

Hot Stove- Hot Corner Series #3

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

Thursday, November 18 2010 5:15 PM - Last Updated Thursday, November 18 2010 9:29 PM



I think a few things are perfectly obvious about the Indians' probable "solution" to the issue of who would make the greatest positive impact by playing third base:

- 1) We're not going to spend a lot of money
- 2) We're not going to treat it as Top Priority
- 3) Any solution for 2011 must be viewed in light of Lonnie Chisenhall being ready no later than 2013
- 4) We don't actually have a very good idea of what we already have

Point (1), for example, rules out signing an Adrian Beltre. I lobbied for Beltre when he was with the Mariners, thinking we could get a year or so out of him if only for the defense, and I thought he'd hit better than he did in Seattle. It turned out I was right, but it was a lot more expensive than I'd expected, so I can hardly fault anyone for what was kind of a half-baked idea in the first place. *(We'd have had to trade something to Seattle when he was still under their control, and I don't know if we had "enough" to get him without paying 1.6 buttlloads of cash.)*

Shoot, (1) probably wouldn't have gotten us Brandon Inge. *(Full disclosure: I am relieved we did not get Brandon Inge. His "plus defense" seems to be all arm, not range, and he hits like a*

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sack of wet Lou Marsons.)

Point (2) makes you wonder why I'm writing so much about it in the first place. In my defense, there aren't a lot of questions about the 2011 team that I think have very interesting answers. I mean, take center field: there are certainly a couple of huge Open Questions about CF next season. Will Grady Sizemore be healthy? Will he be productive? Will he move to LF and let Mike Brantley play CF? Can either of them hit worth a damn? These are all fine questions. But like Tolstoy's happy families, they all have the same answer: "Wait until March, play them a lot, see if they produce." We're not going to go out and get a new center fielder until we know for certain that Sizemore's legs have, in fact, fallen completely off his body. We won't know that until they do or they don't. We won't know that until March. There is virtually nothing interesting to say about CF until March, except possibly the potential for Brantley and Sizemore to swap spots or their relative slots in the batting order. You could probably create a scenario in which the Indians somehow trade for Colby Rasmus or something, but this presses into angels-on-pinheads territory.

Point (3) is probably the most important: if it weren't true, the first two points would be thrown into question. If we looked through the system and saw our best option was a hope and a prayer, we'd probably up the priority of that pretty quickly, and that might even include spending money to solve the problem, a la Kerry Wood at Closer. By all reports that confirm my Confirmation Bias, Chisenhall will hit well and plays acceptable and improving defense at third base. (*Okay, that's a bit flippant, but really, scouting guys like this guy a lot.*) The thing is, I was struck by a line from a [chat with Kevin Goldstein](#)

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Wesley (Akron, OH): *The Indians seem destined for another poor year in '11. If you are the GM, do you give the kids, like Chisenhall, Phelps or Kipnis, a long look this spring?*

Kevin Goldstein: *I give them a long look to figure out how far away they are. Forcing them to the majors if they're not ready isn't going to accomplish anything in either the short or long term*

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That's a pretty good point that gets overlooked sometimes: for every Carlos Santana or Buster Posey who comes up and proves he's ready to go right away, there are a lot of guys who get thrust into a role they're not ready to handle. The minor leagues exist for a reason, and that

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reason isn't solely to hold down Super Two status. It's because it takes a lot of work, practice, and experience to become a major-league baseball player.

Look, there are other guys who know a helluva lot more than I do about minor-league players: Goldstein in general, for example, or [Tony Lastoria](#) for the Tribe. Without going into the fake specifics it would require me to specify fakily, I consider the chance of Lonnie Chisenhall being ready to play in the first half of 2011 to be something just short of "miraculous." He's doing fine. He's progressing nicely. He's on the regular development curve. He's not ready.

On the other hand, though, it would take a fairly amazing series of events for the Tribe to plunk someone down at 3B in 2011 that would involve derailing Chisenhall's likely appearance. (My personal guess is a Sept. call-up and competing for the starting gig in 2012.) There are, in my mind, three scenarios:

a) We somehow acquire a prospect who is both closer to the majors and more skilled than Chisenhall

b) We somehow acquire a young major-leaguer who is more skilled than Chisenhall and cost-controlled for at least three seasons

c) One of our existing options improves by a very large amount requiring scientific notation to represent properly

And item (c) is what point (4) is all about.

