

## Lazy Sunday Cornerstones

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}

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While Daylight Savings “Fall Back” generally buys most people an extra hour of sleep, the concept of turning one’s clock back one hour is lost on two little boys, whose internal clocks had the Reservation jumping at 5:00 AM this morning. While it has allowed an impromptu trip to the Double-D (what “America runs on”) and has given me an early start on tracking Free Agency and when the press conference will be called in the Bronx for CP Lee to don the pinstripes, Daylight Savings is just a clock issue around here, which means more tired eyes...from The DiaBride and your humble host.

That all being said, let’s get off on a Lazy Sunday having to do with another “clock” issue for a player who was once thought to be a cornerstone for the Indians as well as two players who have now assumed that role of “future cornerstones”.

And with that, we’re off...

As I said, the “clock” issue that transpired this week is that the clock seems to have finally run out on one Andy Manuel Marte as a Cleveland Indian. As expected as it was, if you want to call it “news”, have at it, but it is true that Andy Marte has been outrighted off of the 40-man roster, meaning that he can pursue other opportunities (assuming such opportunities exist...and perhaps he has been plotting his revenge –“Count of Monte Cristo” style [as LGT’s Ryan Richards brilliantly implies](#)

) and that he is gone from the Indians...maybe. Of course, Marte could find himself in Goodyear or Columbus or somewhere else related to the Indians as time goes on and as Marte and the Indians survey the scene; but short of that return, it looks as if Andy Marte will be gone from our collected focus, nearly five years after entering it.

While there is a feeling that a retrospective in pictures should be in order, with [The Avett Brothers’ brilliant “Head Full of Doubt/Road Full of Promise”](#)

playing softly over images of the career arc of Marte, from hotshot prospect to erstwhile relief

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pitcher, let's be honest about this and realize that never has so much ink been (figuratively) spilled over a player who never amassed 900 PA over the course of five years with any team, much less one with a career OPS+ of 69. While the reasons for that are long and (frankly) undistinguished, Marte remains a polarizing figure among Cleveland fans, with some feeling that the Indians simply whiffed when they acquired Marte and that he represents one of the greater MLB busts of the decade while others feel that Marte was used so sporadically and so inconsistently (particularly in his first few years in the organization) that, as

[Ed Carroll of Deep Left Field says](#)

, "No prospect could develop the way the Indians handled Marte."

If you thinking I'm going too far with the "greater MLB busts of the decade" idea, let's all remember that Marte was [the #3 prospect in all of MLB according to Baseball Prospectus](#) going into 2004 (Baseball America had him at #16), in front of both Prince Fielder and David Wright, among others. If that blew your mind, h

[ere he is as Baseball Prospectus' #1 prospect in all of baseball](#)

heading into the 2005 season, the same year that

[Baseball America listed him as the 9th best prospect in baseball](#)

, one spot ahead of Hanley Ramirez. While his stock dropped a little heading into 2006 (when he joined the Indians) as

[B-Pro dropped him to #7](#)

and

[Baseball America pegged him as #14](#)

, one spot ahead of Ryan Zimmerman, Marte had just completed three years in the top 20 prospect lists of both major publications, all before his 23rd birthday.

"Road Full of Promise"...yeah, that was Marte.

All of that being rehashed, I'll be honest and admit that I'm tired of writing about Andy Marte and attempting to figure out whose cat he killed among the Tribe brass or whether everyone in baseball simply missed on this kid, blinded by the terrific upper-level production of a 20-year-old, then a 21-year-old in consecutive years and ignoring the warning signs that may have existed. In the end, it's probably a combination of both – he is not as talented as he was purported to be and the Indians soured on him so completely that opportunities that seemed tailor-made for him to get consistent playing time never resulted in much more than sporadic use and a jarring reminder that he remained an "option"...albeit in name only.

Could he have been better with the Indians given a longer leash?

