

Watching September: We Have Questions

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

Friday, September 10 2010 9:00 PM - Last Updated Saturday, September 11 2010 8:19 AM



Anyone out there still watching with me?

Football season is here, which means baseball season takes a back seat to everything.

Double time for Cleveland, especially with the Tribe sitting in last place of a sub-par AL Central.

Against my better judgment Wednesday night, and partially because for once I wasn't tired at 10 o'clock at night, I stayed with the marathon 16-inning contest between the Angels and Indians.

Of course one hour later, with the game still moving slower than a snail and no end in sight, I was too tired to continue on. Especially since I stuck with the late start on Tuesday while finishing up a project for class (so what if that's my reason, it still counts!), I think I'm one of the few fans left going through the motions.

There is absolutely no point for some fans to be watching these games that end past midnight. Well there is, but I sense a strong lack of desire to do just that. I say though, if all you are going to do is complain, there is no point for you to watch.

Someone told me Wednesday that baseball season ended for them the minute college football season kicked off. Fair enough for them. For me, college football season started, but baseball

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season certainly didn't end.

If you are out there with me, thanks for staying.

It is at that point when I realized that a large portion of the fan base that didn't tuck away the Chief Wahoo cap on July 31st, certainly will do so on Sunday, or may already have last Thursday when the Buckeyes kicked their season off.

And now at that point of realization, I'm bound to ask some questions, because I like asking myself rhetorical questions, even though I remove the fact that they are rhetorical by attempting to answer them.

What can we really take from good September call-up performances?

Exhibit-A, Michael Brantley hits .313 with a .358 on-base percentage in 28 games at the end of the Cleveland Indians 2009 season. His performance helped him establish a valid reasoning to start the season with the Indians in 2010. Due to Russell Branyan's injury more than anything, Brantley starts the season as the left fielder.

Exhibit-B, Carlos Carrasco goes 0-4, gives up six home runs in five games and carries both a disastrous 8.87 ERA and a 2.284 WHIP. His performance didn't really help his cause for a rotation spot in 2010 and despite a late charge in the spring, Carrasco started the season in Columbus.

I can sit here and give you Michael Brantley's numbers from last September, then give you what he did earlier this year before his third and most legitimate opportunity to start and start all this business about how it was a fluke. But first and foremost, why would I do that?

Secondly, what does it matter? I could do exhaustive research into September numbers, but this is where statistics make me sick. I compare it to macaroni salad, which is something I love,

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but only once and awhile. Also if I eat too much of it (and usually that happens because no one else eats it, and it becomes my lunch five days in a row), I get sick of it.

I like statistics, but this is the point where I say, no more.

Small sample sizes are small sample sizes no matter when they occur. So what if Exhibit-A put up a .313 average in September or July?

The important part is Brantley and Carrasco both got experience. They had different outcomes, but they also got their first taste of major league baseball. Brantley is back and starting to look like the leadoff hitter he needs to be and Carrasco has had two excellent and encouraging starts.

Let's further this Exhibit-A discussion with what he's done since August 6th against Minnesota. Brantley is hitting .299 with a .346 on-base percentage, two home runs, 18 runs scored and six stolen bases.

As of Wednesday night he's riding a ten game hitting streak and he's collected multiple hits in four of the last five games. Call it another September of Brantley, but here is why you need to put stock into this.

Brantley's swing and his overall look at the plate were both not very pretty prior to this most recent call-up. To me, he looked as if he was pressing and trying to hit with power that he doesn't have. In Columbus he didn't have those issues and now with this recent stint, knowing the job was officially his, he seems to have just forgotten everything that made him press.

Further the Exhibit-B discussion and you have a different sort of turnaround. Last year Carrasco looked like someone trying to do too much in his first few starts. In addition to maybe being more poised and unaffected by the big stage, Clippers pitching coach Charlie Nagy made a mechanical adjustment to Carrasco's delivery.

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My overall point and answer to this question I am asking myself?

Jordan Brown could hit .350 or .150 this month and I'm probably not going to rush to a judgment either way. Jeanmar Gomez may continue this fantastic debut and while I may give him a leg-up in the race for a rotation spot and name him a personal favorite of mine, I will hold off on putting hefty stock into his numbers.

There is a big reason people fall for September performances, good or bad. They aren't watching. They stop watching and they look at the numbers. Try watching and looking beyond the numbers and maybe you'll gain a little more insight into what these September performances are really providing.

Where are all the call-ups?

Well first off, let's look at the fact that the Clippers are in the playoffs right now and realize that they still have to field a credible team. Not to mention since it is the postseason, you do want to try and win those games, at least for the fans and I'm pretty sure even the players care about winning some sort of title.

So Cleveland only really called up a few players when September 1st rolled around. Combine the Clippers playoff run with the fact that they did a lot of their calling-up a month early after the trade deadline; you don't have much TO call up.

We might see Jess Todd and perhaps Josh Rodriguez when the playoffs end, maybe Drew Sutton and Saul Rivera for some depth if 40-man roster spots can be cleared for the likes of Rivera and Rodriguez, but this is it folks.

Michael Brantley, Carlos Carrasco, Jordan Brown, Luis Valbuena, Jeanmar Gomez, and Josh Tomlin are all here. These are the guys the club needs to take a look at with major league experience.

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The names we need to look at are already being looked at.



Are we really looking at these guys again?

This club is looking at the Carlos Carrasco's of the world, but they're also giving opportunities to some players that are not exactly in the prospect mold.

Some of them are young, but they've all had extended opportunities here at the big league level.

