

## A Lazy Sunday Spent Prospecting

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}

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With the calendar about to flip to February, meaning that Spring Training is inching ever so closer, and as the Indians are out in full force on their “Tribe on Tour” in an attempt to drum up some interest for the coming season, the big news of the week comes in the form of a couple of prospect lists emerging from various sources with the Indians not being as well-represented as some corners might have expected them to be, given the...um, roster turnover since July of 2008.

Specifically, there seems to be some concern brewing over the fact that the Indians placed only one player in MLB.com’s Top 50 prospects, “only” three among Keith Law’s Top 100 and that Law ranked the Indians as the 17th best team in terms of organizational talent. Certainly the organizational ranking by Law was eyebrow-raising (he had the Indians #4 last year), but it was something that MLB.com’s [Jordan Bastian attempted to contextualize on his blog](#) when he said that, “there is good depth and many players on the cusp of reaching the big leagues, but the club lacks a pile of players that make the top-prospect-list-makers drool all over themselves.”

That would probably be the case for most organizations, but for a team that is in the midst of a “Rebuild/Reload/Whatever”, most Indians’ fans want to see the Indians at or near the top of all of these lists, with the players acquired for CC, Lee, and Victor dotting the top of them (and they really can’t, by virtue of most of those players no longer being “prospects” having accumulated either 50 IP or 130 AB...but we’ll get to that) or the recent high draftees at least coming in high enough to keep them warm in the cold of January.

Bastian goes further to [alleviate whatever fears may be out there](#) (and he links some of the

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---

“fears” articulated to him via Twitter in the aforementioned linked piece) as he gets used to the nature of the Cleveland sports fan, attempting to talk some folks down off of the 480 bridge:

*Rest assured, Tribe fans, the Indians' farm system is in good shape. Sure, the jury is still out on the overall return of the CC Sabathia and Cliff Lee deals, but Cleveland's Minor League system is widely considered one of the best in baseball. Last year's Draft haul only added to that evaluation.*

*If you like going with Baseball America, then know that BA has the Indians ranked seventh in the 2011 organizational rankings (ESPN's Keith Law disagreed, ranking them 17th). That's the third year in a row that the Tribe has cracked BA's Top 10 (third in 2010 and seventh in 2009). BA also rated the Indians' 2010 First-Year Player Draft as the best in the game.*

For some background on this, here are [Law's organizational rankings, listing the Tribe at #17](#) , his ranking them at

[#4 in his organizational rankings last year](#)

, as well as

[his Top 10 Prospects for the Tribe this year, via the ABJ](#)

. For your further reading enjoyment as long as we're talking ranking organizational talent on the farm, here is

[B-Pro's ranking of the Indians as having the 3rd most organizational talent last year](#)

(B-Pro ranked them #12 prior to the 2009 season), with B-Pro's organizational rankings for 2011 still not yet available.

Regardless, it was a near certainty that the Indians would drop in their organizational rankings, if only based on the players no longer eligible for these lists, most notably Santana, Carrasco, and Brantley along with Marson, Donald and, to an even lesser degree, Jeanmar and Tomlin. However, the list of players that graduated after 2009 (LaPorta and C. Perez most notably, among others) or younger players on the team despite exhausting their “prospect” status a couple of years ago (Cabrera, Masterson, among others) speak to how young the players are who are already in MLB for the Tribe.

By the end of the year, the team could have players in the lineup all of whom are 26 or younger, except for Choo, Hafner, and Sizemore. Additionally, the only pitchers that figure significantly into the 2011 rotation that are older than 26 are Carmona and Talbot (both 27) and Rafael Perez (29).

So if these young guys now on the parent club have “graduated” from prospect status and people are griping about only The Chiz making the MLB.com list and only 3 players (The Chiz, Kipnis, and Drew Pomz) making Keith Law's list when the Indians have been making trades for young talent for the better part of 2 ½ years, wouldn't it be instructive to look at where the current group of Indians' players (acquired via trade or drafted or however) have shown up on these prospect lists, even if it was when they were in the Brewers' organization, the Phillies' organization, the Cardinals' organization, or while a member of the Tribe?

