

## Winterizing on a Lazy Sunday

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}

Sunday, November 14 2010 9:14 AM - Last Updated Tuesday, November 16 2010 1:48 PM

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Just because an Indian Summer has descended on the North Coast doesn't mean that there's all that much news related to the "Indians" or "Summer" as all remains quiet on the North Coast...or at least at the corner of Carnegie and Ontario. While this was to be expected, it hasn't prevented the Hot Stove from putting off a little heat, even if that heat barely moves the thermometer or if it goes noticed by more than a couple of hundred people. Nevertheless, it is Sunday and while most of Cleveland is waiting to see if their new "McCoy" jersey fits (and if it doesn't, the "Hillis" one is a nice fall-back), let's get loose on a Lazy Sunday...

As mentioned above, as the Hot Stove seems to be humming for most teams, news about the Indians (or even marginally related to the Indians) remains mostly non-existent. As a result, you have [a "debate"](#) (term used as loosely as possible) over Kevin Kouzmanoff and whether the Indians could handle his atrocious OBP in the name of defense...and remember K2 is NOT a Free Agent, just a guy who fits the "profile" of what the Indians should be targeting. Combine that "debate" with the news that [Oakland signed 3B Edwin Encarnacion](#) .. which (and I write this breathlessly) means that Kouzmanoff may be available, unless the A's are looking at Encarnacion as a DH candidate and we have ourselves a manufactured storyline

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to follow.

It's true that we can read about the [Indians touting their middle infield and relief pitching depth](#) (and, remember that Pluto's Sunday Notes column is always what he's hearing directly from the club), but creating a "Kevin Kouzmanoff Watch" is about where we're at with the Indians' off-season – essentially reading too much into every situation, as remote as any possibility of some action might be. Lists of possible trade targets from around MLB can be parsed through (and Sizemore oddly appears on

[Nick Cafardo's list as a possible mid-season trade target](#)

despite the fact that Sizemore's 2012 team option voids if he is traded, meaning a team would be only getting ½ of a season for Grady, who would become a FA after this season if traded) and different suggestions can be made for Pablo Sandoval or Juan Rivera, but the speculation is just that.

Would the Indians be interested in Brian Bannister or Kenshin Kawakami...and where were they on the Cameron Maybin trade talks?

Yes, get ready for a winter not so much of "discontent"...more of "detachment", as the Indians figure to remain largely under-the-radar, waiting for things to shake out with the rest of FA before they place a couple of strategic long shot bets as they attempt to improve the team in some key areas of concern.

While this was to be expected, don't let the quiet off-season prevent the local scribes (or at least one of them) from, as my friend says, "stirring the pot with an outboard motor" in terms of unfairly framing the team as being unnecessarily inactive in the off-season by injecting familiar (if unrelated to the team's course of action) names into the mix, to the point that it's not too hard to see through a thinly veiled attempt to create an agenda and or a controversy...or maybe it's just an attempt at creating interest.

If you're not sure what I'm getting at, here are the first two sentences in [a piece that showed up at my front door on Friday morning](#) as a "preview" for the Indians' off-season:

*Just so everyone knows where the Indians stand this off-season when it comes to getting*

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*external help to improve a product that lost 93 games last season, read the following paragraph. While Yankees GM Brian Cashman flew to Arkansas on Wednesday to entice top free agent pitcher Cliff Lee, Indians GM Chris Antonetti was in an all-day meeting at Progressive Field with the organization's scouts to see if they may be able to turn water into wine at any point this winter.*

While you might think that the intro is meant to point out the disparity in MLB, reading further in the piece reveals that the point was more to point out how everybody else is going to be active except for the Indians and invokes the names of Peralta and Westbrook and Lee and Martinez, seemingly to merely fan the flames of an obviously frustrated fanbase.

The overall premise is necessary, but the piece strays from informative (areas of need, projected payroll, etc.) to inconsequential (the courting of Lee affects Cleveland's off-season plans...how?) to simply incendiary as the piece is littered with mentions of other teams spending money, even if it is on obvious FA mistakes that just happened. Most notably, the piece points out that Jhonny recently received 2 years and \$11.5M from Detroit to play SS with Hoynes adding that SS is "a position he was deemed unfit for in Cleveland", failing to mention that he was "deemed unfit" for exceptional reasons and that the media clamored for him to be moved off of SS as far back as 2008.

