

2010 End of the Year Feathers

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

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Some people hand out grades or awards when recapping a season.

I feather people.

So it is a silly play off the fact that the logo for my blog is a feather (because these are the INDIANS afterall, right?) but it basically is grading every player and coach on a scale of one to five.

If you want to get fancy, it's like me rating a movie five stars. I don't split my feathers in half though, you either get a full feather or not feather at all.

The ones that don't get a feather are not bad, but rather players with inconclusive results to their 2010 season. I use the simple standards of 150 at-bats for position players and 30 innings pitched for pitchers. I'll also consider anyone with half a season played, but that loophole doesn't come up often.

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My scale sort of looks like this. Five feathers means you pretty much did everything expected of you and had a fantastic season. You can already tell by that, not many people are getting five feathers. Four feathers is sort of above average or slightly above expectations, three is right in the middle, two is below average or below expectations, and one feather is just summed up in one word. Bad.

I take expectations highly into account in determining this system that isn't very complex and judge all around performance. I do lists basic stats, but what I've seen, defense, and just other random specifics are taken into account.

At the end of it all, I hand out two very special awards, the Golden and Silver feathers. The Golden Feather is simply Shin-Soo Ch, I mean the Team MVP and the Silver Feather goes to the person on the team that I felt was crucial to the squad, but may not get the recognition for it. Essentially, they are the unsung hero of the Cleveland Indians.

Yes, I realize it is hard to be much of a hero, much less an unsung one on a team with 69 wins.

Without need for further explanation, here are my End of the Year Feathers for the 2010 Cleveland Indians.

Five Feathers - Gee, Aren't You Special?

Shin-Soo Choo - .300/.401, 81 R, 22 HR, 90 RBI, 22 SB

Last Year: 5

It was last year that I gave two Indians the honor of receiving five feathers. This year, I've done the same and for the second straight year, Shin-Soo Choo is a five feather player.

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As if there was any doubt. Choo missed a small portion of the season due to an injury to his thumb that was originally expected to claim a larger portion of his season. However Choo managed to make his stint on the disabled list a short one and came back to have a season for the record books offensively. His line is one that no other Indians player has ever put up.

Only seven players put up a .400 on-base percentage in the entire game and Choo was one of them. Only five players also hit .300 and Choo was again, one of them. Those numbers show Choo's value to an Indians lineup that didn't have much to support him.

Meanwhile there was only one other player in the American League that was able to steal 20 bases and hit 20 home runs, that player would be Bobby Abreu. Several players did in the NL, but you could probably say that Choo is one of the most versatile players in the American League.

Not only did he show that all-around ability at the plate and on the base paths, Choo led all outfielders in the majors in assists with 14. His aggressiveness sometimes led to issues, but you save runs when you take runners off the bases in that manner.

We know Choo is the all-around player that any team would love to have. It's just good that he put up All-MLB caliber numbers to prove it to the rest of the game.

Chris Perez - 2-2, 63 IP, 23/27 SV, 9 HLD, 1.71/1.08, 61 K

Last Year: 3

Have the Indians found themselves one of those closers capable of going out there and shutting the opposition down a good percentage of the times he walks out to the mound? It sure does look like it. Chris Perez started the season as the closer because of an injury to Kerry Wood but he finished the season as the closer because he simply knows how to get the job done.

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After the All-Star break, which is around the starting point where Perez was the guy, very few closers had better numbers. Perez was 16-for-17 in save opportunities with a 0.63 ERA and a 0.87 WHIP. He was bested by Rafael Soriano and Neftali Feliz in the WHIP department but no one who had 15 saves in the second half had better numbers than that.

In the brief period he wasn't the closer in the first half of the season, Perez settled into the set-up role. His first stint as closer was a feeling out process that was marked with inconsistent opportunities and some struggles. You almost got the feeling that he could get the job done, but with sporadic chances and the bottom line fact that he wasn't the "true" closer, things just weren't right.

When Wood was dealt, things were right and Perez showed it. The Indians should feel really good about the back end of their bullpen going forward with Perez as the closer.

Four Feathers - Good, But Not Quite Good Enough!

