

Fukudome in a New Home

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}

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For the first time since 2007, the Indians are “buyers” in the July swap meet as the Indians have added Cubs’ OF Kosuke Fukudome to their painfully thin OF mix. According to most reports, the Cubs would pick up the majority of the remaining \$4.7M on Fukudome’s 2011 salary and the Indians would be parting with two minor-leaguers, Columbus reliever Carlton Smith and Kinston OF Abner Abreu. While most of the North Coast will exhale with a soft “meh” and as the sports-talk radio machine goes into high gear that “THIS...THIS is the BIG MOVE?!?” (that I told you was coming), let’s get to know Fukudome and attempt to figure how he fits into this 2011 Indians team.

On the season, Fukudome has a line of .273 BA / .374 OBP / .369 SLG / .742 OPS with only 20 XBH in 87 games while walking 46 times and striking out 57 times. Though he has virtually no power (he has 3 HR this season in the friendly confines of Wrigley Field), his .742 OPS would put him 4th among current Tribe regulars (behind Hafner, Asdrubal, and Santana) and that represents an obvious upgrade over the Buck/Kearns/Carrera triumvirate, which will continue to live on in some amalgamation until Choo returns...which he still thinks will be in mid-August.

Regardless of Choo’s timeframe, the one thing that Fukudome has done since he arrived in America is get on base, and he has done so with remarkable consistency if you look at his OBP over the last three years:

2009 - .375 OBP

2010 - .371 OBP

2011 - .374 OBP

With the Indians currently stuck with Buck, Kearns, and Carrera starting in 2 of the 3 OF spots, Fukudome represents an upgrade in on-base ability at the very least, despite the fact that he

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has very little power. While it is true that he is a LH hitter, he has a generally even platoon split in his career:

Career vs. LHP - .712 OPS

Career vs. RHP - .783 OPS

Looking at that, it's true that he's better against RHP, but he's not awful against LHP, something that cannot be said about Travis Buck, who has now been DFA'd for Fukudome and will likely head back to Columbus once he clears waivers.

Regardless and back to Fukudome, he's generally played RF in his career with the Cubs, but has also played quite a bit of CF, which means that Fukudome can man RF until Choo returns (which, again, he thinks he's doing in mid-August...or in two weeks), then sliding over to CF to provide some speed and on-base ability to the top of the lineup.

In Chicago, Fukudome was often seen as a bust, which was largely the result of the money he was getting paid on the North Side (\$40M over the last 3 years) as Fukudome is a useful, if flawed and incomplete, player who was never worth the money that the Cubs gave him when he came stateside, but certainly represents an upgrade – however incremental – over what the Indians have been forced to play in the OF since the injuries to Choo, then Sizemore.

Certainly Fukudome may not move the needle and he may not be that BIG BAT that everyone seems to think is going to solve all of the Indians' offensive woes, but there was really one difference-making bat available this July and he just made his way to the Bay Area after (surprise) the news that Beltran would block any trade to Cleveland, with the [Indians intimating that Boras was "controlling the process"](#)

. If this comes as a surprise to you...well, you haven't been paying attention. As much as I'd like to say that this wasn't the obvious outcome to any Beltran-to-Cleveland talk, it was if you remember that thing that I've written about since Beltran's name was invoked as a "trade target"...that Beltran wouldn't come to Cleveland, that Heymann's reportage of it meant that Boras was telling Heymann that Beltran wouldn't come to Cleveland.

While other OF names have gotten more attention in recent weeks and may have more cache because of name recognition (justified or not), let's all realize some things about the three names that have been most closely connected to the Tribe to this point – Upton, Crisp, and Ludwick.

BJ Upton has a cumulative OPS of .721 since the beginning of the 2009...

Coco Crisp has an OPS+ of 90 since he left Cleveland 5 ½ seasons ago...

Ryan Ludwick has a .718 OPS since the beginning of last season...

So, let's all acknowledge that while all of those names may certainly look like an upgrade, at this point doesn't it seem that the Indians are more than just one "big bat" away?

Those guys...yeah, those aren't big bats, if you consider what they've done this year in comparison to everyone's whipping boy du jour (who is about to feel the snarl of my whip), one Matt MaTola:

2011 OPS Totals

LaPorta - .703 OPS

BJ Upton - .702 OPS

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Coco Crisp - .701 OPS

Ryan Ludwick - .678 OPS

Seriously...

Yes, LaPorta has the lowest OBP on the season among those names...but that also means that LaPorta has a higher SLG than Upton, Crisp (obviously), and Upton. So, if you're looking for that big bat to plop in the middle of the Tribe lineup to apparently make everything sunny and happy on the North Coast, those names weren't going to do it. That's not to say that Fukudome is "the answer" to what ails the Indians, but at this point he represents an upgrade over Zeke Carrera stepping out of his 4th OF role and this team should be looking to make any and all incremental upgrades available to them.

Essentially, that's what Fukudome is – an incremental upgrade and since I'm becoming more resigned to the fact that they won't be adding a long-term piece (with the Nats' acquisition of Jonny Gomes indicating that they may be buying, not selling...so Mike Morse's availability can certainly be questioned), it may come back to the fact that the team has already made their BIG moves as Chiz arrived for Hannahan and Kipnis arrived for The OC as the Indians set their lineup up for today and tomorrow already.

Putting Fukudome in the #2 spot and in RF for the time being makes the lineup more palatable (though certainly not intimidating) as the addition of Fukudome gives the Indians at least a viable MLB player that can get on-base that can fill in while Choo gets healthy and can be useful for the remainder of the year.

While what the Indians gave up for 2 months of Fukudome looks like a pretty small price, the Cubs eating Fukudome's remaining salary meant that the Tribe had to give up more than just the PTBNL's and "cash considerations" that are so popular this time of year. With Fukudome in the fold, most reports indicate that the Indians are not done adding as they're probably still looking to add a RH bat (like Ludwick...who will underwhelm more than Fukudome does if he's added) or a starting pitcher before Sunday's Trade Deadline.