

## Sizemore Still Matters

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}

Thursday, February 24 2011 12:30 PM - Last Updated Friday, February 25 2011 4:45 PM

---



While parsing through the “X is a candidate for the 5th starter spot” pieces before any game action has started, much of the talk under the Arizona sun has revolved around the knee of one Grady Sizemore and while the discussion of that body part is preferable to what was the um...focus of last Spring (pertaining to Grady’s pieces and parts), there certainly seems to be quite a bit of attention being paid to Sizemore’s knee, even if all of it seems to be muddying the waters of expectation.

For the most part, the rhetoric coming out of the Indians’ camp has been that Grady’s knee is fine and that he’s continuing his rehab from the microfracture surgery that took place last summer to repair the damage done last season on the basepaths. Certainly, we’ve heard enough “he’s fine” and “he’s coming along great” as well as “he’s right on schedule with where he needs to be”, and perhaps those assertions are all true and indicative of where Sizemore really is in his recovery.

However, this little nugget appeared in [the AP story](#) (among other places) about Sizemore’s Spring last week, which led to some hand-wringing on the North Coast:

*Sizemore said he was still experiencing soreness and discomfort in his left knee.*

*“I can definitely tell I had surgery there,” he said. “Just walking or running, I’m not feeling zero pain or zero symptoms.”*

*There is no timetable for when Sizemore will resume full baseball activities. He concedes he’s taking baby steps and isn’t sure precisely what’s ahead for him.*

## Sizemore Still Matters

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}

Thursday, February 24 2011 12:30 PM - Last Updated Friday, February 25 2011 4:45 PM

---

Though I'm no doctor and cannot speak to the recovery from this surgery (or any surgery), this idea that he's still experiencing pain in the knee is surprising, in that Opening Day for the Indians is about 6 weeks away. While it's been intimated that Sizemore may be on the "Branyan Plan" for 2011 (Branyan didn't play until mid-April and didn't play in 3 consecutive games last year until May 9th), the bigger question shouldn't be "when will Grady return", but rather "how will Grady perform when he returns".

To that end, both Will Carroll of Sports Illustrated and a couple of writers at Baseball Prospectus weighed in on that very topic, after clearing through the vagaries of the surgery and rehab. To start it off, [here's Carroll from SI](#) on how the knee could affect Sizemore's performance:

*There's reason to believe that Sizemore will see a significant portion of his speed gone, costing him steals and doubles. It could force him to shift out of centerfield, as well, prompting some lineup issues for manager Manny Acta. Both Michael Brantley and Shin-Soo Choo can play CF, but neither is a plus defender like Sizemore -- if Grady can be that again.*

The Indians have already gone on record that Grady is likely to stay in CF because playing CF means fewer sharp cuts than playing LF would, minimizing stress on the knee, although Brantley looked more than capable in CF if it comes to that.

Going further than Carroll's prognosis, B-Pro has a VERY technical look at Sizemore's injury and recovery, coming to a similar conclusion as Carroll but even offering [an even more sobering conclusion](#) :

*Sizemore will likely lack the same quick burst of speed that made him a special player in the past, even all this time after surgery. His pain may be gone but his range in the outfield could suffer, and his work on the basepaths could follow suit. The best way to evaluate his knee—short of looking at it—is to see how aggressive he is. If he's aggressive in the outfield or on the bases, it means he trusts the knee. If not, the knee may not be 100 percent.*

While those pieces certainly throw some cold water on any idea that the Grady that we came to take for granted (the one who donned his cape in CF) is ever going to return, it is worth mentioning how terrific Grady truly was prior to the last two seasons, both derailed by injury, in the context of the rest of the league. By that I mean that not many people realize how unbelievable Sizemore was over a 4-year stretch, from 2005 to 2008, [as he was the 5th most valuable player in baseball \(according to WAR\) over those 4 years](#), which came when Grady was 22 years old to 25 years old. He's unquestionably the most accomplished current Indian, though recent performance certainly has clouded that fact in most minds.

As a burgeoning superstar, entering what should have been his "prime" years, as a 26-year-old and as a 27-year-old however, Grady's been [as valuable as Jason Kendall, Melvin Mora, and Ben Francisco](#) (no...seriously, and he's been a worse hitter than The Frisco Kid) since the beginning of the 2008 season. Of course, his injuries are the main culprit in that steep decline and it could be argued forever whether his style of play begat his injuries, but there are track records of "healthy Grady" and "injured Grady", with the

## Sizemore Still Matters

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}

Thursday, February 24 2011 12:30 PM - Last Updated Friday, February 25 2011 4:45 PM

---

performance of the two varying from that of a legitimate elite player in MLB to roster fodder.

So if those two incarnations exist, what is to be expected in 2011?

Truthfully, nobody knows what to expect and to simply assert that he's going to be somewhere between those two incarnations of Sizemore is lazy as about 90% of the players in MLB fall somewhere between elite and roster fodder. Additionally, any conveyance from the Indians regarding Sizemore's health or expectations is probably not worth much as the updates on Hafner's shoulder from Springs past were consistently bright and sunny, while the usage and performance of Hafner foretold another story all together. Certainly, I'm not ready to put Grady's knee into the same column as Hafner's shoulder, but the only clues as to what are to be realistically expected from Sizemore (and when) are going to come from reports of how he's hitting, how he's patrolling the OF, and (most importantly) how frequently.

It seems pretty likely at this point that he's going to start the season on the DL and even when he does return, the percentage of his former self that arrives to the corner of Carnegie and Ontario is what will bear watching. The reason for that is that Sizemore at even 75% of his "former self" is better than most any other option the Indians would have in 2011 and, even more pointedly, going forward.

Here arrives the second factor in Grady's return and level of performance, as well as the effect on the team, once he does return as if Grady's injury lingers and if their already tenuous depth in the OF is forced to absorb a blow like losing Sizemore for any stretch of time. As we saw in 2010 after Grady went down, the options once you get past Choo, Kearns, and Brantley (who still needs to greatly improve, even on his "hot streak" when he returned in August, after which he posted merely a .332 OBP) get pretty ugly and the news that [Trevor Crowe still can't throw at full strength](#) (insert arm strength joke here) makes the Indians' OF "depth" even more shallow.

Of course, it could be argued that Trevor Crowe shouldn't even be considered as a "depth" option at this point, particularly based on his stunningly ridiculous excuse that his elbow trouble, which did prompt off-season surgery, last year somehow caused his poor 2010 season. In case you don't know to what I'm referring, [Crowe explained that he began "feeling it \(the elbow trouble\) at the All-Star break," and that he's "interested to see what I can do at this level when I'm healthy."](#)

Um... "at the All-Star break"?

Lest anyone think that the elbow had more to do with Crowe's struggles more than a sheer lack of ability to play in MLB, here are Crowe's numbers before and after the All-Star Break last year:

### **Pre-All-Star Break**

.249 BA / .302 OBP / .330 SLG / .632 OPS with 10 2B and 1 HR in 227 PA in 53 games

### **Post-All-Star Break**

.253 BA / .301 OBP / .335 SLG / .636 OPS with 14 2B and 1 HR in 252 PA in 69 games

## Sizemore Still Matters

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}

Thursday, February 24 2011 12:30 PM - Last Updated Friday, February 25 2011 4:45 PM

---