Travis Hafner - .278/.374, 46 R, 13 HR, 50 RBI, 2 SB

Last Year: 4

I know I'll catch flack for this and I probably should have caught flack for putting him in the four-feather category last year. But the fact of the matter is Travis Hafner produced. A lot of the feathers are based off expectations and I'm telling you right now, if you are expecting 30 home runs and 120 RBI from this guy, you are expecting too much.

Hafner hit fewer home runs and knocked in fewer runs than I expected him to, but he got something back that took me by surprise. His batting eye has returned and with it the avoidance that some pitchers have when pitching to Pronk. His high OBP is good news for the hitters around him because it not only gives them more RBI opportunities, it means Hafner is getting walked and pitchers are deciding not to pitch to him.

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Not only that, Hafner seems to be adjusting his game. I think he knows he can't hit 30 home runs again and he's stopped trying to. Hafner compromised a lot of the success with getting on base and hitting for three more home runs last year. Granted he had more at-bats, I don't think he played as consistently as he did this year.

I think we've seen a pattern or at least a routine in terms of Pronk's playing time. Set your expectations lower for what he gives and while I know that is hard with the money he is getting paid, it is the only way you are going to be positive about what are actually decent numbers that he puts up. Are they MVP numbers worth of a guy who is just paid to basically hit? No, but they contribute and that type of production is valuable to the team and the hitters around him.

Carlos Santana - .260/.401, 23 R, 6 HR, 22 RBI, 3 SB

Last Year: NF

It may be crazy and almost too hopeful to be giving four feathers to a guy who had just 150 at-bats this season. But those 150 at-bats were incredible. Look at what he did in those 46 games he played in. Throw in what he did at Columbus (and it was overly dominant) and there is reason to believe this guy is as-advertised.

Four feathers to Santana because he lived up to the hype, albeit briefly, Santana not only produced, he brought a swagger to this team. Look beyond what he did at the plate and look at what he did behind it. His first two games were probably two of the better pitched games of the season for Jake Westbrook and Fausto Carmona. His first opportunity to gun down a runner was successful and he threw out 35% of would-be base stealers.

If anything, let me give one number: 37. That is the number of walks that Santana had in his 150 at-bat. Of the 12 players who had more at-bats than Santana, he had more walks than nine of them. Only Choo, Hafner, and LaPorta had more walks than Santana on this team and he played considerably less than a lot of them. That is how good this kid is.

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Fausto Carmona - 13-14, 210 IP, 3.77/1.31, 124 K

Last Year: 1

Fausto Carmona is Exhibit-A when it comes to proving a turnaround is possible. This is what I said about Carmona last year when I gave him one feather.

"What has happened here is an absolute train wreck. He's gone from deer in the headlights closer crawled up in the fetal position of the clubhouse after being exposed to the Boston Red Sox, to Cy Young contending tamer of the bugs and the New York Yankees in the ALDS, to awful starting pitching exiled to Arizona."

And if that run on sentence didn't sum things up, I don't know what would. Let me continue.

"Carmona was awful and at one point it felt like the Indians had no clue what to do with him. I think it was at that point they threw their hands up and said, 'alright let's just start over.'"

That is exactly what happened and by golly it worked, at least it worked better than I think we all hoped it would. Carmona has come back to more than a semblance of a decent starter. Did he show that he could be a lock down number one ace of a starting rotation? No, but he's pretty damn close, if not a great number two.

It now remains to be seen if the adjustments that he made in the second half of the season (he's trying to develop a changeup) will take him to yet another level.

I also said the Indians were transitioning him into an actual pitcher. Carmona looked like an actual pitcher this past season and with that skill-set, he's less-likely to implode. Carmona only had five starts out of 33 in which he gave up five or more earned runs. Two of those games marked the only two times he wasn't able to go at least five innings in a start this season. He failed to go five innings five times last year and only twice did he go at least seven innings in a

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game and both times he only went seven.

He's going deeper into games and we all know a lot of that has to do with the fact that he isn't walking hitters like crazy. Carmona didn't go a start last year and not walk someone. Did it four times this year and only walked more than four hitters on four occasions. Only did it 3 times last year but he had nine less starts in 2009 and only two less walks than he did this season.

The point of the matter is that he is become much more efficient and much more controlled. His WHIP lowered from 1.76 to 1.31, back closer to what he was doing in 2007. He also led the AL in ground ball double plays, which signifies more than anything that he's closer to 2007 than he is to 2009. Carmona had an incredible turnaround and let's hope that it isn't quite finished yet.

