

In Search of the Power Swing

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

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In 1995, the Cleveland Indians hit 207 home runs. Albert Belle, Jim Thome, Manny Ramirez, Paul Sorrento, and Eddie Murray all reached the 20 home run mark.

A decade later in 2005, a year of contention, the Indians matched that total and could even field a lineup of hitters with at least 16 home runs

In 2010, 15 years from that powerful '95 year, the Indians are in danger of not even having one player reach that mark for the first time since 1983.

Andre Thornton and Gorman Thomas, the only players with double digit home runs, were both three shy of 20. With just about a month left in the season, Shin-Soo Choo is the only one close enough to hit 20 this season, something he barely did last year to prevent this statistic from

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being a reality in 2009.

Even in the down years of Mark Shapiro's rebuilding phase, the club found someone to hit 20 home runs in a season. I guess you could pin injuries to the club's biggest home run threats as a reason for this year's scare, but there actually is an overall lack of power within the organization.

So much so that it has to be concerning.

Choo missed a good chunk of time due to injuries, so one would figure that if he had that time back, plus the month that he has still left to play, he surely would reach the number in question, but he's the only one even close.

As it stands, there are only two players right now in the organization that have even reached that number and Choo may be the only one who has a legitimate chance to join them. Jared "Rare Breed" Goedert leads the organization with 25 home runs, and Matt McBride recently joined the ranks of 20 this past week.

J. Goedert

25 (18 AAA, 7 AA)

A. Abraham

13 (A-)

M. McBride

20 (3 AAA, 17 AA)

N. Weglarz

13 (AAA, 7 AA)

C. Santana

19 (6 MLB, 13 AAA)

S. Duncan

13 (7 MLB, 6 AAA)

L. Chisenhall

17 (AA)

J. Rodriguez

12 (11 AAA, 1 AA)

J. Head

17 (2 AAA, 15 AA)

C. Frawley

11 (A-)

S. Choo

15 (MLB)

C. Chen

11 (5 A+, 6 A-)

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J. Kipnis	15 (9 AA, 6 A+)	J. Tice	11 (2 A+, 9 A-)
M. LaPorta	14 (9 MLB, 5 AAA)	K. Sanchez	10 (A+)
W. Hodges	13 (AAA)	T. Hafner	10 (MLB)
C. Kersten	13 (3 A+, 10 A-)	J. Nix	10 (9 CLE, 1 CHW)

Take a look at the full-list of players in the organization that have hit at least 10 home runs this season.

Up until this year, Goedert wasn't even on the major league radar and by most accounts a player like Jerad Head is an organizational body. Jason Kipnis isn't a power hitter and Lonnie Chisenhall's greatest attribute is his flat-out hitting, not necessarily his power numbers.

I know he's missed time and he isn't the "Pronk" of old, but isn't it the least bit sad that Karexon Sanchez has as many dingers as Travis Hafner? I'm one of the last people to get on Pronk, but seeing him barely making this list is, for lack of a better term, deflating.

The silver lining with the names on this list is that Grady Sizemore (not listed) missed virtually the entire year, Carlos Santana and Nick Weglarz had their seasons cut short, Matt LaPorta had some issues to iron out, and as already noted, Choo missed time with injuries.

The overall concern is that the Indians only really have one bonafied power hitter down the pipeline and that is Nick Weglarz. Individual names don't seem to be popping out, but the collective numbers are actually a lot more positive than the individual.

[Compiled here](#) , is a total of home runs hit collectively by all 30 MLB organizations and their top four farm teams, the Triple-A, Double-A, Advanced-A, and Low-A levels. The Tribe sits 19th overall with 481 total home runs hit.

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As you can see by the breakdown, the club was just shy of the 100 home run mark going into Friday's game against Kansas City (with three home runs in that game, they passed it). Columbus has actually been leading the charge and even Akron has more dingers than the big league club.

Level	Team	HR	Rank
MLB	CLE	98	23rd
AAA	COL	130	12th
AA	AKR	107	11th
A+	KIN	65	25th
A-	LC	81	11th
COM	BINED	481	18th

Columbus and Akron combined account for 49 percent of the organization's home runs, while Cleveland accounts for a mere 20 percent. If you look at the top four minor league levels, major league teams excluded, Cleveland's ranking does improve, up from 19th to 11th. Seattle is the biggest benefactor to discrediting the major league numbers, as they go from trailing Toronto by 14 to leading them by 97!

The Mariners are devoid of power, maybe a reason they foolishly traded for Russell Branyan not long ago from the Indians. They are ahead of only Oakland in the home run department, worse than the Tribe.