Who knows, but one thing stands out to me with Marte – after arriving as that top prospect in all of baseball – in that he compiled 858 PA as an Indian over five years with the organization.

858 PA in five years...want some perspective on that?

His 858 PA with the Tribe from 2006 to 2010 is merely 56 more than Alvaro Espinoza accumulated as an Indian (and Espinoza was on the team only four years compared to Marte's five years) and is less than half of the amount of PA than what Paul Sorrento piled up in one fewer year as an Indian. For some positional and timeframe perspective, Casey Blake had nearly 4 times the PA as Marte (3,358 for Blake, 858 for Marte) as an Indian in playing six years for the Tribe, only one more season than Marte donned the Chief.

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In the ultimate indication of how Marte was perceived in the organization (particularly at the end), Trevor Crowe has 681 PA (80% of the PA that Marte has as a member of the Cleveland Indians) to date and has racked up that total in merely a two-year stretch as a horrible baseball player at a position of lesser need than 3B. Crowe, (allegedly) one month younger than Marte, has a career OPS+ of 74 and has failed to show that he has any type of future with the team, but his 479 PA in 2010 is only 16 fewer than Marte received in his FIRST THREE FULL YEARS in Cleveland, when Casey Blake (whose most valuable asset was his versatility) was anchored to 3B as Dellichaels, Garko, and Ben Francisco all were given significant and extended looks as Indians.

While it may sound like it, I'm not here to argue that Marte was wronged or that he will become the next Carlos Pena or Phil Nevin after a change of pace. Instead, let's all acknowledge that something went horribly, irreparably wrong from 2006 to now with Andy Marte and the Indians, and we may now only be closing the final page in this page-turner that was compelling for all of the wrong reasons.

Andy Marte is, for all intents and purposes, gone and the player that some wistfully thought would be a cornerstone of the next incarnation of the contending Indians in the mid-to-late-2000's (a team that did contend...just without any contributions from Marte) leaves only a trail of unanswered questions and unfulfilled promise (assuming it was ever there) in his wake. The idea that Marte would be a 25 HR "cornerstone" in the lineup is long gone and all that will likely remain is [that wonderful 9th inning against the Yankees](#), the one that I can't help but smile about as a parting shot of Marte.

On that idea of what is often thought to be a cornerstone and attempting to (finally) move past The Dominican Dandy (as he was once lovingly dubbed in happier days), [Jon-Paul Morosi of FOX Sports asserts that the Giants won \(and will continue to win\) because of their "cornerstones" of Buster Posey and Brian Wilson](#)

. He makes this assertion because he says that the Giants have "a near-automatic closer who's nails in the postseason, and a young hitter who grinds and inspires" comparing them to another duo that came upon the scene in the late-1990s' –Rivera and Jeter.

While his intimation that Wilson and Posey are the new "Mo" and "Jeets" (and I will now flog myself for typing the word "Jeets") feels a little presumptuous (and, by his own admission, it is), how about the big finish to the piece, in which Morosi says that the Giants are alone in MLB in terms of being absolutely set at Catcher and Closer for the next few years, detailing it thusly: *Think about it: How many teams can say, right now, they have zero interest in upgrading at the need-to-have positions of catcher or closer?*

*The Phillies, now that Brad Lidge is right. The Twins, as long as Joe Nathan returns healthy. But that's it. For every other team in the majors, there's a compelling case to change personnel at one position or the other.*

Excuse me...Jon-Paul? Um, down here...

Remember us? Yeah, the Indians are still in Cleveland...you must have forgotten about our lowly Tribe because I'm pretty sure that I have yet to see "a compelling case to change

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personnel” for the Indians, in terms of their Catcher (The Axe Man) and their Closer (Chris F. Perez) that figure to be in place for 2011.