Mark Shapiro - Signed OF Austin Kearns, OF Shelley Duncan, 2B Mark Grudzielanek, RHP Jamey Wright, RHP Saul Rivera to Minor League Deals, Signed C Mike Redmond, and 1B Russell Branyan Traded for RHP Mitch Talbot, Traded OF Austin Kearns, 3B Jhonny Peralta, 1B Russell Branyan RHP Kerry Wood, RHP Jake Westbrook, Claimed 2B Jayson Nix off Waivers

Last Year: 2

Like with Hafner, people will probably groan seeing Mark Shapiro's name under the four feather grouping, but last year proved I can knock Shapiro down a few pegs.

Next year Chris Antonetti gets feathered as he takes over as General Manager, but for this season, we still hold Mark Shapiro largely responsible for what went down. As you can see, Shapiro signed a few minor league free agents that contributed and even netted the Indians a prospect in Zach McAllister, as well as traded enigmas such as Jhonny Peralta and Russell Branyan.

After he signed Russell Branyan of course.

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I give Shapiro high marks for what he did this season and past offseason. He traded Kelly Shoppach, someone the club didn't need for a pitcher that played a part in their rotation. The Kearns signing was brilliant not just because he got something in return for a minor league signing, but Kearns was one of the two players offensively contributing at one point early in the season.

Like last year, it's hard to judge him on deals like Peralta and Westbrook because we not yet know what we have in those players in terms of the major leagues. But like we do with all the feathers, we judge based on expectations and perception and I think Shapiro did good in this little window.

Last year, I really knocked Shapiro down for trading Franklin Gutierrez for Joe Smith and Luis Valbuena. That was after he signed Carl Pavano. This year he made not just one brilliant minor league addition in Kearns, he picked up a guy like Shelley Duncan who contributed and made a great low-risk trade for Mitch Talbot. Not to mention he claimed Jayson Nix off the trash heap and he traded someone he foolishly signed for not one, but two prospects.

I also liked the short-term signing of Mike Redmond as the backup. An above-average year for Mark Shapiro in his final run as GM of the Indians.

Tim Belcher - 4.30 ERA (25th), 1.43 WHIP (27th), 967 K (30th)

Last Year: NF

I think if I just put up Tim Belcher's name and didn't attach those statistics, you'd agree with me. But even I doubted myself when I attached those stats. But let's take a step back and remember what this is about. This is about expectations and I think everyone and their mother expected the Indians pitching staff to be abysmal. They weren't stellar by any means and collectively the numbers are near the bottom where they were expected to be.

But there are some real positive individual cases and if you look at how well they progressed in the second half (3.89 ERA, 13th in the majors and 1.34 WHIP, 19th) then I'm really pleased with

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the job Tim Belcher did.

More than anything, I love the philosophy that both he and manager Manny Acta have not only preached, but have strictly enforced. Throw strikes and throw them early. It clearly started to take with this club as over time, they started doing so and started getting results.

You look at Carmona and Talbot, some of the progressions Justin Masterson made. You look at young guys like Jeanmar Gomez, Josh Tomlin, and Carlos Carrasco, guys who are green and more easily to influence early on and the job Belcher has done with them.

Let's also consider this. 110 errors and a .982 fielding percentage (20th in the MLB). I think the defense might have actually been worse than those numbers indicate, which would probably mean the pitching was better than the numbers indicate.

Three Feathers - You Serve A Purpose, I Promise.

Asdrubal Cabrera - .276/.326, 39 R, 3 HR, 29 RBI, 6 SB

Last Year: 5

Does everyone realize that he hit .308 last year? Look, I'm not going to complain if he ultimate hits upwards of .280 because I had the original opinion that if he just hits a little and plays amazing defense, that would be good enough for me.

Yet I go back to the recurring them of expectations and the expectations for Cabrera were a little higher both offensively and defensively. Now he broke his arm, or I should say, Jhonny Peralta broke his arm, so he gets a little slack. But he got injured last year and still put up 52 extra-base hits as a part of a stellar season.