Just to keep the hand-wringing to a minimum, let's do that and, for the purposes of “brevity”, I'll use Baseball America, Baseball Prospectus, Keith Law, MLB.com, and John Sickels for context

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---

here, listing the rankings only when the players have appeared in the Top 100 rankings of MLB for any of those rankings. As an aside, it is worth noting that John Sickels breaks up his lists to Top 50 hitters and Top 50 pitchers, so just be aware of that difference as it still makes up a "Top 100", just not as cleanly.

Going back as far as I can find lists that are applicable (and BA goes back the furthest while I can only find Keith Law's lists for the last two years) and announcing that while I'd love to provide links for each applicable ranking, in the best interests of my sanity and time...just trust me on these.

Let's go around the diamond and I'm keeping this (for now) limited to guys that have been on these prospect rankings in the last three years:



### **Carlos Santana**

Pre-2010 - #3 Keith Law

Pre-2010 - #8 B-Pro

Pre-2010 - #10 BA

Pre-2010 - #11 MLB.com

Pre-2010 - #5 John Sickels Hitting

Pre-2009 - #13 Keith Law

Pre-2009 - #33 B-Pro

Pre-2009 - #26 BA

Pre-2009 - #17 John Sickels Hitting

Not too much left up to the imagination here as Santana steadily rose up all of these lists from the time he arrived.

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---

### Lou Marson

Pre-2009 - #66 BA

Pre-2009 - #43 MLB.com

Yes, Lonnie Chisenhall is MLB.com's 36th ranked prospect going into this year...two years ago, MLB.com had Louis Glenn Marson (who could a convoluted platoon partner for Hafner going forward, something touched on in [the latest "Jon & Paul Plus Baseball"](#)) at #43.

### Matt MaTola

Pre-2009 - #30 B-Pro

Pre-2009 - #27 BA

Pre-2009 - #14 MLB.com

Pre-2009 - #29 John Sickels Hitting

Pre-2008 - #31 B-Pro

Pre-2008 - #23 BA

Pre-2008 - #19 John Sickels Hitting

Those are nearly universal top 50 rankings (remember, I can't find Law's list for Pre-2009 or Pre-2008) from the time that he was drafted until he was no longer a "prospect" - as determined by plate appearances. He's been a major disappointment to this point, but let's see where LaPorta stands after 2011 to see if these rankings were illusory or justified.

### Jason Kipnis

Pre-2011 - #56 Keith Law

It will be interesting to see where The Kipper comes in on the BA, B-Pro, and Sickels' lists for this year as he certainly asserted himself to the point that he was the 4th highest rated 2B by MLB.com and, [according to Jordan Bastian](#), if the MLB.com "was Top 100, Indians prospects Jason Kipnis, Alex White & Drew Pomeranz would all likely be included."

### Jason Donald

Pre- 2009 - #69 BA

As is the case with Tofu Lou, it is often forgotten that Donald was, in fact, a Top 100 prospect (at least according to BA) in the off-season prior to him being part of the Lee deal.

### Lonnie Chisenhall

Pre-2011 - #39 Keith Law

Pre-2011 - #36 MLB.com

Pre-2010 - #26 Keith Law

Pre-2010 - #43 B-Pro

Pre-2010 - #31 BA

Pre-2010 - #55 MLB.com

Pre-2010 - #25 John Sickels Hitting

Here's a great example of how these prospect lists vary as The Chiz moved up in MLB.com's ranking from last year to this (going from #55 last off-season to #36 in the most recent edition) and moved down in Law's rankings for the same time period (#26 last off-season to #39 this past week).

### Mike Brantley

## A Lazy Sunday Spent Prospecting

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Sunday, January 30 2011 8:10 AM - Last Updated Sunday, January 30 2011 10:53 AM

---

Pre-2010 - #71 Keith Law

Pre-2010 - #46 MLB.com

Pre-2010 - #50 John Sickels Hitting

Like Donald and Marson, Brantley often gets overlooked in the context of being a "top" prospect as Law, MLB.com, and Sickels all had him in their Top 100 (or even Top 50) going into last year.

### Nick Weglarz

Pre-2009 - #83 B-Pro

Pre-2009 - #57 BA

Wegz seems to have fallen off of the radar after getting some love prior to the 2009 season, but now that he's in AAA, he could be a name that surprises in 2011. Of course, he could just as easily be a name that floats away.