See, here's the thing: before we go galavanting about through other teams' farm systems looking for hidden gems and blocked players, we need to define exactly what it is we're looking for. To know that the Yankees have a credible AAA 3B who won't get much of a chance while Alex Rodriguez is productive is one thing, but if he's no better than, say, Jared Goedert, then what's the point? There is no point in looking for EXTERNAL solutions unless they are likely to be measurably more skilled and productive than the existing INTERNAL solutions.

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Here are the internal solutions as I see them, with what I consider to be rational guesses at their ceilings, floors, and "weighted average outcomes:"

Jayson Nix

As discussed [yesterday](#) , Nix' ceiling is basically Casey Blake. Right now, Casey Blake would be far more likely to produce more WAR (or whatever measure you choose) than Lonnie Chisenhall or any of our third basemen last season. His floor is basically what he was in Chicago in 2010, which is a wretched baseball player (.163/.268/.245) of little value to anyone regardless of defense. (For comparison, Mike Rouse hit .119/.200/.134 as an Indian, and he has been widely consider as the most fungal Cleveland player of recent memory.) Let's say Nix is told early in the spring to relax, that he gets 2011 to establish his value, and that he will play multiple positions but third base more than any other. But he gets 500 PA sink or swim, so don't press, just let the game slow down for him. Given a year's worth of major-league playing time under his belt over the last couple of seasons and this edict, I think Nix can get his average up in the .250-.260 range, keeping most of his power, but striking out too often to be truly productive. Something like a .255/.325/.425 batting line. This would actually be a measurable improvement over Jhonny Peralta's .246/.308/.389 line with the Indians last season. It would not actually be very good. The real challenge is for Nix to play adequate defense at third, which he clearly did not in 2010. I think the most likely scenario is that he will not.

Jared Goedert

Jared Goedert started last season like gangbusters, or at least like smallgroupwounders. After a horrid 2009, Goedert posted excellent overall offensive numbers at both AA Akron and AAA Columbus in 2010. The problem is twofold: he tailed off badly, suggesting either a first-half fluke, an injury, or a simple regression to the mean, and his defense was pretty lame. He made 18 errors in 205 chances in Columbus, and while errors aren't necessarily the best way to judge a third baseman's defense, reports I trust do not consider Goedert to be anything like a "plus defender." I would be inclined to make Goedert "prove it" in Columbus for at least another half a season. I think Goedert's ceiling is probably, say, Ty Wigginton (a useful player, to be sure), and his floor is The Theoretical Wes Hodges Particle That Never Materialized. His most likely outcome for 2010 is Columbus, but if thrust into the majors, I believe his weighted mean average would be "lousy."

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Cord Phelps

I'd love to see Phelps get a shot at second base. I think he is more offensively talented than Jason Donald. However, it should be noted that he was actually pretty crummy as a 22-year-old in High A before blossoming last year across AA and AAA. I'm not convinced his power spike in Columbus is sustainable: I think his ISO will eventually be closer to .100 than .200. (Maybe split the difference? Nah, under .150 IMO.) I think Phelps could absolutely have the kind of year in 2011 than Donald did in 2010. Of course, that's not really very good. Phelps is a lot better at making contact than Donald, though, which should help him be more valuable.

Why am I talking about second base? Because Phelps is an execrable third baseman.

Andy Marte

*O, Andy Marte
What will we do without you?
I hope to find out*

*More seriously,
We may have handled him wrong
But I do not care*

*The hole in his swing
Is still too large to project
Real major-league success*

*Defensively, he
Is better than bad options
I must say, "So what?"*

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*Placed on waivers,
I am not sure he will leave
But solution? No.*

Farewell and godspeed,

No hard feelings or ill will,

But it's time to go.

Luis Valbuena

plotz

There's your baseline. If you want someone else, he has to be better than that. Start your engines.