

## Defending the Defensive: Tribe Signs Orlando Cabrera

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

Friday, February 11 2011 6:00 PM - Last Updated Sunday, February 13 2011 10:24 AM

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It really is funny how quickly your opinion can change.

If the Indians had gone the entire offseason with just Austin Kearns, I would have readily admitted that they were smart to not add someone else.

But we have something to test that. With less than a week before pitchers and catchers are scheduled to report to Goodyear, there has been an addition. A major league addition and not the one we thought would happen.

On Thursday the Indians agreed to terms with shortstop Orlando Cabrera. The 36-year-old infielder will presumably get a one-year Major League deal and it is widely believed he'll be in contention to start at second base.

Not shortstop, the position he's played his entire career and has two Rawlings Gold Glove

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Awards at.

Entrenched at shortstop is fellow Cabrera, the one that goes by Asdrubal. Despite a decrease in range, the Indians seemed to be committed to Asdrubal and his defense at the position. Would you blame them if they believed his regression was due to injuries and lack of commitment to conditioning?

So Cabrera, the Orlando version that was signed to a deal, is clearly on board to man either second or third. Okay Cabrera has never played third, so yeah, let's just scratch that idea.

Cabrera is here to play second base. Right now we believe he signed a Major League contract with a team that wouldn't hand out guaranteed Major League contracts to someone who is going to be a backup.

After signing wild life expert Jack Hannahan and Adam "Hit Softly and Carry a Big Stick" Everett to minor league deals, they clearly are not in the business of giving a guaranteed contract to just anyone.

Now to the point where opinions change.

If the Indians were so set, as set as a Jayson Nix/Jason Donald battle at second base could be, at second, but not third, why would they sign Orlando Cabrera?

Would it not make more sense to sign someone at third base, if you were going to sign anyone at all?

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Prior logic, and the logic I used, would say yes, that would make most sense. Don't sign anyone unless you sign them for third base.

Hear me out though. That logic, as sound as it is, can be dented with the right circumstances.

Behold one of those circumstances.

There are a few reasons as to why this makes sense.

1.) There was no one at third base worth signing.

Okay maybe there was, but really was there? Yes there were/are third base options, some of which could be had for cheap or even minor league deals.

Yeah, Pedro Feliz at a minor league deal or Nick Punto for a little under at \$1 million is decent and better than Jack Hannahan, but what do they bring to the table? A little bit of defense?

2.) Here's the biggie, because it validates number one. Orlando Cabrera is a veteran presence.

Not only that, but Orlando Cabrera can still play a little bit of defense. Is it a gamble that he can play a solid second base? Hey, he's over the age of 35 and some think he's lost some range at shortstop (safe assumption, probably true), so a move to second might actually be for the best.

Now that we've equated that, the big reason for all of this. Cabrera brings a bit of an attitude, a swagger to any team he goes to. Just ask the Twins, just ask the Red Sox, just ask the Angels. The guy has a winning attitude about him, everywhere he goes he seems to play a successful and meaningful role.

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Did I forget to mention the Cincinnati Reds, 2010 NL Central Division Champions?

[This is from spring training](#) a little over a year ago when Cabrera was new to the club.

*"If you show up at the park every day for just personal numbers, it really gets annoying," Cabrera said. 'If I see something, guys getting off track or focused on things not important, yeah, I will say something to them. I like to play hard. I like to play smart. I like to show that at any given moment, you can beat any team.'*

*Cabrera, 35, has become nomadic his past few years with stops on six different teams since 2004. But perhaps it's no coincidence that he's also been to the postseason in five of the past six seasons, including the past three consecutive years with the Angels, White Sox and Twins.*

*Most of the reviews from his previous stops were that Cabrera was a positive presence in the clubhouse."*

And to prove the point, MLB.com's Mark Sheldon [six months later after the Reds had clinched](#) .

*"This is no mere coincidence. Teams have coveted Cabrera, hoping that his postseason experience and veteran leadership were the missing ingredients that could increase their chances for success.*

*'I care about winning and losing, that's it,' Cabrera said. 'For me, it's always been a big motivation -- knowing there is something at the end as a payoff. I'm really disappointed when it doesn't happen that way, regardless of the numbers I put up. The numbers always look better when your team goes to the playoffs.'"*

Bench coach Chris Speier equated Cabrera to somewhat of a field general. In a way, Cabrera is

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an on-the-field coach that also can still field the ball.

Now don't get me wrong here, before we proceed, this isn't me saying the signing of Cabrera will equate to an AL Central Division Championship. But let me take you back to 2010 when the Indians signed someone that had a tendency to get naked.

Mike Redmond's signing as backup catcher was one that was perplexing to most. Why does Cleveland need to spend their only major league contract and a small chunk of change on someone who's barely going to play?

Veteran leadership? On the field coach? Didn't we bring in Sandy Alomar Jr. to coach Carlos Santana?

A year later though, with one fixed Fausto Carmona, how many people are really angered about that signing? Why do I ask you questions you know the answer to?

That's how I prove my point. Which I'm now getting back to.

There's something to be said about a player who can energize a ballclub and command respect from his teammates before he walks into the clubhouse. Cabrera was with the Reds for a few weeks and he had already been pegged as a leader. He came in and was a leader, not by saying he was a leader, but by saying he would hold teammates accountable.

You can bet the same thing will happen when he walks into Goodyear. There is now another person other than Manny Acta to hold players on this squad accountable. And this one is a peer. Let's assume he's starting at second base everyday as well. If he's playing everyday, he's likely to have the attention of his teammates. They'll respect him and listen to him.

Like with Redmond, I'm sure the same concern will come up. Really? Signing this guy for veteran leadership? Why?

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I'll skip the theatrics this time. This is a young team! There are two players born before 1980 on the 40-man roster and one now may get the boot because of the Cabrera signing.

If you truly want to build a championship team, you need leadership before you believe you will be a contender. You need guidance at an early point in the process, even if you don't feel there will be a chance to contend for a championship.

If you have the opportunity to get some championship experience in your clubhouse in someone like an Orlando Cabrera, you take that opportunity.

Make no mistake; this signing is little about the offense and partially about solidifying the infield defense. Think of it this way if you want to think Cabrera is on the down end defensively. He's a seasoned vet and a smart player with the glove. Will he be the best? No, but he won't make the mistakes someone like a young Jason Donald might make.

He can be assuring to the pitchers in front of him that they can pitch their game because the guy not only will not make stupid mistakes, he'll make sure the others don't.

I'm also going to venture to guess Chris Antonetti and crew have to be mortified about the prospects of playing one of Donald or Nix at third and the other at second. Now they can try their hand at both by working out some sort of utility/third base platoon to find out which one works.

This is far better than throwing one magnet against the fridge and hoping it sticks.

Cabrera's signing will pay dividends this season, but like with most moves the Indians make, the real benefits may not be realized right away.

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*You can follow Nino on Twitter @ [TheTribeDaily](#) where he often changes his opinion. You should also follow his [blog on Facebook](#) so he can sleep at night.*