to show any type of consistency in the month of September, he's going to have the leg up on a rotation spot for 2011, which seem to be wide open after Carmona and Talbot. If Carrasco can inspire any kind of confidence, the Indians could conceivably approach their 2011 rotation with Carmona, Talbot, and Carrasco, going after a vet, and using the 5th spot to allow the rest of the arms to shake out of their own volition.

Who those arms would be remains to be seen for 2011, but the list would seem to include Gomez, Tomlin, and (now) Zach McCallister with Alex White probably coming into the mix at some point. Perhaps I'm looking too deeply into this, but I think that the Indians are positioning Laffey as a long man/swing man and the likelihood of Huff being on the team next year is questionable at best.

Why is Huff being an Indian in 2011 "questionable at best"?

Well...there's [this little nugget from the ABJ](#) on which arms might see some starts in September with Acta being about as dismissive of a player as is possible:

David Huff presumably might be a candidate for September promotion, but Tribe officials,

Tomahawks Looking For Hope

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}

Wednesday, August 25 2010 9:08 PM -

including Acta, are not high on him. when asked about Huff, the manager said, ""Yes, he's down there, too."

If there's been a more telling quote regarding the future of a particular player in an organization, it doesn't immediately jump to mind and if anyone can see this Huff thing is going to end anything but badly at this point?

The Indians will have decisions to make on Masterson's future and what to do with Laffey, but if there's one thing to watch through the month of September, it is the performance of Carlos Carrasco.

If you want a look at where the Indians would LIKE to be in terms of their pitching rotation, look no further than across the diamond this week, as these are the arms that have populated the Oakland staff that are 26 or younger:

Trevor Cahill (Age 22) – 22 starts, 161 ERA+

Brett Anderson (Age 22) – 11 starts, 144 ERA+

Gio Gonzalez (Age 24) – 26 starts, 126 ERA+

Dallas Braden (Age 26) – 22 starts, 117 ERA+

Vin Mazzaro (Age 22) – 15 starts, 115 ERA+

For some perspective on this, the starters on the Indians with the best ERA+ on the year with more than 10 starts are Carmona (Age 26, 94 ERA+) and Talbot (Age 26, 93 ERA+)...so yeah, that's pretty impressive. What's happened in Oakland is that consistency finally arrived for a number of these ballyhooed young pitchers in 2010 and, while Anderson is obviously injured this year, the A's built this stable in a manner which should make the Indians green with envy as Anderson and Gonzalez came via trade while Cahill (2nd Round, 2006), Braden (24th Round, 2004), and Mazzaro (3rd Round, 2005) all came via the Amateur Draft.

Whether arms like White, Pomeranz, and Knapp can eventually fill into the Indians' rotation as effectively and at such young ages remains to be seen, but what they've accomplished in Oakland (or are accomplishing) should provide some semblance of a blueprint.

While there has been much (justified) discussion over what the Indians should be doing at 3B for the remainder of 2010 and into 2011, can a simple suggestion be made that defense be one of the most important aspects of identifying that "stop-gap" to fill the hot corner?

Given what we've seen at 3B and since it seems as if Marte has fumbled away his (albeit limited) opportunity, perhaps the best course of action is for the Indians to find a player, who has played 3B for the majority of his career (or is unusually adept at fielding the position) to serve as the bridge to Lonnie Chisenhall, whose ETA is still TBD. Although defensive metrics remain suspect to me, [here are the Ultimate Zone Ratings for 3B this year from FanGraphs](#), which are only moderately helpful if you look where Jhonny Peralta ranks in these ratings.

If you think that the Indians are going to attempt to find an answer via FA, the most compelling

Tomahawks Looking For Hope

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}

Wednesday, August 25 2010 9:08 PM -

names belong to Brandon Inge and Pedro Feliz (if you're talking about defensive 3B) and a bunch of older players whose better days (offensively and defensively) are likely behind them. To wit, how does a list that includes the names of Melvin Mora, Bill Hall, Garrett Atkins, Geoff Blum, Wes Helms, and Mike Lowell strike you?

All of those names might be recognizable to a degree, but Inge and Feliz are the only ones who really stand out as defensive upgrades and while Brandon Inge presents a name of some interest, one would think that Inge is going to generate some interest from some corner on the FA market, something that the Indians likely aren't going to be able to compete with on the open market.

