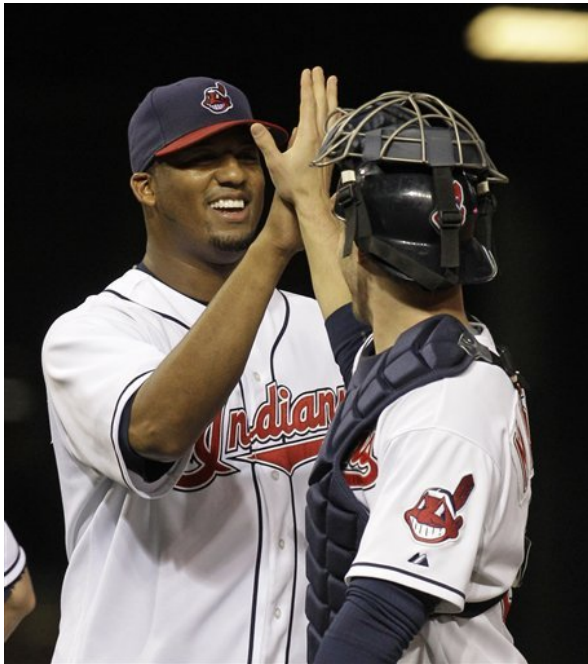


Falling Tomahawks

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}

Thursday, September 16 2010 10:00 AM - Last Updated Thursday, September 16 2010 6:31 AM



While the calendar tells us that it is not yet Fall, that Autumn feel is pervasive in Cleveland and I, for one, couldn't be happier about it. Give me the 2 months between Labor Day and Halloween every year to remember why I love the North Coast – flush with clambakes and weekend days filled with something simmering on the stove (chili, pasta sauce, brisket) all day, some Oktoberfest in hand from GLBC (cider from Patterson's Fruit Farm for the kids), with the promise of a Pumpkin Roll from Heinen's for dessert and you can count me as one happy camper.

There is no better feeling than simply throwing on a sweatshirt/sweater and a pair of jeans and enjoying the best time of the year in Cleveland, with another layer of clothing being thrown on at night to accompany some friends around a fire pit. With the Indians' season listing to a finish, the Browns' season spiking itself in the starting blocks, the Cavs' pending season perhaps evoking memories of Wes Person and LaMond Murray, and the local government officials providing more embarrassment to a region in need of no more, Fall in Cleveland is a reminder as to why we brave the brutal winters, soldier through the losing sports seasons, and hope for better days ahead...when a sports championship trophy is showcased on a finally--and-fully-developed lakefront.

Sorry, that's the Oktoberfest talking...

Nevertheless, let's get some Tomahawks in the air before the leaves start falling and force us to remember the by-product of these beautiful Autumns – raking and more yard work.

Let 'em fly...

In a season that has been short on bright spots (Santana's debut, CF Perez's recent dominance, the return of ¡Fausto!, the consistency of Choo, and the return to "effectiveness" for Hafner), a shining light shone out from the corner of Carnegie and Ontario this weekend.

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That “shining light” came in the performances of Carmona, Carrasco, Masterson against the Twins as the trio (yes...Talbot “started” the Sunday game, but Masterson ostensibly served as the “starter”) put forth these performances against the playoff-bound Twinkies:

Carmona – 9 IP, 0 ER, 3 H, 7 K, 1 BB

Carrasco – 7 1/3 IP, 0 ER, 5 H, 4 K, 3 BB

Masterson – 7 IP, 1 ER, 5 H, 6 K, 0 BB

While a weekend is just a weekend is just a weekend and not too much should be gleaned from 3 games among 162, that’s a cumulative 0.38 ERA, 0.73 WHIP with 17 K and 4 BB in 23 1/3 IP for the three pitchers who obviously figure into the 2011 rotation. Most encouraging about the starts are the manner in which each player succeeded – limiting baserunners (and, most notably, walks) and missing bats – en route to limiting the team with the 5th highest OPS in MLB and the 6th most runs in MLB on the season to a lost weekend at the plate...at least against those three starters.

Obviously, the Indians lost 2 of 3 to the Twins, but if we’re looking at performances of individual players and not just tallies in the win-loss column, the performances of Carmona, Carrasco, and Masterson begin to provide some optimism (and perhaps confidence) that the Indians DO, in fact, have some internal rotation options that project to be more than just middle-to-back-end-of-the-rotation fodder.

To that end, here’s what [a scout told Baseball Prospectus’ John Perrotto on Fausto Carmona](#) , his conditioning, and his repertoire:

“You can tell he has started taking the game seriously again this year. He lost weight and got the bite back on that hard sinker. He’s also greatly improved his changeup. He doesn’t strike out as many as you’d think for a guy who throws hard but he compensates by getting lots and lots of ground balls.”

With the “taking the game seriously again this year” line, I can’t tell if I’m happy to read that or sad, given what we know about how 2008 and 2009 and how the SEVERE regression of Carmona from 2007 was a major contributing factor in where the Indians sit today.

Regardless, getting the “bite back on that hard sinker” and improving his changeup portends that better days may indeed be ahead for Carmona (signed on club options through 2014), although the idea that he had allowed his weight get away from him, affecting his performance and the direction of the franchise as a result, make this evaluation more bitter than sweet.