The transaction (Peralta to Detroit) however is painted in such a manner to show that other teams are spending money...and the Indians sit at home trying to figure out "how to turn water into wine" on the FA market. In reality, if the Indians gave Peralta a 2-year deal (much less a 2-year deal to play SS), people would be marching to the corner of Carnegie and Ontario with torches and pitchforks, out for somebody's blood to spill over the decision...and with good reason, I might add.

Again, this piece needs to be written to provide an overview of what is to be expected, but compare it to [what Castrovince wrote](#) (a SOLID two weeks ago I might add) and note how AC's piece is informative and enlightening while not catering to the lowest common denominator by unnecessarily dredging up names that have no bearing on the Indians' off-season and giving a starting point to the cynics that usually don't even need that much of a head start to wail and gnash teeth.

If you think that I'm overanalyzing this unsurprisingly incongruous piece, realize that even an impartial observer like [Craig Calcaterra of Hardball Talk sees the inconsistency in the flow of](#)

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[the piece](#), specifically as to how Jake Westbrook's name is mentioned and, more importantly, how the Indians are portrayed in the situation. To wit, Hoynes brings up Jake as an option for adding a veteran starting pitcher, but leaves it at "Westbrook pitched well for the Cardinals and there is little chance that he would return to Cleveland". All of this is technically relevant and moderately accurate, but it fails to mention that [Ken Rosenthal is reporting that Jake Westbrook is unlikely to return to ST. LOUIS](#) because he's looking to secure a contract with a guaranteed third year, which the Cardinals are balking at.

Given that "rest of the story", in that Westbrook is probably going to get three guaranteed years from somebody, do you really blame the Indians for kicking the tires on Jake and moving on down the used-car lot after looking at the asking price on the sticker in the window?

Lest you forget, the Indians just finished paying the bulk of Westbrook's 3-year, \$33M deal from 2008 to this past July. During that deal, the Indians paid for 162 1/3 IP over three years (\$204,545 per inning pitched for the Tribe) when Jake was 30 to 32 years old. So...do you think that they're anxious to give him a 3-year deal when he's going to be 33 to 35 years old?

This is certainly pointed out here to demonize Westbrook, whose injuries were out of his control, but more to point out that once the bidding on a guy like Jake gets to a guaranteed third year (or even a guaranteed second year) is when the Indians should send their well wishes and move on to a target that better fits the profile of what they need.

When Westbrook signs, there will be the contingent that simply looks at him being inked to a deal and bemoans that the Indians "let another one get away" while missing the forest for the trees. What they won't realize is that [Westbrook is seen as the second most attractive FA starting pitcher on the market](#) and that he's going to get a deal from a team that feels that they're one pitcher away from legitimately contending and will be paid as such.

As a quick aside, check out that list in a piece from Jerry Crasnick (which also gauges GM opinions on reclamation arms), with Lee, Westbrook, and Pavano being three of the four most attractive FA pitchers on the market. Remember that whole idea that [the Indians should be touting their ability to find these players](#) (if not keep them) and that Sabathia, Lee, Westbrook, Pavano, and others were all on teams in either 2008 or 2009 – neither of which were winning teams.

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If anything, the Indians should be spending their time pointing out that many of the prime FA on the market were players that either made their debut with the Indians, or established themselves in Cleveland or re-established themselves in Cleveland and that the current focus of the organization is to recognize that SAME TYPE OF TALENT, just on the way up in their careers...not on their way down.

While they'd never do it, they should use the moment when Victor Martinez signs the inevitable 5-year deal with the Tigers or Rangers (which will end when he is 36 years old) will be completed before Carlos Santana's years of club control expire. In a similar vein, they should meet the signing of Peralta to a 2-year deal (TO PLAY SS) with some sort of press release pointing out that Peralta's contract will run out before Asdrubal Cabrera (the player that displaced Peralta at SS) is through with his arbitration years.

