

Blast From The Past: Alex Cole

Written by {ga=googleph2}

Tuesday, April 26 2011 11:00 PM - Last Updated Wednesday, April 27 2011 7:23 AM



Most years, major league baseball teams come up with some reasons for their fans to believe—some points of interest which they hope will cause the fan base to buy tickets. However contrived they may seem.

Prior to the start of 2011, the Philadelphia Phillies' message to their fans was, "We can still hit, and now we have the two best starting pitchers in baseball." The Milwaukee Brewers were saying, "In our division, our new starters and the top of our order put us right there at the top." The Cleveland Indians: "We will spend when the time is right." (Actually, the Tribe has been sitting on that one since 2002.)

Back in 1991, the franchise was listing. They'd recently wilted under the national media's expectations that they'd be playoff contenders. Hank Peters was the president of the Tribe; he'd previously enjoyed success at the helm of the late 1970s/early 1980s Baltimore Orioles. Peters was beginning to put some of the pieces in place which would set the Indians on a path to success. These moves were crucial in the transition from Cleveland Stadium to the new ballpark 'at the corner of Carnegie and Ontario'.

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In 1991, Peters' marketing focus included center fielder Alex Cole.

Cole was a small, lightning-fast slap hitter. He'd been an 11th round draft pick of the Pittsburgh Pirates in 1984, though they'd failed to sign him. The St. Louis Cardinals then chose him in the 2nd round of the 1985 draft. He was noted for his 'Vince Coleman-type speed'. His defense was horrible, but the Cardinals really seemed to favor those fast runners, hoping they would develop as singles and doubles hitters (but as I ask my National League buds: why did that league always seem to want to build offenses designed not to score much?). After about six years in the Cardinals' system, they dealt him to the San Diego Padres, before the 1990 season. On July 11th

of that season, Cole was picked up by the Indians in a midseason trade with the Padres for catcher Tom Lampkin. (Don't worry, me neither.) Cole didn't play in his first game until July 27th

, yet he finished 4th

in the American League in stolen bases with 40, against just 9 times getting caught. He also hit at a .295 clip.

One game in particular in 1990 helped to capture the imagination of Tribe fans:

Wednesday, August 1. A home game against the Kansas City Royals. Greg Swindell vs. Mark Davis. The Tribe was, well, listing at 48-56, eight games out of first place. The Royals had a similar record.

Swindell yielded a run in the top of the first. (This was not the game when he gave up a narrow lead while with the offensively-challenged Tribe, and declared in frustration, "It's over.") And now the stage was set for the birth of a cult hero. In front of 12,000+ home fans, Alex Cole promptly walked to start the game. With left fielder Mitch Webster sitting on a 2-1 count, Cole stole second base. Webster flew out, and on the first offering to second baseman Jerry Browne, Cole stole third. Browne worked the count to 3-1, then lined a double over the head of Cole down the third base line. A 1-1 game.

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In the bottom of the third, Alex Cole was hit by a pitch with one out. He swiped second, but the Tribe failed to drive him home.

Both pitchers settled down and were eating up scoreless innings. Until the bottom of the fifth, when shortstop Tom Brookens doubled after first baseman Jeff Manto had struck out. On a 1-0 pitch, Alex Cole grounded a single to center field, scoring Brookens. Then on the 1-1 pitch to Webster, Cole stole second again. Webster doubled him home on the next pitch. For good measure, Browne drove in Webster with a sac fly to center. 4-1 Tribe after five.

In the seventh, Cole hit a line drive single to left, before stealing second. He was stranded there.

But the four runs were all the support Swindell needed. He pitched into the eighth inning, when he allowed singles by Gerald Perry and Danny Tartabull to start the inning. Manager John McNamara removed Swindell in favor of the Tribe's star closer Doug Jones; the Royals then went flyball/flyball/flyball to end the threat. Jones set the Royals down in order in the bottom of the ninth to secure his 28th save.

The line on Alex Cole was 2 for 2, a walk and a hit-by-pitch, with an RBI and two of the Indians' four runs scored. And a whopping five stolen bases off of Royals pitching and catcher Mike McFarlane. The five steals was a new Cleveland Indians record.

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