

## Hot Stove- Hot Corner Series

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

Tuesday, November 16 2010 1:58 PM - Last Updated Tuesday, November 16 2010 2:09 PM

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Every year I take a month off at the end of the season to decompress. This is necessary because I write awfully long game recaps and my team is awfully bad.

Anyway.

Baseball Prospectus does a series in the off-season in which a staffer is chosen to be "GM For a Day." Many of the series' postings are quite illuminating, especially for teams I don't follow very closely. The Brewers, for example, probably have some players who are neither Ryan Braun nor Prince Fielder. I accept this on faith. I would have to look it up to be certain, though. In any event, this year's was written by [Tommy Bennett](#), and it says basically, "Because hope is not a plan, the Cleveland Indians have no plan, because my strategy boils down to 'hope a lot'."

To a certain extent, Bennett has a point: the Indians aren't going to spend a lot of money, and they don't have many trade assets that they don't actually need themselves in the first place. Sure, Shin-Soo Choo would fetch a good return, but ... who needs Shin-Soo Choo more than Cleveland does? You could trade Justin Masterson to plug a hole, but the most significant hole is starting pitching, and it's pretty hard to believe that the Indians could improve their starting pitching by trading away their starting pitching. (Granted, you could see if you could trade lesser pitching for greater pitching as Arizona did with Detroit, but that's probably really hard to pull off, and I certainly don't want to be That Guy that suggests trading Masterson, Tofu Lou, and Josh Tomlin for Zack Greinke.)

The most disappointing thing about the article, though, is that it doesn't address what to do about the single most-obvious hole on the major-league team: third base.

Look, let's consider this from a rational perspective. The best option for the Indians last season was a guy who (using FanGraphs data) was a below-average third baseman with a UZR/150 of -4.1. He posted a sub-.700 OPS and offensive rates of .307 wOBA and 92 wRC+ (average is 100). BP lists him as a .260 TAv player worth 4.2 VORP. The popular With My Own Eyes™ test suggests this fellow falls on the defensive spectrum in the "Lame-Assed" section. He had lousy range but a good arm, but basically, look: this isn't a very valuable player.

This player was Jhonny Peralta.

Now, let's be even more rational: Jhonny Peralta was traded because he was just starting to get expensive. His \$7M option wasn't going to be picked up, and they certainly weren't going to offer him arbitration (he might have accepted: he turned out getting a two-year deal from Detroit to play SS, where he's more valuable, but it would have been a breath-holder). They got an asset for a player they weren't going to use any more, and huzzahs all around. But permit me to offer a more radical notion here:

The Cleveland Indians traded Jhonny Peralta because he was *bad*.

Was he horrifying, atrocious, abysmal, spleen-explodingly bad? Heck, no. He wasn't that far away from being a league-average third baseman. But he didn't hit well enough (below average) and he didn't field well enough (also below average) and he didn't run the bases or situationally perform or inspire his teammates or do anything else but sport a spherical head and occupy the space between the shortstop and the third base line. He wasn't any good.

He was the *best performer we had*.

Consider this: Peralta's .307 wOBA and 92 wRC+ led Cleveland's 3B offensively. Jayson Nix had more OPS because of a few extra homers (.705 to .698), but posted a 91 wRC+ and a .305 wOBA. Andy Marte: .680 OPS, .293 wOBA, 82 wRC+. Luis Valbuena: caused boils, frog rain, and spontaneous combustion of housepets.

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*(Seriously, was Luis Valbuena the worst-LOOKING player Cleveland has had in a very long time or what? -15.2 VORP in 310 PA. -20.3 UZR/150 in **SIXTY-SIX INNINGS** with an .882 FPct as a 3B. Flames shooting out of my cat's ears. Just horrifying.)*

Defensively, though, Marte at least posted a positive UZR/150 (0.4). Nix was so teeth-gratingly putrid as to approach Valbuena's ineptitude with a -17.4 UZR/150. According to the With My Own Eyes™ test, Nix bypassed "Lame-Assed" and went straight to "Eye-Shielding."

So this is the thing: not ONE Cleveland third baseman performed at anything like League Average, and most hovered around Replacement Player status. I wonder why that is?

Maybe because ... **they actually WERE Replacement Players?**

I mean, think about it: what is the concept of a Replacement Player about? It's a guy who you can call up from AAA or pick up off waivers, right? Not just Ordinary Bob, but Free Sub-Ordinary Bob Who Anyone Could Have But Has Chosen Not To (or a non-ready yoot).

Valbuena: non-ready yoot, horrifying  
Nix: Picked up off waivers, horrifying  
Marte: Just waived by Cleveland, not interesting enough to horrify

Sure, Anderson Hernandez got a shot and so what. By the way, Spring Training NRI? You betcha.

So this is the problem in a nutshell: no team should have to use a Replacement Player for a long time. I guess if you're a really poor team breaking in a bunch of rookies and willingly taking lumps you might start more sub-ready kids than most teams, but really, the waiver-wire veteran is either a Player of Last Resort or an Indictment of Your Farm System.

C: Santana/Marson, ready callup/lumpy callup  
1B: LaPorta, lumpy callup (borderline Indictment)  
2B: Donald, lumpy callup  
SS: Cabrera, actual player  
3B: Horrorshow, Indictment  
LF:

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Duncan/Crowe, Indictment/lump\* callupCF: Brantley, lumpy callup (Sizemore, actual but injured player)RF: Choo, actual playerDH: Hafner, actual player

\* (*intentional*)

I mean, that's pretty freaking bad. Now, don't get me wrong: I LOVE that we got Jason Donald some reps. We learned a lot about Jason Donald: he's a little better with the stick than I thought, he can't play shortstop at ALL, he can hit major-league pitching, he earned Armando Galarraga a new car. I liked getting Mike Brantley some reps even though I don't think he's actually good. I really kind of liked letting Shell Duncan earn some big-league money: the man could be the RH half of a DH platoon or be a bench RH bat and you'd be getting your money's worth. But I hated, hated, HATED the third basemen. Hated them. Jayson Nix had surprising pop. Andy Marte pitched a whale of an inning. I hated watching them **play third base**.

What are our options at this point? In-house, I mean. Let's see:

**Nix:** hate this

**Marte:** probably going to leave, would hate this

**Frine Pan Hodges:** hate this

**Lonnie Chisenhall:** very unlikely to be ready, would not hate this, but would not be optimistic, either

**Cord Phelps:** AFL performance making Nix look like Brandon Inge with the glove, would not hate this, but would not be optimistic

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**Jason Donald** (assuming Phelps/Kipnis at 2B): no clue, would be prepared to hate

**Jared Goedert**: chile, please

The most INTERESTING option would be if Chisenhall forced his way into the conversation as an Opening Day starter. I view this as slightly less likely than a volcanic eruption in Texas. (It *could* happen. There are amonite fossils in the woods behind my house. It's not *going* to happen.) The most HORRIFYING prospect is that we sign Brandon Inge to a 30-year deal and he hits like Brandon Inge. (Actually, Inge has already signed, so we dodged that bullet.)

But what would the most PRODUCTIVE option be? I'm not sure. So that's what we'll be looking at this week. Maybe more than that. Depends on the strength of my stomach.