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I think his offense will come back around. Not sure if he really is a .300 hitter, but again, he doesn't have to be. If he's getting on base (or better yet, if the Indians play him up there and expect him to do so) then he doesn't have to be a .308 hitter. But he needs to play better defense. If this guy is going to be the man in the middle that controls the infield, he has to set the example. I just brought up defense and how the pitching may have suffered because of it. He needs to be this club's standard in that aspect.

Cabrera's fielding percentage last year was .972. That's below even the Indians team average and stellar defenders like Jhonny Peralta and Luis Valbuena. I'm not going to bother digging or flashing the sambermetric fielding stats because I quite frankly don't understand them. I watched just about every game and I know that Cabrera didn't look like the same shortstop he has in the past.

His range wasn't as good, he made some flashy plays, but also made some head-scratchers.

The overall package just wasn't what we thought it would be. He maintains an average rating because he still contributed and I'm taking the injury heavily into consideration, but we need better from Cabrera.

Jayson Nix - .234/.283, 29 R, 13 HR, 29 RBI, 1 SB

Last Year: NF

Nix had just one home run with the Chicago White Sox. What ever got into him when he arrived in Cleveland was probably an effort you won't see from him on a consistent basis, but I think there is a happy medium in there somewhere.

Ultimately when this guy arrived, I think people were puzzled. This isn't a contending team, why not get a guy like Josh Rodriguez up here if there is a need in the infield while Cabrera is out? Shapiro and company saw something though and made the claim and I think they deserve

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some credit for it. Now obviously, if he continued to clunk around and not be of any contribution, Shapiro would have continued to get blasted, rightfully so.

But Nix did more than we thought and I think for that, you have to tip your hat on the pick-up. Now the plan seems to be for Nix to be a potential answer at third base. The club has multiple second base options in Jason Donald and Luis Valbuena, as well as a duo in Columbus that both seem to have some high upside. Nix was part of the three-headed monster (and it was a monster) that took over in place of Peralta and none of them were good defensively.

But Nix was the best offensively and probably the fact that he is above average or at least average at second in terms of defense gives the club hope he can adapt. He'll be in Puerto Rico playing third and if things go well, the Indians might have themselves an internal option.

Ultimately I don't think anyone could have asked for more than what Nix did when he came over. I don't think many people actually wanted Nix to do what he did when he came over truthfully, but the fact is he did.

Shelley Duncan - .231/.317, 29 R, 11 HR, 36 RBI, 1 SB

Last Year: NF

I think the original thought here was that the Indians were signing a former Columbus Clipper who has had incredible success at the Triple-A level to compliment a bunch of young options and help guide a club to a successful season.

Well the Clippers had a successful season long after Duncan was called up and Duncan had some success as well. Like it is with most players in Duncan's position, I think the expectations for Duncan in Cleveland was that of a short stay. That short stay turned into a call-up that lasted all season.

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Not only was Duncan a nice source of power and the go-to-guy for pinch hitting, he was a great veteran presence down the stretch after the club had traded their other veteran players. Duncan is a guy who's had to work hard to get to the major league level and he's also had the rare experience of being around success in addition to that with his time in New York.

If the Indians want to keep Duncan around for next season as a bench option, under the right circumstances, I wouldn't put up a fight. He was a good piece of this team.

Jason Donald - .253/.312, 39 R, 4 HR, 24 RBI, 5 SB

Last Year: NF

I had this kid pegged from the start of spring training. He was diving all over the place in the spring making all sorts of good defensively plays. The thing about Jason Donald is that he's one of those guys that makes up for whatever he lacks in hard work. The thing is I don't think he has to make up for a lot of things. I said that the Indians would be starting Jason Donald at second base sooner rather than later and I'm proud to say the fall of Luis Valbuena is one of the things I nailed.

Thank god Jason Donald was there. Yeah he hit .253 and made some mistakes at shortstop. But he's a second baseman and he was a rookie. Remember how he lit it up in Columbus? Now that he's healthy, I think full-speed ahead for Donald.

Only three players had more than 19 doubles on this team and they all had more at-bats. Donald is not a power hitter, but you have to love the way he hits those gaps. I love his defense at second and if this is his ceiling (which I don't think it is) I think its more than good enough as a utility player. Let's be honest, if Jason Kipnis is the answer (and I think we all hope he is), Donald is probably the odd man out. But for now, I'll ride the train.

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