If you notice what the Indians’ 2011 rotation looks like (Carmona, Carrasco, Masterson, Gomez, Tomlin), it looks decidedly RH and, unless you see a turnaround for Dave Huff in terms of organizational standing and don’t think that Aaron Laffey is destined for the bullpen (I don’t and he is), the Indians are largely bereft of LH options for the rotation for 2011 and probably for 2012.

While the handedness of the 2011 rotation may not really matter, in terms of whether the team

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is legitimately looking to contend in 2011 or just attempting to get a better read on pitchers like Gomez and Tomlin, while perhaps getting a look at Alex White (also RH), given that the Indians are likely to explore the open market for a veteran pitcher, should they be looking to target a LH one?

With the unfortunate exception of Jason Johnson, the Indians have built a decent track record in terms of adding and utilizing veteran pitchers when they are relatively cheap (and Millwood really wasn't cheap when he was a "reclamation project" making \$7M) or when they are looking to resurrect their career (as in the case of Hot Carl Pavano, although his success came a year after he was an Indian) and have signed them generally to harmless one-year deals in the hopes that they will either exceed expectations or buy the organization developmental time in terms of their young pitchers.

All of that being said, back to the idea that the Indians could be looking to add a veteran LHP, what would be out there in terms of options?

Given that CP Lee probably isn't making a valiant return to Cleveland to doff his cap again for the home faithful, the types of players that likely fit into the Indians' "needs" (in terms of expected years and dollars) are either going to come via the second tier of FA or perhaps from a group of players who could be non-tendered by their current clubs.

On the Free Agent front (and [here's the whole list of FA](#)), as much as I'd love to say to go out and get Ted Lilly (cumulative ERA of the last 4 years of 3.60, ERA+ of 116), he is going to likely command a multi-year deal at a high annual salary, two factors the Indians probably aren't going to be interested in at this stage in the "Reload/Rebuild/Whatever". Beyond that, if the Indians are looking for an innings-eater and preferably one who would be LH, one option may be Bruce Chen. I know...I know...BRUCE CHEN!?! Is that what we've come to?

Well, perhaps – and don't forget that I still think that the Indians' first option is probably Westbrook, but seeing as how Jake's another RHP, this is designed to look at LHP options – but let's remember that Chen is still only 33 and while his ERA (4.67) and his FIP (4.58, which is a career low) aren't going to win many beauty contests, he would provide the Indians some LH depth in their rotation.

Would he be a better option than just letting Gomez or Tomlin get a long leash?

Probably not, but if you're looking for LH rotation options that legitimately could be on the Indians' radar, Chen is at least a step up from other FA like Doug Davis, he of ERA of 53+ with a WHIP of 1.98 in Milwaukee this year.

On [the non-tender front](#) , perhaps the Indians look at guys like Zack Duke, Ryan Rowland-Smith, or even John Lannan, which is an interesting name because of the connection with the Nationals, although none of those guys look like anything more than shots in the dark or picking through another team's detritus.

If anything, maybe that little trip through what might be available on the FA market and sorting through some non-tender candidates is the idea that the Indians shouldn't be worrying about handedness and more concerned about getting a viable veteran option to plug into the rotation.

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While Westbrook is the most obvious candidate of a veteran innings-eater, guys like Hiroki Kuroda, Aaron Harang, Vicente Padilla would be the guys that you could look at on the high end with the likes of Rodrigo Lopez, Freddy Garcia, Dave Bush, and Jeremy Bonderman falling more in line with the types of arms that can truly be classified as “reclamation projects” if you’re adding an external arm to the 2011 rotational mix. Past that, you’re into damaged goods territory with Brad Penny, Erik Bedard, Ben Sheets, and the like.

Perhaps the Indians have some sort of trade idea up their sleeve, but the pickings are slim in the trough that the Indians figure to feed from this off-season in terms of fattening up next year’s rotation.

If you have a remaining interest as to how the Indians finish the season and how it relates to more than just the AL Central standings, MLB Trade Rumors has a [“Reverse Standings” page](#) that shows how the projected 2011 MLB Draft order is stacking up. Go ahead, bookmark it (if anyone still does that) or do whatever you want with it, just don’t ask me who the 4th pick in the 2011 MLB Draft looks like in September of 2010.

Hey, if the NFL Draft is the most exciting thing about the Browns’ season, perhaps the Indians are just capitalizing on the town’s obsession with draft position and what may one day be...

Speaking of the NFL (and this is just slightly off-topic), the beginning of football season always has me feeling like a bit of an outsider as I’m more than happy to watch some Browns’ football (plus the requisite Packers’ game for The DiaBride) on a Sunday and Ohio State games are necessary Saturday activities. However, sitting in the barber shop yesterday listening to two guys break down the Redskins’ offensive line and the Chargers’ secondary made me realize how out of the loop I am in terms of NFL-mania that has undeniably swept across our great nation.

Thankfully, I didn’t feel quite as alone as I normally do when I read [this from Craig Calcaterra on the start of the NFL season](#)

:

“Being a baseball fan these past several days has been like belonging to some tiny religious sect that worships and exalts austerity at Christmas time. Everyone in America is celebrating the return of their gambling, beer drinking and fantasy sports pretext, and I couldn’t care less.”

So....this and forgive me if I don’t know who Jamaal Charles or Arian Foster is or where they came from, but the fact that makes me feel like somewhat of a lesser American Sports Fan always bothers me this time of year.

That is, of course, until the next Oktoberfest is popped open...