

Primed and Ready: A Guide to Indians Spring Training

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

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Officially, pitchers and catchers have reported to Goodyear, Arizona as the annual signal that spring training has indeed started. Soon the position players will join the fray, if they haven't already, and most have.

Every year, I take on a large up-taking that I like to call my yearly spring training primer. I break down every player coming into big league camp and then top it off with what can be best described as a manual or guide for everything Indians at spring training.

This guide, if you will, was originally posted on my blog. I've cleaned it up, added in a few things, made a few changes, and am now presenting it as more of a guide, rather than just one long rambling post about how excited I am for the return of baseball.

In this guide, you'll find.

Player Watch

-Three players that are worth keeping an eye on as spring progresses. These are three that could generate attention or notice based off how they perform.

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-A prospect dark horse is a player that is not considered a favorite to win a spot on the opening day roster, but could surprise and do just that.

-The 40-man watch is for players that could find themselves or are already on the roster bubble. These are all players that could lose their 40-man spot this spring or early in the season.

Injury Watch

-A summation of all the injuries/offseason surgeries that are worth keeping an eye on or need updated.

The Spring Progression

-Every position that is assumed to be up for grabs is covered and all the players up for that position as well.

-I ask and answer five questions pertaining to the beginning of the season or spring training itself.

Projections

-25 Man Roster Projection

-Lineup Projections (VS LHP/RHP)

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-Four Deep Depth Chart: This is my best guess as far as the chain reaction would go for each position. If a starter goes down, who is next up?

I usually post this portion of my primer on the blog the day of Pitchers & Catchers reporting and with that I say this as you prepare for 4,500-plus words of insanity.

As I say every year.... Today is the day we've been waiting for...Maybe.

But since today isn't the day we've been waiting for, I guess last Tuesday was the day we've been waiting for...Maybe

-

Player Watch

Three Up

Lou Marson, C: Lou Marson is an interesting name to keep an eye on this spring because there is a silver lining to the offensive year he had in 2010. It can't possibly get much worse can it? Marson hit .195 over 87 games for Cleveland in 2010 and with Columbus he hit .202 in 37 games. Defensively he was good, throwing out the second most base runners among AL backstops. Not bad for someone who only played in 87 games.

Marson is actually younger than Carlos Santana, so in some way, there is some hope that maybe he'll come around offensively. If the Indians want to start Marson in Columbus to get regular at-bats, it will depend on what Marson does this spring. With Santana essentially being the backup first baseman, the backup catcher on this team will play more than a normal backup, so Marson can't hit his weight and expect to contribute, something he didn't even do last year.

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Matt LaPorta, 1B: Word on the street is that Matt LaPorta is in great shape as a result of actually spending the offseason conditioning and preparing to play a 162 game season. That's a big change from what he did last year, spending his winter months rehabbing from surgeries and injuries. With confidence that he's going to be the opening day first baseman, an adjustment to his swing that was made last year in Columbus and the offseason of conditioning, LaPorta could be setting himself up for a breakout year in 2011. Spring should be a good indicator for all of us in terms of what he could bring to the table.

Vinnie Pestano, RP: There will be a point in 2011 when Vinnie Pestano is pitching in the Indians bullpen. The question is when will that point be? Will it be from the outset right of spring? Will it be in mid-April when someone gets hurt or at the end of May when the bullpen implodes? Let's hope none of those scenarios happens and Pestano makes his 2011 debut due to the least painful reason. Pestano certainly has an opportunity to win one of the two-to-three bullpen jobs that are up for grabs this spring. And other than Jensen Lewis, he probably is the "hottest" out of the competitors in terms of how he ended 2010.

Prospect Dark Horse

Zach Putnam, RP: If you want a name that could come out of nowhere to win a spot on the roster, you could find few better bets than Zach Putnam. Despite never really blowing the doors off statistically, Putnam has pushed his way through the system at a fantastic rate. His upside and stuff play up in the bullpen way better than they do when he starts. The Indians must love his potential and what they see out of him on the mound, because they keep pushing him and he doesn't back down. What if he actually comes out and puts up the stats that blow you away? Denying him a spot in the pen would be hard to do.

40 Man Endangered Species

Aaron Laffey, RP: He has options left, but that doesn't matter as long as Laffey has been around. Laffey's status on this team has always been a question mark. Now that he's most likely a full-time reliever, there stands a better chance of disposing of him if the Indians see fit. He's probably on the lower end of this list, but he's still on it.