### Carlos Carrasco

Pre-2009 - #43 B-Pro

Pre-2009 - #52 BA

Pre-2009 - #28 MLB.com

Pre-2009 - #24 John Sickels Pitching

Pre-2008 - #68 B-Pro

Pre-2008 - #54 BA

Pre-2008 - #28 MLB.com

Pre-2007 - #37 B-Pro

Pre-2007 - #41 BA

Pre-2007 - #31 John Sickels Pitching

That's three straight years on Top 100 lists (peaking on the MLB.com lists at #28 for two years in a row) and while the stagnation on these lists is noticeable, Carrasco was unquestionably a Top 100 prospect...and not just for a short time.

### Justin Masterson

Pre-2008 - #53 B-Pro

Pre-2008 - #64 BA

Pre-2008 - #40 John Sickels Pitching

Masterson is an interesting one as the Red Sox moved him quickly up the ladder of the Minor

## A Lazy Sunday Spent Prospecting

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---

League system and into their bullpen, which means that he didn't really spend more than one year as a "top prospect". In the year that he was, he easily made the cut of the Top 100 of multiple lists.

### **Mitch Talbot**

Pre-2007 - #36 John Sickels Pitching

Yeah, back before the 2007 season, even Talbot Unleashed his own brand of Fury on one of these listings.

### **David Huff**

Pre-2009 - #36 John Sickels Pitching

I'll get to the "misses" on these lists (that I'm not listing here as they aren't still on the 40-man), but Huff on a list, ranked higher on Sickels' pitching list than Masterson was the previous year and just 12 slots behind Carrasco on Sickels' Pre-2009 Pitching list.

### **Chris Perez**

Pre-2009 - #67 B-Pro

Pre-2009 - #91 BA

Pre-2009 - #20 John Sickels Pitching

Pre-2008 - #69 B-Pro

Pre-2008 - #97 BA

Though Perez has always been a reliever (and relievers aren't usually very highly rated on these lists), here's a great example of a player that hangs around these lists at the bottom end of them and explodes onto the scene when promoted to MLB.

### **Alex White**

Pre-2010 - #77 B-Pro

Pre-2010 - #65 BA

Pre-2010 - #31 John Sickels Pitching

Like his 2009 Draft mate Jason Kipnis, it will be interesting to see where White falls on the BA, B-Pro, and Sickels' lists as you'll remember (or maybe you won't) that [Jordan Bastian passed along](#) that White (as well as Kipnis and Pomz) would have been on MLB.com's list had it gone to 100 and Keith Law dismissed White as more of a reliever than a starter.

### **Drew Pomeranz**

Pre-2011 - #60 Keith Law

Since Pomeranz (who was [interviewed by B-Pro's David Laurila in an interesting piece here](#)) has yet to throw a pitch for the Indians, this is all based on reports prior to him being drafted so my guess is that he's going to come in higher than this on BA's list (as they LOVE them some high draft picks) and will probably come in around here on B-Pro's list. Regardless, all of this is based on nothing having to do with Pomz throwing a pitch in the Minors yet, so we'll see...

### **Jason Knapp**

Pre-2010 - #82 B-Pro

Pre-2010 - #64 BA

## A Lazy Sunday Spent Prospecting

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Sunday, January 30 2011 8:10 AM - Last Updated Sunday, January 30 2011 10:53 AM

---

Like Pomz, this one is still based largely on projection and I wouldn't be surprised if Knapp shows up somewhere on the still-to-be-announced lists as his 47 K in 28 IP last year is likely to cause some scout somewhere to drool over his radar gun.

### **Hector Rondon**

Pre-2010 - #51 Keith Law

Pre-2010 - #32 John Sickels Pitching

Often a forgotten man after he went down last year, Rondon figures to be out all of 2011 after undergoing Tommy John surgery.

### **Nick Hagadone**

Pre-2010 - #100 Keith Law

Pre-2010 - #91 B-Pro

Pre-2010 - #44 BA

Pre-2010 - #56 MLB.com

Seeing as how Hagadone was one of the more highly-rated players in the system going into last year for Hagadone and with news that he's officially going to be transferred to the bullpen, it will be interesting to see if he sticks around on the BA or B-Pro lists for Pre-2011, based on projection.