However they've got a serious amount of power at every minor league level. Their farm team leads three out of the four minor league levels, with the fourth, Double-A West Tenn coming in eighth. Even MLB-worst Oakland's minor league numbers stand better alone, making even more of a leap than Cleveland when you subtract the Major League totals.

The overall point here is that the club hasn't exactly cornered the market on power. Now don't get me wrong, power isn't everything. I'm far from someone who wants to see a lineup filled with sluggers and home run hitters (I'd root for the Yankees if that were the case).

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But the middle of the road numbers collectively only support the evidence that the club is devoid of at least a few guys who have the ability to put up a 30-home run season. Every lineup needs that type of player; it just makes things a lot easier for the hitters around him.

Why don't we take this a step further and look at another function of power numbers, the double. I consider a double just as much of a component of how much power a hitter has because a good amount of doubles need to be hit hard. Sure you've got your Michael Brantley-like speed gap doubles, but the players with a lot of doubles usually earn a good portion of them.

There are some more positives with these numbers because there are actually players around a good mark. Sure, [they may not have anyone hit for 40 doubles](#) (combined between levels), but they at least have people approaching 30 and past 30.

I look at it this way. San Francisco will have three players reach the 30 doubles number once Aubrey Huff hits one more. Cleveland currently has two past the 20 mark, Shin-Soo Choo and Trevor Crowe.

I think we know what side of the ledger Crowe falls under in terms of "power" double and "speed" double. Andres Torres probably has more speed doubles than power doubles, but when Huff joins Pablo Sandoval, they've got at least two bonafied 30-doubles hitters in their lineup.

Level	Team	2B	Rank
MLB	CLE	224	17th
AAA	COL	277	6th
AA	AKR	232	15th
A+	KIN	190	30th
A-	LC	212	25th
COM	BINED	1135	20th

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not have big time home run power, but he has won minor league batting titles and even with missed time, he's right up there in doubles within the organization. If he gets a September call-up with significant playing time, he could approach that magical number of 40.

Obviously the big question becomes: Can he do that at the big league level, while maintaining a good batting average like he has at the minor league level? That is the big question with everyone at the top of that list from Goedert on down to Weglarz.

Another question you could pose: Does every single lineup have a player that is going to hit 30 home runs and 40 doubles? Right now Miguel Cabrera is the only player who has done it already and soon Josh Hamilton will join him, but they are both MVP candidates.

By years end, Robinson Cano and Albert Pujols should join them while Vernon Wells, Evan Longoria, Adrian Beltre, Adam Dunn, David Wright, Aubrey Huff, and Mark Teixeira could realistically reach those numbers.

That's really only 11 players in the entire major leagues and only two of them play for the same team. That gives us 10 teams, if they were all to make it, with one of those coveted 30/40 players.

Remember, this is all in the "Year of the Pitcher" where it seems as if starting pitchers are taking no-hitters into the seventh inning on a weekly basis. Power is down, pitching is up, and things are different than they used to be.

So maybe all this talk about power is a little overrated. I've probably overrated it just by talking about it.

The fact of the matter remains that there is a line. There is a line where you can get to where you can safely say this is an issue to not worry about. Cleveland right now is on that line,

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teetering more towards the outside looking in. They're not quite at the point where they can safely step over it and say, "Alright, let's not worry about it."

What about the new blood? While the club did load up on young high school arms in the draft (ditto the "young arms" part in recent trades), they had to have added some position players, right?

Their most notable picks include Alex Lavy, Tony Wolters, and LeVon Washington. Only Lavy figures to be more of a power hitter, with Washington being more of an athletic type of a player and Wolters a true shortstop in every sense. Lavy has some pop, but until we see all these guys at the minor league level for more than a few weeks, we can't really make a comparison or true healthy projection.

You can make note of Mahoning Valley outfielder Chase Burnette, who has clubbed eight home runs and 15 doubles in 62 games as of August 27th.

Up to this point, I've pointed out a lot of what's not there, but I haven't really pointed out a whole of what is there. In reality, if you go beyond the basic statistics, there actually is a lot there, it just isn't real visible and it comes down to what is seemingly a big issue for the Tribe these past few seasons and that is injuries.

The obvious is Grady Sizemore. A regular 30-home run hitter in a healthy season has been missing from this club for virtually the past two seasons. His production thrown in is an automatic boon to this club and if he is healthy, we know he can at least reach 20 and be a consistent power threat.