While it’s true that the original FOX Sports story is dripping with hyperbole and projection, isn’t it interesting to compare the two “cornerstones” (Morosi’s words, not mine) of the current World Champs and the players who play the same position for the Tribe, and how their 2010 numbers stack up:

### **Posey vs. Santana – 2010**

#### **Posey (Age 23)**

.305 BA / .357 OBP / .505 SLG / .862 OPS (129 OPS+) with 23 2B and 18 HR in 443 PA

#### **Santana (Age 24)**

.260 BA / .401 OBP / .467 SLG / .868 OPS (144 OPS+) with 13 2B and 6 HR in 192 PA

### **Wilson vs. Perez – 2010**

#### **Wilson (Age 28)**

1.81 ERA, 1.18 WHIP, 11.8 K/9, 7.2 BB/9, 1.63 K/BB in 74 2/3 IP

#### **Perez (Age 24)**

1.71 ERA, 1.08 WHIP, 8.7 K/9, 4.0 BB/9, 2.18 K/BB in 63 IP

Certainly, that is not meant to assert that the Indians are close to winning a WS title simply because they have a catcher and a closer that “they have zero interest in upgrading” as CLEARLY the starting pitching is the separator (to begin with) between the two organizations. However, if those are two “need-to-have” positions, at least the Indians have those spots locked down (theoretically) for the next couple of years.

If you’re comparing the two (and [sites were asking the question as recently as mid-May as to whether Posey or Santana was better/would be better](#)), it goes past the idea that the catchers have a preternatural ability from behind the plate and that both closers...um, can we say, walk to the beat of a different drummer en route to their effectiveness, to the point that

[B-Pro did a Q & A with each and put them together in one piece](#)

As a quick aside here, after some MLB calculations, [CF Perez is Super-2](#) (as is Jenny Lewis, which could be the end of Lewis in Cleveland as they may not be all that interested in keeping Lewis around at a higher-than-minimum-salary rate...though I think that they should), so his price tag just got a bit higher. Although,

[as I’ve said before](#)

, I’d be reluctant to get into multi-year deal negotiations with Perez, even with his Super-2 status:

*I still go year-to-year right now with Perez, simply given that volatility of relievers and with the idea that there are no guarantees (Ferd Cabrera v.2005, Jenny Lewis v.2008) for success from one year to waterfall into the next for relievers. Maybe Perez is that exception (and, truthfully, I hope that he is), but I’d exchange numbers with Perez’s people and sign him to a one-year deal.*

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--snip--

*In Cleveland we've become so USED to the idea that we HAVE to lock all of these guys up because that's what has been done. In reality, with positions like relievers and with players who are still relatively unproven (sorry, as great as that post-All-Star break ERA is, it is still less than 30 innings of MLB), the idea to go year-to-year (or simply delay a decision on a long-term deal) is a luxury that the Indians have, and in the case of Perez, they should use it.*

It should be made clear that Perez is under club control for four more years (unlike Choo, also in his first year of arbitration, who is under club control for three more years) because of the Super-2 designation, so let's stop any crying from the rooftops that Perez is soon to be a member of the Yankees/Red Sox/etc. before it even starts. At this point, let's just say that this is good for Perez in that he'll get paid four years of arbitration eligibility, but the spectre of arbitration shouldn't cause the Indians to jump into bed with a multi-year deal in hand...yet.

But I digress...back to that Giants/Posey/Wilson and Indians/Santana/Perez "comparison", as stated above, starting pitching is the difference between the two teams and while it is [something that I hit on a few weeks back in terms of the Giants' high draft picks that were pitchers erasing the organizational mistakes](#)

and serving as the engine that drove the World Series floats,

[Anthony Castrovince puts another nice bow on it in terms of bringing the comparison to the Tribe](#)

:

*The Giants are world champs primarily because they drafted well. In the first round in the last decade, they took Matt Cain in 2002, Tim Lincecum in 2006, Madison Bumgarner in 2007 and Buster Posey in 2008.*