With that in mind, what direction could they go and could past serve as prologue in this matter? By that I mean, the Indians could go in the same direction that they did back when Casey Blake won the 3B job in Spring Training, inviting a number of late-20's/early-30's career minor-league 3B/MLB journeyman to fill the 3B position until a better alternative emerged.

If you don't remember (or even if you do), the "competition" in 2003 Spring Training consisted of Blake, Bill Selby, Greg LaRocca, Zach Sorenson, and probably some other players I'm not remembering being given a legitimate chance to be the 2003 Opening Day 3B. Of course, Blake "seized" the opportunity to create the MLB career he currently enjoys, but in light of the internal alternatives that we've seen and with the knowledge that the Indians probably aren't going to be bringing in a high-profile FA 3B on a multi-year deal, perhaps that is the path they tread once again.

Certainly, the current cast of characters can be thrown into the mix (although Nix looks more like a fill-in at multiple positions more than a straight 3B and Valbuena is simply not a viable defensive 3B while Andy Marte is simply living on borrowed time), but maybe the Indians should be asking their scouts to find the best defensive 3B in the Minors that they can find who will be a Minor League FA at season's end and throw them into the gauntlet.

While this isn't going to quicken any pulses, there are guys in the Minors who fit that Blake/Selby/LaRocca profile, whether it be Dan Johnson of the Durham Bulls, who is blocked by Longoria in Tampa (if a 31-year-old can be "blocked") or players like Wes Timmons of the Gwinnet Braves, Cody Ransom of the Lehigh Valley Iron Pigs, and Ed Lucas of the Omaha Royals, in that these players could probably be had in the off-season to simply provide (hopefully) a solid glove at 3B until Lonnie Chisenhall is ready to emerge.

Given the way Lonnie Chisenhall is absolutely crushing the ball in AA recently and since his defense is purported to be among the best in the organization at 3B, a placeholder is all that is really needed so the Indians should concentrate on finding a slick glove at 3B to help out their pitching staff before worrying about production from 3B (which has been largely absent with the questionable gloves there), because that production from 3B is eventually coming.

The production will come from The Chiz, whose numbers since June 1 are awfully impressive in AA:

.272 BA / .341 OBP / .494 SLG / .835 OPS with 12 2B and 14 HR in 261 AB

Tomahawks Looking For Hope

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}

Wednesday, August 25 2010 9:08 PM -

Don't take that impressive line as an assertion that he's going to be ready by the middle of 2011, just compare it to what Carlos Santana did last year in AA:

.290 BA / .413 OBP / .530 SLG / .943 OPS with 30 2B and 23 HR in 428 AB

Certainly, Santana's numbers were better across the board (and I'm cherry-picking numbers for Lonnie), but Santana was also 23 years old last year while Chisenhall is still 21 this year in Akron. His arrival may not be imminent and his impact may still be a couple of years away, but in finding a stop-gap at 3B until he arrives, perhaps they should follow a path they've already taken and let the glove do the talking in the process.

Though the baseball world is atwitter with news that the Pirates turned a \$34.8M profit over the last 3 years, a simple question keeps coming to mind for me - aren't these teams SUPPOSED to make money or not necessarily break even or deficit spend year after year?

Let's be very real about this, all of these teams are making money in some fashion, although the profits are going to be as wildly disparate as the revenues that fuel them. While people in Pittsburgh may be up in arms over the Pirates "pocketing" money instead of spending every...single...solitary...dollar to win 75 games instead of 60, wouldn't it be more concerning if some of these small-market teams were losing money hand over fist?

This is the most relevant fact for me as this great fear exists in the recesses of my mind that Cleveland is going to have two professional sports teams ten years from now (or sooner) and that the Browns aren't going to be going anywhere (again) any time soon. Given the fragile states of the Indians and the Cavaliers and the shrinking population base that lines their pockets, it would concern me if the Indians were to come out and say that they had lost X amount of money over the course of X amount of years because I think that it would bring serious questions about the future of baseball in Cleveland, competitive balance or not.

And with that thought ruminating, pour me another before this glass starts to look half-empty...