Last year, Lou Marson had an audition with the club in the final month and a half of the season. He hit .246 with a respectable .347 on-base percentage. With Santana on the horizon, he looked like a decent guy to build value to use as a trade chip or perhaps as a long term backup.

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Marson started this season as the club's starting catcher and had he performed he might have been able to hold off Santana a little longer, but he didn't. It is a tale of two stints for Marson.

April 5th to June 10th: 45/141 G/AB, .191 AVG, .268 OBP, 1 HR, 12 RBI, 15 R, 14/36 BB/K, 5 SB

August 3rd to September 8th: 27/77 G/AB, .182 AVG, .267 OBP, 2 HR, 6 RBI, 10 R, 7/7 BB/K, 2 SB

Marson is virtually the same in half the at-bats. Unfortunately, his stint in Columbus did nothing to help the hitting as he is still below the .200 mark and still not getting on base to make up for it. He has cut down on strikeouts and shown some more power but there has only been one bright spot with Marson's game.

His defense has been outstanding. Despite missing that good chunk of time from the beginning of June to the beginning of August, he is leading the AL in runners caught stealing. He doesn't qualify for percentage because of the lack of chances, but with his chances he's been one of the best.

A far cry of the defensive player we saw trying to stop Jake Westbrook's dirt balls on opening day.

Why are we looking at Marson again? Oh that's right, because Santana is hurt. Marson though needs this time to do something. He was never in line to become the full-time starting catcher and I think even in a way he knew that. But he can establish value for himself, be it for this team or another one. Every team could use a decent backup catcher, especially one who is defensively sound like Marson.

But if he can hit a little bit, that would make it easier to play Santana at first a lot more to save some wear-and-tear on the young hitting prodigy.

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Marson can give himself some value, but there is no more value being gained by Andy Marte. I think by now, everyone knows what is there with the fan bases most polarizing figure.

Hah, polarizing figure. It may be true, sadly.

I've gone to bat for him many of times, and as recently as a month ago when the club was playing musical chairs at third base. There is no point in going over the numbers, because it doesn't matter anymore. This team seems destined to move on from him after this season, unless for the nine-hundredth time, something comes out of no where to save him and that fate.

Marte may be better off getting a new opportunity in some other place, where the pressure of a fan base who hates him isn't crushing down on his head, even though he probably doesn't understand half the things we say about him.

Or he can just disappear into obscurity, being picked up by a team and sent to the minor leagues only to slowly fade away into nothing. But why is this team keeping him around here in September? Why not look at a player like Jared Goedert?

I don't know if there really is an answer I can provide to justifiably answer that question. Marte's here though and he's being used sparingly, so why not just watch him play this string out. What's he playing for? I bet if you asked the club, they would probably tell you a potential spot on the 2011 roster.

Is he? With all of the 40-man decisions have to make this offseason, probably not. There are some questions that just cannot be answered.

Speaking of unanswerable questions...

Is this club still trying to get Luis Valbuena to play third base? Seriously give up on it. This is a shortstop by trade you say? Who says? I can't because he looked horrible at short earlier this

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season. He looks decent at second and at third, just no. Just...no.

I know the club would like to turn him into a utility man, but before you worry about his defense at multiple positions, you should probably worry about the offense.

In his rookie season, Valbuena was an extra-base hit machine. This season he hasn't even hit period. You know what, this topic dismays me so much, I'm not even going to put the effort in. Let's just move onto the final part of this question, Jayson Nix.

I think this is legitimately intriguing because you have someone this club picked up off the scrap heap and I don't think there was one person not scratching their head. Why bother with this guy? If you want a utility player or someone to play second while Cabrera is down and Donald is over at short, just go into the minor leagues and grab one of your Valbuenas.

There was a greater goal with the Nix pick up though and while the season may indicate you don't make moves like this, Shapiro isn't above giving these types of players a shot, regardless of circumstances.

And now you have someone who could be challenging to play third base next season.

Nix had his hot streak before the break and was really on fire during that time. He went back to the bench when Cabrera came back but was thrown into the mix at third after the Peralta trade.

Now he's pretty much taken the reigns of that Nimartuena platoon and has played in just about every game since August 11th. Since that date, Nix has hit four home runs, knocked in 10 and hit .264 with a .302 on-base percentage. It's nothing stellar on top of the fact that he's made plentiful errors at the position of third.

But Nix has made some good plays and some strides at third and more importantly, the boring numbers are actually better than everything else in the Nimartuena experiment, not that the

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other two have had the extended shot Nix has had, but let's not digress.

I give up. I'm throwing my hands in the air and just ignoring third base. Why bother with this guy? Why bother with the position as a whole? There clearly is no answer right now and if the club feels like throwing Nix out there for half a season until Lonnie Chisenhall is ready, I say go crazy.

The fact of the matter is none of these guys are the future and there is no point in wasting money at the position for three-fourths of a season. Jared Goedert is probably not the future either and while he could show value to other teams by doing some decent things with the bat, I'm not going to get all bent out of shape that the club has snubbed him this final month of the season.

For me, it's like Marson at catcher at the start of this season. Sure it would be nice to see him establish himself and make it a tough decision to replace him with Santana and perhaps build value as a backup or a trade chip, but I'm concerned about the starters.

And the future starter at third is still in Double-A and I'll patiently wait until he gets here.

I can't answer all these questions and I don't know if the Indians could either. But I do know they and I are both watching intently because while stats don't tell us everything, what these players do at this point is very telling.

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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.