



Despite gallantly clinging to their pennant pipe dreams right up to Labor Day, the 2011 Cleveland Indians have remained frustratingly overshadowed by their greatest rival—not the Detroit Tigers, mind you-- but the hypothetical Cleveland Indians of an alternate, economically balanced universe... the team we "could have been." For many fans, not even the warm and fuzzy return of Jim Thome or blockbuster acquisition of Ubaldo Jimenez could reverse the cynicism birthed by the Tribe's recent history of all-star extraditions. "We're decent now," they say, "but just imagine if we still had [insert name of former Indian]!"

With this in mind, and with old friends Victor Martinez and Jhonny Peralta leading the Tigers into town this week, it seems like a fitting time to revisit that much-celebrated, purely imaginary ballclub known as the Ex-Indians. Two years ago, [when we last touched base with them](#), the Ex-Indians appeared to have the real-life Indians outgunned at just about every position on the diamond. They were considerably older, sure, but the laundry list of productive veterans still enjoying their post-Cleveland careers made for a somewhat damning indictment of the franchise they left in their wake. As the mid-market cliché went, Cleveland was more of a talent farm for the "big clubs" than a legitimate contender in their own right. And no amount of mid-level prospects was going to patch over the marketing carnage of trading two Cy Young Award winners.

Flash forward to 2011, however, and the premature blossoming of the latest Tribe rebuild—combined with the gradual decline of some of the eldest Ex-Indians—has clearly bridged the gap between the stars of Cleveland's past and present. Yes, the Ex-Indians still have the bigger names, and the real Indians have some severe fragility issues impeding their own advancement. But hey, the Exies just lost Jim Thome after nine solid seasons playing in

their dimension, and with Manny Ramirez shamed into retirement, their outfield isn't exactly one that inspires a ton of envy anymore, either (unless you're a huge fan of spindly banjo hitters). Fact is, your scrappy real-life Wahoos just might have enough ammo to take down the ghosts of their past in a head-to-head duel, if such craziness were possible. Refuse to believe that what's been gained could now defeat what's been lost? Well, let's go the extra mile and have a gander at this admittedly ridiculous hypothetical battle across time and space. **Choosing the best available players at each position (health not being an issue)**

, this is the

Curent Indians vs. Ex-Indians, 2011

.



Current Indians vs Ex-Indians: Position By Position

Statistics as of September 3, 2011

Catcher



Lou Marson (age: 25) vs **Kelly Shoppach** (31)

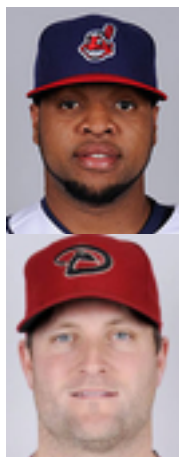
.221, 1 HR, 12 RBI /// .175, 8 HR, 19 RBI

Depth

None /// Josh Bard

Advantage: Current Indians

First Base



Carlos Santana (25) vs. **Russell Branyan** (35)

.239, 21 HR, 68 RBI /// .202, 5 HR, 14 RBI

Depth

Matt LaPorta /// Mark DeRosa

Advantage: Current Indians

Second Base



Jason Kipnis (28) vs. Brandon Phillips (30) Maicer Izturis
Shortstop



Asdrubal Cabrera (25) vs. Jhonny Peralta (29)

.278, 22 HR, 80 RBI /// .305, 18 HR, 72 RBI

Depth

Jason Donald /// Orlando Cabrera, Marco Scutaro

Advantage: Even

Third Base



David Blanks (24) vs. Oscar Vizquel (38)
Left Field



Michael Brantley (24) vs. Coco Crisp (31)

.266, 7 HR, 46 RBI /// .268, 7 HR, 47 RBI

Depth

Jared Head, Shelley Duncan /// Ben Francisco

Advantage: Even

Center Field



Jason Kipnis (28) vs. Jason Kipnis (28)
Right Field



Shin-Soo Choo (28) vs. Ryan Ludwick (33)

.260, 8 HR, 36 RBI /// .242, 12 HR, 71 RBI

Depth

Kosuke Fukudome /// Luke Scott

Advantage: Current Indians

Designated Hitter



Justin Masterson (42) vs. Victor Martinez (32)
Starting Pitchers



Justin Masterson (26) vs. Cliff Lee (33)

Stats

11-8, 2.92 ERA /// 15-7, 2.59 ERA

Advantage

Ex-Indians



Hosely (27) vs. CC Sabathia (31)



Josh Tomlin (26) vs. Jake Westbrook (33)



Eusebio Carrara (29) vs. Buffalo Colon (38)





Carlos Carrasco (24) vs. Carl Pavano (35)
Bullpen, Sean Rodriguez, Jeremy Guthrie, Alex White, Drew Pomeranz



Chris Perez (25) vs. Rafael Betancourt (36)

Stats

31 Saves, 2.68 ERA /// 6 Saves, 3.20 ERA

Advantage

Current Indians





Tom Sizemore (27) vs. A.J. Burnett (32) 2.87 ERA



Justin Masterson (23) vs. Kyle Wright (30) 3.00 ERA
 Jason Donald (28) vs. Aaron Laffey (29) 3.00 ERA
Final Tally: Current Indians 7, Ex-Indians 7 (TIE)

So, to sum up, neither the current nor former Indians squads boast a hell of a lot of offensive clout. Injuries have led to major statistical drop-offs in 2011 for players on both sides, as well. But with a healthy Choo and Sizemore and the youthful depth in the form of Chisenhall, Donald, and Carrera (among others), the Current Indians stack up just fine with the bats the team has shipped off in recent years. Even the deadly, inner-division Ex-Indian duo of V-Mart and J-honey have respectable counterparts in Thome/Hafner and Asdrubal Cabrera, respectively.

It's on the mound, though, where the big gap clearly remains-- even despite the Indians' stellar effort from its young starting staff this year. Justin Masterson may very well be on his way to becoming an elite AL ace, but compared to the Cy Young winners the Tribe was jettisoning in 2008 and 2009, he and the other Current Indians hurlers are simply overmatched by superior skill and experience. As unquestioned elites, Cliff Lee and CC Sabathia alone probably would guarantee an Ex-Indian triumph in a 7-game series. But lest it be overlooked, if a close game comes down to a bullpen battle, the Current Tribesmen have the clear edge, with even the tightrope-walking Chris Perez slightly preferable to current fill-in Rockies closer Rafael Betancourt.

Better team or not, the one thing the Current Indians clearly have going for them is youth, and the boundless potential (for improvement and/or disappointment) that comes with it. So, now that we're a couple years removed from the worst of the talent purge, and Thome nostalgia is healing some old wounds, maybe the time has come to stop pondering the teams that "could

have been" and the "ones that got away." Because while the Tribe may not catch any Tigers by their toes in 2011, they are hot on the heels of the Ex-Indians... and ready to move on.