As I said, they'd never do it and because of that, the vocal minority sing their chorus that the Dolans are sitting on their dust-covered checkbook because they don't want to improve the team by adding a FA that's going to cost too much. Realistically, does Chris Antonetti need to spoon-feed the fans the obviousness of this line that came from of Kansas City's GM this week, [when Dayton Moore had this to say to the Kansas City Star](#) :

*"It's not cost effective at this time for us to be real aggressive with major-league free agents." --snip--"Our stance on potentially adding something (major through free agency) "is it would really have to fit long term. That guy doesn't exist right now, and I don't know who that would be."We're not just going to add somebody to make our payroll higher for one year."*

To most, that goes without saying for a team that lost 90 games in consecutive seasons, and both the Royals and Indians have. For the Tribe however, a major contributing factor in the mix should be the lack of a return on investment on big money contracts given out their own players (Jake and Hafner, most notably), much less when they ventured into the swamp of FA for external options, like Kerry Wood, when the team was much closer to contention than the current club is.

Going back to Dayton Moore reciting a line from "Team Building for Dummies", find me a fit on the FA market that makes baseball and financial sense for the Indians, and I'm all ears. Short of that, simply looking over the whole MLB landscape in a vacuum and picking players that

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would help the Indians is simply not rational thinking and anyone who has been paying attention knows this and really shouldn't fault the Indians (or the Royals) for believing that staying away from the FA market is in most teams' best interests. Would Jake Westbrook look great back in the Tribe rotation? Of course, just like Adrian Beltre would certainly solve the black hole that has existed at 3B...and Paul Konerko and Rafael Soriano would be perfect to solve the lack of a RH bat and the need for a RH back-end reliever.

But there are 29 other teams in this mix, many of whom see themselves as closer to contention than the Indians with more of a stomach for the risk that comes with FA, that are not excluded from FA discussions. So for anyone to think that the Indians were going to make a splash (or even a couple of ripples) in FA this off-season simply wasn't around (or wasn't paying attention to the organizational about-face) when CP Lee and El Capitan were traded a couple of months after the Indians DID make their splash (via a bellyflop) in FA with Kerry Wood.

Any "big" move is going to come via trade and just to attempt to bring some (relative) constructiveness to this whole monologue, while I already [laid out](#) one team that the Indians could perhaps be a trade partner with (Oakland), how about Toronto and their "glut" of arms?

Their GM [told B-Pro's John Perrotto](#) that he "vows to be more aggressive in his second offseason as he seeks to fill holes at catcher, first base, and the bullpen for a team that finished a surprising 85-77" and admits that he's "talking to GMs right now, canvassing what everyone's needs are," and that he's "been doing that the last little while on and off, and making my way through the 29 GMs to see where their priorities are to see if we line up in trade."

Of course, every GM could make that last statement, but given that the Blue Jays do have some Indians' ties with new manager John Farrell and new 1B coach Torey Lovullo, perhaps one of those former Indians' execs/coaches has a particular player in the Tribe organization that strikes their fancy and the Indians could net some of the young pitchers from Toronto in the exchange. Then again, the same rationale existed when Neal Huntington made his way to Pittsburgh and the only players with ties to the Pirates that have donned the Chief that I can think of recently are Luke Carlin and Brian Bullington...so that idea that Farrell or Lovullo may be looking to extract some of their organizational favorites may be reading too much into the situation.

Which gets us back to where we started, as the silence coming from the corner of Carnegie

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and Ontario has left us to not only attempt to read the tea leaves, but to conduct extensive scientific studies on those tea leaves to glean something...anything from the happenings around MLB and how it may be affecting the actions/inactions of the Tribe this off-season.

So, while we take a hard look at Oakland acquiring Ed Encarnacion or the ties of some of the Blue Jays' coaching staff to Cleveland, the Indians remain so far off of the radar, in terms of player movement, that 40-man decisions, new uniforms, and a Winter Wonderland at the ballpark have been the basis for most of the off-season articles about the Tribe...aside from the occasional snarky diversion.

While that may be disappointing to some, examining where the organization is in their attempt to re-build a contender (and, since they're not trumpeting it, I will...yes, RE-BUILD a contender) in short order, that Winter of Detachment may actually be what's best for the Indians this off-season. As boring as that may be while Free Agents (and many former Indians) order new address labels, that doesn't mean that there won't be more MLB tea leaves to be sent to the lab for further examination all Winter long.