Have we reached a point with Travis Hafner that we cannot expect even 20 home runs from him? Even if he doesn't play as much with that shoulder, he is actually still hitting and getting on base with the walk. The problem is he isn't the power hitter he once was because he's clearly sacrificed that aspect of his game to at least be semi-productive. I guess that is better than nothing.

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One has to wonder what Matt LaPorta can do in a full-season hitting like he has since the Russell Branyan trade. Sure he's found a slump as of late, but we've seen him hit 20 home runs in a minor league season and have heard his power potential is capable of that, if not more at the major league level.

Beyond that, at the minor league level, Nick Weglarz has that same type of track record, yet equal set of expectations when it comes to hitting the long ball. What about a player that is curiously absent from this list, former first round pick Beau Mills who hit 21 home runs in his first full professional season for Kinston?

Mills has slowly fallen as he's progressed through the system. He's spent the last two seasons spinning his wheels in Akron, losing his power stroke. He can still hit the double, but can he even hit enough to warrant progression?

For every puzzling mystery though, there could be a pleasant surprise that could equal out what production you believe you can count on for the future.

Can you count on Jared Goedert hitting 25 home runs next season, especially if he's asked to do it at the major league level?

The Indians' rare breed has hit 20 home runs just once in his minor league career before this season. He had an incredible hot streak that lasted two months in June and July, but he's since come back down to earth.

With the Clippers he hit 17 home runs between the months of June and July. In April and May with the Aeros he hit seven home runs, probably more of his pace. On equal footing with his hot June and July, his horrible August is probably more of an evening of numbers rather than a true indication of what you can expect.

Is Goedert capable of hitting for power? Yes, you can't discredit what he's done, but go back to the question before this last paragraph and you start to uncover the concern. This is your organization's leader in home runs, at any level, major league included. If that is a fluke

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(Goedert's production isn't a fluke, but his home run number is definitely inflated) then what are you left with? 20 home runs from Matt McBride?

What about the organization that is leading the free world in home runs, mostly because of their major league team and one player, Toronto? Jose Bautista leads everyone that has swung a bat in home runs with 42 as of Friday night's play. Even with Bautista's incredible display of home runs the Blue Jays will have at least three other players at that 20 home run mark or very close to it.

Vernon Wells is already there, Aaron Hills is one away and Adam Lind stands at 18. They've got two hitters with 30 doubles already in Wells and Fred Lewis and Bautista should soon join them there.

Bautista has never hit more than 16 home runs in his career prior to this season. He's 29 years old, been dumped by the Pirates, and has had full-time gigs before. The light didn't just "turn on" with him. Maybe it did and saying that is a discredit to him, but who in their right minds would expect him to hit 40 home runs again? Maybe 20, but certainly not double that.

Even if you were to cut Bautista's efforts in half, Toronto is still up there and likely still leading the MLB charge.

Okay so what's the point of all of that?

The point is that even with a bit of a fluke, Toronto still has their power numbers. Even with a fluke, the Indians are still missing numbers and likely still in the same position they are in now.

Does that mean they make a conscious effort to go out and get more power within the system? I think it means they should at least consider it, especially since guys they did have, either have injuries or are Jose Bautista without the actual production. What does this really mean for 2011 though, the year we are actually focusing towards?

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A Somewhat Projected 2011 Lineup: Brantley, Cabrera, Choo, Santana, Sizemore, Hafner, LaPorta, Goedert/Nix, Donald

Your middle of the order *could* all hit 20 home runs. I emphasize the *could* part of that last statement though, because as we've already been over, we've reached a point where we can't expect Hafner to actually do such. Choo through LaPorta all have the potential or have done so before at some point in their career and I didn't even throw Goedert into that mix.

If anything, I think Matt LaPorta is key to a power surge in Cleveland. Getting Sizemore back would be nice, and Choo staying healthy is certainly something most of us hope for. But if Matt LaPorta can hit 25 home runs and give this club some much needed corner infield power production, they'll be a lot better for it.

The above projection (and hope about LaPorta) leads me to believe that maybe this year in which the Indians won't have a player hit 20 home runs at the major league level is simply just an aberration. Maybe it isn't a year completely devoid of power. Choo does have time to save us from the first season of such since 1983, but even if he doesn't, I wouldn't have a problem with it going down as a footnote in Indians history.

It would simply be the year the Indians were led by Jared Goedert, a year that won't ever happen again.

All numbers and statistics used in tables and links were compiled prior to action on Friday, August 27th. All references to statistics are referred to and noted if they apply to after that date.

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You can follow Nino on Twitter @ [TheTribeDaily](#) where he often tweets about his parties with Andy Marte and sometimes about the Indians.