Jensen Lewis, RP: With no options left, if the Indians want to send Jensen Lewis down to

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Columbus, they'll have to pass him through waivers first. For that reason, I think Lewis is probably the lowest on this list of "endangered species." He should be safe, but keep in mind his lack of options if he gets off to a bad start and the Indians want to make a call to Columbus. They simply can't put him on the shuttle anymore.

Jess Todd, RP: There was thought that Jess Todd could be on the outs with the Rule V Draft. That still may be the case, but with guys like Pestano and Herrmann pushing ahead, and others like Stowell and Putnam on the horizon, he better pick it up. Joe Martinez was his security blanket, so if there's any relief business that needs taken care of, Todd may be on the chopping block. We better see "The Todd" in Cleveland sometime this season, or he will soon lose his 40-man status.

Jayson Nix, 2B: Nix is probably the front-runner to take over third to start the year but he is no stranger to the waiver wire and that is where he'll likely find himself if he doesn't come out of the gates playing well defensively. His offensive is marginal, but if he is putrid with the glove, he won't be worth keeping around.

Trevor Crowe, OF: With Nick Weglarz nearing his arrival and now a younger and more quicker type of fourth outfielder on the 40-man in Zeke Carrera, Manny Acta's man-crush on Crowe may not be enough to save him. You don't need two of the same type of player on the 40-man but if a need arises early, Crowe could play himself onto the active roster. He could also play himself off the 40-man if a need arises somewhere else.

Shelley Duncan, OF: There were times in the offseason that you thought he may be on the outs, especially when they signed Austin Kearns, but Duncan's survival made you think the Indians like him a lot. Duncan has endeared himself to the organization and clearly they've got a spot for him, or else they would have already axed him from the 40-man.

Injury Watch

Adam Miller, RP - Finger

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Adam Miller is not on the big league invite list, despite some laboring over adding him to the 40-man roster in preparation for the Rule V Draft. But Miller will be with the Indians and the early word? He's going to participate like a normal pitcher but we're rapidly approaching the moment of truth. Can he pitch consistently without getting hurt and will he be somewhere near the pitcher of old? Miller will contend for a spot in Columbus and he has to win that if he ever wants to reach that major league goal.

Hector Rondon, SP - Elbow (Tommy John Surgery)

Nope... Not this year. Hector Rondon is a prospect to boot, so the chances of him even pitching in a game above Rookie ball are slim. Rondon sat out most of 2010 due to the injury, but he and the Indians didn't opt for surgery until the end of the season, hoping simple rest and rehab would let everything heal. That didn't happen and now Rondon will be out for 2011 as well. He'll likely gain an extra option year due to missing the season.

Anthony Reyes, SP - Elbow (Tommy John Surgery)

One year later and here we are again. Anthony Reyes didn't officially pitch for Cleveland last year in his attempt to come back from Tommy John Surgery. He did see some time in the minor leagues, but in an effort to help Anthony forget what happened, we won't even mention the numbers or the starts. They were that bad. Now Reyes has more than a year and an additional offseason of strengthening under his belt, but it still will be an uphill battle. With his mechanics he not only is he trying to adjust to having his elbow put back together with Elmer's glue and rubber bands, he has to adjust to maybe a change in mechanics so he doesn't do it again. We remember what Jake Westbrook went through last year, and that was Jake Westbrook. Reyes could benefit from a little bit of extended spring training and maybe a rehab tour, but likely, the worst of his comeback trail is over.

Bryce Stowell, RP - Elbow

Some believe that the guy that hit 100 MPH on the gun last year was due a call-up in September. We'll never know for sure as Stowell strained the elbow on his throwing arm. The strain ended Stowell's season prematurely either way, but shouldn't be causing him any issues this spring. It's still something to keep an eye on though as elbow strains are never good

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precursors.

Carlos Santana, C - Knee

An impressive rookie campaign was cut short one week in Boston when Santana suffered damaged LCL as the result of a collision at home plate. Initially, broken leg, ripped up knee, torn ACL, everything short of death was expected. Santana underwent surgery and now over a half a year later, he's been cleared for 100% activity this spring. I'm sure the Indians will hold him back slightly, easing him a little easier than they would if he was 100% healthy and without concern, but he's as close to ready as you are going to get coming back from a knee surgery. He should be go to go for the start of spring games and a definite yes for April 1st, barring any set-backs.

