

Choo Needs to Head South

Written by {ga=mikeperry}

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The time has come for the Cleveland Indians to put struggling outfielder Shin-Soo Choo on a bus bound for Columbus.

Choo was the Indians' best player last season when he hit .300 with 22 home runs, 83 RBI and 22 stolen bases. But this season, after signing a one-year deal worth \$3.975 million on Jan. 18, Choo has been a shadow of his former self.

There is a big problem that needs to be sorted, and the Indians cannot afford to sit back and let Choo work through his problems at the Major League level.

Right now Choo is hurting the team. He looks completely clueless at the plate, and whenever he comes up in a critical situation he has virtually no chance of success.

Choo was arrested for DUI on May 2 of this year, and recently said the arrest has played a part

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in his struggles.

"I know what the problem is, I try too hard," Choo said of trying to make up for his arrest. "I think too much. I need to slow down my mind."

The numbers are abysmal. Since his May 2 arrest Choo has been a giant void in the Cleveland batting order. Hitting everywhere from third to sixth in the lineup, Choo has gone just 25-of-119 at the plate (.210 batting average) with only five extra-base hits, one home run and just seven runs driven in (his last coming on May 22). Choo has struck out 33 times and walked just 10 times. In his 119 at-bats he has left 42 runners on base.

Time and time again Choo has come up in a key situation and failed to deliver. Wednesday's day game against the Twins, in the 10th inning with the Indians down a run, Choo again did not deliver a critical hit as he grounded out to the pitcher to end the game.

The DUI has obviously had an effect, but this writer thinks it is a little bit more than that.

Choo played for the South Korean National Team last fall, leading it to a gold medal in the Asian Games. That win allowed Choo to avoid mandatory service in the South Korean military. All South Korean males are required to complete two years of mandatory military service before their 30th birthday, but the members of the South Korean National Team earned waivers with their gold medal performance.

Choo entered this season without his mandatory service hanging over his head, and things have not been the same. Maybe he is not as hungry. Maybe he lacks the sense of urgency a player has when his career is on the line, as his was before the gold medal.

There have been times when Choo has looked completely uninterested in the outfield. The flyball that fell for a double in the Texas series, the one Manny Acta claimed was "lost in the twilight" was a mental lapse that came about because of a lack of concentration. It was a lazy fly ball to left-center...a play a Major League outfielder makes 1,000 times out of 1,000. But Choo stood idly by while the ball fell to the turf.

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Choo, who possesses one of the best throwing arms in the Majors, has missed cutoff men, overthrown bases and, simply, has not taken full advantage of the gifts he owns in the outfield.

A few years ago the Indians send Fausto Carmona all the way back to Class A ball so he could get his head on straight. This probably isn't necessary for Choo, but he does need a wake-up call. A trip to Columbus, where he could work through whatever problems he is having and, hopefully, find his stroke, would help the big-league team right now.

As it stands the Indians are playing American League baseball with a National League lineup. The NL has eight hitters and, usually, one virtually automatic out...the pitcher. Well, Choo has been about as productive as the pitcher's spot this season. This has to change if the Indians are going to remain in contention for the American League Central crown.

To win a division a team needs contributions from across the board. Right now they are not getting any kind of contribution from Choo, and that is not fair to the rest of the team or the fans. Send him down and get someone in there that can actually deliver every once in awhile.