All told, every single one of those players have been rated as Top 100 prospects at some point since prior to the 2007 season. The other "veterans" on the team have found themselves similarly on prospect lists through the years (listed without comment), and let's look at those as an introduction to the point of this whole discourse:

### **Fausto Carmona**

Pre-2006 - #50 MLB.com

Pre-2004 - #76 BA

### **Travis Hafner**

Pre-2003 - #46 BA

Pre-2003 - #10 John Sickels Hitting

### **The BLC**

Pre-2005 - #51 BA

Pre-2005 - #25 John Sickels Hitting

Pre-2004 - #44 John Sickels Hitting

Pre-2003 - #23 John Sickels Hitting

### **Grady Sizemore**

Pre-2005 - #17 John Sickels Hitting

Pre-2004 - #9 BA

Pre-2004 - #11 John Sickels Hitting

### **Jayson Nix**

Pre-2004 - #94 BA

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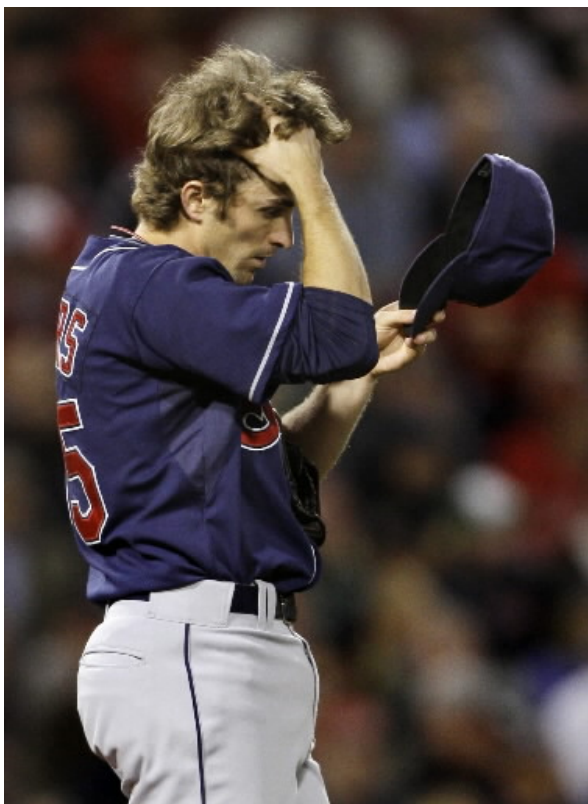
Sunday, January 30 2011 8:10 AM - Last Updated Sunday, January 30 2011 10:53 AM

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Pre-2004 - #26 John Sickels Hitting  
Hafner, Choo, Cabrera

Interestingly, Asdrubal Cabrera never was listed as a Top 100 player by any of the rankings that I could find and looking at these lists in the context of what these players became (and I'm talking about the former incarnation of Pronk, not the Pronk Lite we see now) as the only one of those players that ever cracked a Top 20 overall was Sizemore.

Of course, the Indians had some "can't miss" players in the past like Victor and CC that panned out, but the highest that Clifton Phifer Lee was ever rated was as the 30th best prospect from BA prior to the 2003 season, which is only 23 spots lower than the #53 rating that Jeremy Sowers would receive prior to the 2006 season.



That's the rub in all of this inexact science as [the old BA lists](#) are littered with former Indians like Atom Miller or Wes Hodges or Chuck Lofgren or Trevor Crowe (seriously...who came in at #60 on the pre-2007 B-Pro list and #64 on the BA list from the same year, with Dustin Pedroia coming in at #77) or Beau Mills (#87 on the pre-2008 BA list...ahead of Chris Perez), who did in fact finish in some of these Top 100 lists in a particular year

With the benefit of hindsight, you see how absurd the idea of [a Pre-2006 prospect list](#) looks with Jeremy Sowers at #17, putting him behind Marte, (#7 on the same list), and ahead of Anthony Reyes (who was #26), and Fernando Cabrera (#43)...and three of those players figured to contribute to a 2006 Tribe team that was coming off of the 93-win 2005 season.

We all know how that played out and these lists are an endless source of fascination, when you go far enough back and look at some of these lists, [you see Marte ahead of...well, everyone](#)

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---

[and Mike Aubrey ahead of Ryan Howard and Hanley Ramirez or Anthony Reyes ahead of Matt Cain](#)

Even better – [there's Josh Barfield one slot ahead of David Wright on the Pre-2004 BA list](#) .