Jayson Nix, 2B - Noggin

One of the reasons Jayson Nix's campaign in Puerto Rico wasn't very telling was the fact that he missed nine games after being hit in the head. Nix resumed play, and should be fine this spring.

Asdrubal Cabrera, SS - Arm

We all know by now, but Asdrubal Cabrera had his arm sat on by Jhonny Peralta. The result of that was a broken arm, sad. Cabrera is completely healed, but he sure didn't look like himself after his return. Let's see how he looks, in addition to him supposedly getting in better shape this offseason.

Grady Sizemore, OF - Left Knee

The knee of Grady Sizemore is clearly the center of attention. Other than Tommy John Surgery, all the other ailments mentioned in this section are cuts and bruises compared to the

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micro-fracture surgery Sizemore had on his knee. The surgery was done in early June, so he's had months between now and then. But this is a bit of an experimental case in regards to baseball players. Sizemore won't get into games until the middle of March, but Manny Acta recently tweeted he took his first batting practice session on Saturday. The knee will be a hot topic all spring and until Grady Sizemore is in the starting lineup on April 1st, no one will rest.

Nick Weglarz, OF - What's New?

Pretty soon Nick Weglarz is going to be a bionic man. He's got rods in his body and god knows what else has been done to him. In the offseason, Weglarz played in winter league ball after undergoing surgery on his thumb that cut his season short. Then he hurt his back. Hopefully that big bruising body is all healthy and ready to go.

The Spring Progression

Position Battles

Final Three Bullpen Spots

Contenders: Justin Germano, Frank Herrmann, Josh Judy, Aaron Laffey, Jensen Lewis, Joe Martinez, Doug Mathis, Vinnie Pestano, Zach Putnam, Bryce Stowell, Jess Todd

I wouldn't even consider a good portion of these guys. Todd, Mathis, Martinez, and Germano are all fodder if you ask me. The real contest is between Herrman, Laffey, Judy, Putnam, Stowell, and Pestano for two of the spots. I think Jensen Lewis is pretty much guaranteed a spot given that they took time to tender him an offer in the offseason. Out of those six options, the two I like best are Pestano and Judy. I like the young guys and I think one of the two will win a spot based off performance. Putnam and Stowell are nice, but they are not on the 40-man roster and I can see the Indians opting to start them in Columbus no matter what. Herrmann is very much well in the mix after last season and then you have Aaron Laffey, the wild card that the club still has no clue what they are doing with.

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Fifth



Rotation Spot

Contenders: Jeanmar Gomez, David Huff, Doug Mathis, Anthony Reyes, Josh Tomlin

The two names you want to watch here the most are probably Josh Tomlin and David Huff. Anthony Reyes has too much to prove, Doug Mathis stands little shot and deep down, even if he pitches well, I think the Indians want Jeanmar Gomez to get a little more Triple-A seasoning. That leaves an advanced Josh Tomlin and a dog-housed David Huff. If you made me pick one right now, I'd pick David Huff based off the hope he can come in and salvage his career. But if you are telling me the competition will be one as it was last year, Tomlin presents more of a challenge to Huff than Carlos Carrasco did, mainly because Carlos Carrasco probably didn't think he had a legitimate shot at beating out Huff. Tomlin had a good rookie campaign and isn't really someone who has to learn much about pitching at the major league level.

Starting Second Baseman

Contenders: Orlando Cabrera, Jason Donald, Adam Everett, Jayson Nix

This is Orlando Cabrera's job to lose. You'd be hard pressed to put a guy your giving a guaranteed one million to on the bench over Jayson Nix or Adam Everett. Let's not fool ourselves.

Starting Third Baseman

Contenders: Jason Donald, Jared Goedert, Jack Hannahan, Jayson Nix

The assumption towards the end of the offseason was that Jason Donald and Jayson Nix would compete for jobs, but it really didn't matter because both would likely win. It just wasn't clear who would go where. Now it looks like they are battling each other for one starting spot at third base. Now the loser could conceivably lose out on the third base job and claim the backup infielder job, but that may not happen if Nix wins. Donald could win and Nix is much more likely to win a backup job. Jared Goedert and Jack Hannahan could be in the mix, but unless you morph them, they probably don't stand a chance. On defense alone, Hannahan is the pick over anyone, but he can't hit worth a lick. Goedert might be the pick based off offense (at least 1/3rd of a season's worth of offense), but he can't play defense. Truly the Indians might have their minds made up in sending Donald to Columbus after the Cabrera signing.