*Right there, the Giants provided themselves with the pieces that would fill three rotation spots and a catcher for the middle of the order.*

--snip--

*As if the message hasn't been hammered home enough, I'll hammer it home again: The Indians have to hope they got it right with Alex White, Drew Pomeranz and their other prominent Draft picks in recent years.*

*The Indians don't have the money, the market or the reliable fan support to compare to the Giants, but they do have the ability to build this thing from within, as the Giants (in some ways in spite of themselves) did. You have to hit on your No. 1 Draft picks, and you have to have some luck -- something the Indians haven't majored in, to this point.*

"Luck"...like the 2008 start and CC being traded from a 37-51 team that was supposed to contend for a WS title, the 2009 start and Lee being traded from a team that was 42-60 after adding Kerry Wood, Grady's elbow then knee, Carmona's spare tire, Hafner's shoulder?

Yeah, I guess that hasn't been the Indians' strong suit the past few years and here's hoping that White, Pomeranz, and others are able to make Atom Miller, Jerry Sowers, and Dave Huff merely answers to obscure trivia questions and not the trail-blazers to a well-worn path leading to obscurity.

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Nevertheless, keeping it with Castro as the seque for the rest of our trip around the globe...well, not really around the globe, but [Castro has a piece](#) that confirms that the Indians will be quiet in the FA market, passing along this quote from the Tribe's new GM:

*"The bulk of the improvements to the team are going to have to happen internally. And then, whether or not we'll have the ability to be opportunistic in the free-agent market and at what level, that's going to be determined by a bunch of variables that are still unclear at this time."*

Yep...everybody ready to wait on the rest of the market to shake out?

If you think that it's going to be quiet without too many compelling storylines this offseason, consider that [Cliff Corcoran of SI.com has a little snippet about the Tribe in his AL Central Hot Stove Report](#) in which he devotes 85 words on the off-season outlook for the Indians, compared to 441 on the Tigers, 438 on the Twins, 356 on the White Sox, and even 239 on the Royals...yeah, I did the word count. In those 85 words, he comes to the conclusion that the Indians "have made it clear they won't be players this winter" and that "they'll work to continue to establish their prospects in the majors and wait for Travis Hafner's contract to expire after the 2012 season".

Though brief...that sounds about right and in the best small dose of reality out there, [Adam Van Arsdale of LGT](#)

sums up what the Tribe is likely to do this Winter when he writes that:

*Instead, we will once again be targeting the Austin Kearns and Shelley Duncan's of the world. Which is ok, in some respects. We have had a fair bit of success with these guys in the past. And the key is not that we produce a 90-win roster in 2011, which is highly unlikely, but that we get value out of roster. Value in a 1-year player is at least partially encapsulated by the potential to sell high on him mid-season...making Cleveland baseball's version of an amateur day trader.*

That's just about it (and that "day trader" line is great) if you're looking at what this off-season is going to look like.

If they're looking for a 3B to keep the seat warm for The Chiz, the likelihood is that they'll look to flip any 3B they acquire when (or is it if) Chisenhall is ready. The same could be said with any RH bat they may add or any arm – starter or reliever – that may find themselves in Goodyear next Spring with the Tribe.

That strategy may not be all that palatable and the idea of "internal development" based on "top prospects" may turn some stomachs in the week that saw Andy Marte make his way out of the organization (maybe). However, at this stage of the Indians' development, they need to focus on their internal talent not going the way of Andy Marte, blocked by external options and struggling when given sporadic chances.

The Indians need to give LaPorta, Brantley, Carrasco, Masterson, and a whole slew of other young players the length of rope that was never afforded to Andy Marte. Whether those players still in the organization end up hanging themselves with the prescribed rope remains to be seen, but given that the options of adding a player or two that would ostensibly block any of the young players are underwhelming at best, let Andy Marte serve as the cautionary tale as to what can go wrong with young, "can't miss" players get mired in prospect purgatory and who...well, miss.

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