This could go on and on...

Regardless, you get where this is going as these prospect lists are great conversation fodder and certainly the inclusion on any of these lists is a positive in terms of a particular player's perception. However, all it takes is a cursory glance at past prospect lists to see if these ranking services have as many "hits" and "misses" as most organizations do as some of these players flame out while others who are ranked lower on these lists (or not ranked at all) surprise when ascending to MLB.

Don't take that to mean that my assertion is that the Indians will be justified by their current batch of prospects when it all comes out in the wash. Rather the crash-and-burn of the likes of Sowers, Miller, Aubrey, Crowe, Lofgren, and Hodges have given me pause to simply equate the prospect ranking of a particular player to an assumed amount of success (if any) for said player.

Again, sometimes players surprise (Choo peaked at #51 on the BA list all the way back in 2005 and Asdrubal never made a list), others fail to reach the level of success predicted for them for reasons as varied as a pulley strain (Miller) to an inability to adjust to MLB (Sowers), while the rare special players fulfill their potential (the way that Sizemore, CC, and Victor did) and continue to develop until they attain the star status "expected" of them.

That's not to discount these rankings or any prospect rankings as there certainly seems to be an order in any organization of highly-thought-of prospects (with the current group for the Tribe being Chiz, The Kipper, Al White and Pomz quite universally) and somewhat- promising guys that are either going to take the next step, simply be 40-man fodder, or disappear completely.

The truth is that I don't know which guys, either on the parent club or in the Minors, fall into which category and neither do any of these other national lists. While this is treading over old territory, I know, the only way to accurately determine which of these young players (whether they retain "prospect" status or not) succeed in MLB is to get them up to the parent club (assuming they've "earned" it) and to find some gold among the iron pyrite.

Regardless of that fact (and that many people realize that), whenever these things come out, there is the requisite celebration or gnashing of teeth...but to what end?

In the Indians' situation (as well as about 24 other teams in MLB), they need to not only assemble talent, but assemble talent that arrives all at once or only a couple of years apart from each other. In Acta, they seem to have [a "hands-on" manager](#) who seems [genuinely excited about the future that lies ahead](#)

, sometimes at the expense of common sense. However, this organization assembled talent that arrived all at once from 1993 to 1995 and experienced success based on the contributions of those young players and did it again from 2003 to 2005 and experienced fleeting success based on the assembled young talent.

## A Lazy Sunday Spent Prospecting

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---

While there is some truth that not much can truly be gleaned from these lists, how about the fact that the current Indians are well-represented in the BA lists from 2009, with the specific players and rankings here:

### 2009 BA Top 100 Prospects

- #26 – Santana
- #27 – LaPorta
- #52 – Carrasco
- #57 – Weglarz
- #66 – Marson
- #69 – Donald
- #91 – C. Perez

Beyond that, there's Masterson the 2008 list (#64) that "graduated" and players that appeared for the first time on the BA Top 100 in the 2010 list:

### 2010 BA Top 100 Prospects (only those appearing for 1st time on BA list)

- #31 – Chisenhall
- #44 – Hagadone
- #64 – Knapp
- #65 – White

That's 12 players, 7 of whom will be on the Opening Day roster and 3 of whom (Chiz, White, and Wegz) who are likely to ascend to the parent club at some point in 2011.

Further, we'll add Kipnis and Pomeranz in a few weeks to that list of players that appeared in the BA Top 100 lists of the last three years when they are ranked in the Pre-2011 rankings as players that figure to play roles in the next incarnation of the Indians.

Seeing as how the Indians that appeared in the 2007 BA list were Atom Miller (#23), Chuck Lofgren (#54), Trevor Crowe (#64), and Brian Barton (#86) and knowing how all of that turned out, the influx of talent – though painful – puts the Indians back to where they need to be, attempting to get another group of young, similarly-aged and similarly-advanced players all at the big league level or just beneath it in an attempt to push open yet another "window of contention" when they're still smarting from the last window slamming shut on their fingers so fast.

Is that enough?

With teams built like this and with the young players that make up those teams, only time will tell...