Backup Infielder Spot

Contenders: Orlando Cabrera, Jason Donald, Adam Everett, Jared Goedert, Jack Hannahan, Jayson Nix, Cord Phelps, Luis Valbuena

Before the Orlando Cabrera signing, Adam Everett probably had a strangle-hold on this position. Now with essentially a guaranteed contract given to Cabrera, Everett is redundant. If he could play third, he'd have more a chance but we don't know if that is possible. If he can, then he may be worth taking over Luis Valbuena. Otherwise it looks like Luis Valbuena's spot to lose. This is Valbuena though, so losing is always an option. The loser of Nix/Donald at third will be Valbuena's stiffest competition, lucky them.

Outfield/Bench Spot

Contenders: Jordan Brown, Travis Buck, Trevor Crowe, Shelley Duncan

It is conceivable that the Indians go with someone like a Shelley Duncan as their other bench player (over a Nix/Valbuena/Donald/Everett) because he can play first base as well as the outfield. But the likelihood of them carrying five bonafied outfielders is slim. Buck was probably signed for depth in Columbus and if Duncan isn't around, Trevor Crowe, Jordan Brown and Ezequiel Carrera are still there. Austin Kearns could play first base in a pinch but it is expected that if LaPorta doesn't start at first, Santana will. Nix and Valbuena could also probably play first in a pinch, but who would want that?

Five Burning Questions Headed into Spring Training

1. How will the top of the order shake out, with or without Sizemore?

This is an interesting question because we don't know how Acta will choose to integrate Grady and if he will even have to. We saw him move Sizemore into the two-spot last year from the start, but is that something he wants to go back to? Hafner won't be hitting cleanup and that means there will not be three left-handed hitters stack in the middle if he were to do so. How will he use Michael Brantley at first? Does he want to throw Brantley in the fire right from the get-go? These are all questions that begin to get answered as the games start as his lineups may clue us in to what direction he may be leaning.

2. Who will Orlando Cabrera's addition impact the most?

It's looking more and more like the Cabrera addition is going to impact Jason Donald the most. He could win the third base job, that's a fact. But if he doesn't, the club will likely want him getting everyday reps in Columbus rather than being the utility player. Even though he is perceived to be a utility player in the future, the club wants him to play now and the Cabrera signing definitively eats up one of the starting spots that were assumed to go to Nix and Donald. With only one spot now open, Donald likely is the odd man out and because of that, likely

destined for Columbus.

3. What happens if a starter is signed?

Well most importantly, it depends on if that pitcher is a minor league signing. The Indians are said to not want to add Bonderman unless it is just that. They've had the discussions with Millwood, but they won't give him the four million he's seeking? Would they sign him to a guaranteed deal if he took, say one million? Obviously if one is signed, it really puts a damper on the fifth spot and it is likely one of the two (if that is the case and they earn their spot) will slide into the third or fourth spot and push everyone else down. I think that is really unlikely at this point though, but you never say never.

4. Who's closest to the parent club in terms of prospects?

I think it has to be Cord Phelps. The guy is gaining versatility and he's such an experienced college player who has really taken every challenge at the minor league level. I think he's the first guy up this season. If Jayson Nix goes nuclear-disaster on us at third, I think Phelps will be the guy this team calls on because you can only get away with playing him like Mark DeRosa for so long. The relievers will all get their shots but it is rather unpredictable in terms of when and how that will happen. In terms of position players though, I think Cord Phelps is the guy we see first. I think we'll see Weglarz at some point and if he shows good health Chisenhall on the same time-table as Santana was last year. Kipnis is a long shot.

5. What happens if Grady Sizemore can't go?

There is a definitive answer to this question. At least the first part. Austin Kearns will start in left field and Michael Brantley will assume center field duties. Heck, Brantley may assume center field duties at some point anyway, but a Sizemore disabled list stint to start the season will solidify that. Kearns will be the left fielder, they essentially brought him in for that reason and then the fourth outfield spot would be up for grabs. Trevor Crowe would likely be the next in line to be the fourth outfielder by virtue of his ability to play all three outfield positions.

