

Spring Training Rundown: Grady and the Pursuit of Happiness

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

Friday, March 02 2012 10:31 AM - Last Updated Friday, March 02 2012 11:24 AM



Let's not bother with introductions, I know why you're here.

[AND HERE WE ARE AGAIN]

I don't really think anyone is shocked, but it certainly is a little surprising to see the news that this back injury is going to keep **Grady Sizemore** out [for at least two months, probably more](#) .

And of course it is at this point that many people will scream that the Indians wasted their money. Perhaps they wasted a good chunk of it. One thing for sure is that Sizemore will not have a realistic chance at earning any of his incentives, so the Indians will surely be paying him less than they would have had they picked up his option.

But that's neither here nor there, as they could have not re-signed him and paid him nothing.

First, Sizemore...

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We've reached a point where everyone is now just feeling sorry for the guy.

"I feel bad for him," Indians manager Manny Acta said. "Obviously, it seems like he can't catch a break over the last couple of years."

I mean, I do. I think it is rotten for a guy with so much talent to be hampered by so many injuries. And this one seems as innocent as anything. I mean how did this happen? Fielding ground balls? And now another sort of procedure?

I know it is hard to feel bad for a guy getting paid millions of dollars, but the idea of not being able to contribute has to eat at a guy like Sizemore, who is as competitive as the next guy.

You have to wonder if he's done though. I mean he tweaks his back, he eases up from activity, it gets worse, so they shut him down completely and it turns out, oh he needs surgery. Does he just have a fragile body from all those years of bumping around in the outfield and playing with reckless abandon? Perhaps and perhaps he is just one of those people that doesn't exactly heal as quickly as others.

And then add in the fact that he's now had six surgical procedures in four years? Um, ouch.

So we've essentially gone from having someone we love and adore, to someone we're hopeful will come back and just contribute, to someone we just feel sorry about... And so we move on...

The focus we shift to now is what the heck to do in left field because we now assume [that Michael Brantley is the man in center](#)

. Acta says that the only way he plays left is if Zeke Carrera wins a spot, then he'd play center and that sure as heck isn't happening anytime soon.

We now look at the glut of outfield options and try and sort out which ones stand the best chance. The repeated point keeps coming up now, this is why the Indians signed all the NRI's

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that they did.

"There's going to be plenty of at-bats to have out there," Acta said. "You might not have seen it as a big deal during the offseason, but now it looks pretty big when you have a full bag of guys like that who have been in the big leagues the last few years and have experience."

However I don't think Duncan is slated for a starting spot, I think if anything, the Indians will attempt to give it to someone new. They know what Duncan can do, but he is much more effective as a bench/role player than he is a starter. [Duncan would want to think otherwise](#) though. The focus will immediately shift to

Shelley Duncan

who had a role with this team last year and seemingly a leg-up on the competition for one of the few open bench jobs. The fourth outfield spot has now become essentially the runner-up spot to this left-field job, so Duncan's chances of making the roster just went up very high in my opinion.

"I'd like that," Duncan said. "That's how I feel, but I'm not going to go screaming and hollering about it. I'm just going to go and try to prove it out there on the field."

The other options that seem favorable are **Aaron Cunningham** (right handed hitter, no options) and **Russ Canzler** (right handed hitter, versatile,

[also hit a grand slam in the intrasquad game yesterday](#)

). I've professed my affinity for Cunningham, so I think he has as good chance as anyone, but counting out Canzler at this point doesn't seem like a good idea. Cunningham

[by the by had been dealing with a sore hand](#)

, but should play in the Tribe's game this weekend.

Canzler meanwhile seems like he's going to us his right-handedness as his calling card.

"That was one thing that Chris stressed to me when I first got here -- how lefty dominant our lineup was and how they are looking for a right-handed bat," Canzler said. "My approach is trying to stay the same as it was last year. I had a good year last year, so I'm feeling confident coming in here."

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One name that I would now throw in there is **Matt LaPorta**, who could probably benefit more than anyone from this injury. First base isn't an option for him anymore, unless it was in a backup role, but if he can produce this spring, you have to think the Indians would consider him an option in left. If not at the outset, then eventually if the option they do pick does not pan out by the time Sizemore is ready to roll (if he's ready to roll).

You can throw out the other names like Nick Weglarz, Felix Pie, Fred Lewis. I really do not think it matters because there shouldn't be any sort of "underlying reason" to hold anyone back from winning this spot. Sizemore is out two months at least, that means we can reasonably assume he'll be placed on the 60-Day DL and therefore open up a 40 man roster spot for his "replacement". If Felix Pie deserves to win the spot, then the fact that he isn't on the 40 man roster will not be the thing that holds him back from that.

So there we are.. The left field job just became the most talked about battle this spring... Should be fun that we now have something to beat with a stick way past it's point of death.

[A WHOLE NEW CHOO]

I'd bet a lot of money on **Shin-Soo Choo** being the player the Indians need him to be this season. I guess I'm buying into the new Choo that seems to be on display after he [completed his required stint in the military](#)

. Although it wasn't the same stint he would have had to deal with had his team not captured the gold medal in the Asian Games, it was something he still had to do.

"I really didn't want to go," Choo said. "But after I went for the four weeks -- wow. It was hard. I'm used to a lot of hard training, but this was a different type. It made me think how easy it is to play baseball, how easy my life is."

A new perspective, a new Choo? I'm going to add in the fact that the pressure is off the guy now. The team has Asdrubal Cabrera and Carlos Santana they are also depending on, he doesn't have to feel the pressure of being "the guy" for this offense. He also doesn't have that "weight" of his country on him.

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"It was an emotional thing," Choo said. "I thought back to 25 years ago when I started playing baseball. Good times. Bad times. All those things were on my mind and then it all cleared. Last year happened. The injuries. Everything else. I've thrown all that away.

"At the end of it, I thought about how lucky I am. I love this job. I love baseball and the best baseball in the world is in the Major Leagues. I have a beautiful family. I'm healthy. I have great wife -- a beautiful wife -- and great kids."

Choo said the walks he would take with 55 pounds on his shoulders was good time for him to think and reflect. And heck, I'm sure the 55 pounds felt a lot heavier than the weight of a country and I'm sure it put it all in perspective for the guy.

So yeah, I'm buying into this New Choo. Hopefully he's the same as the on-field Choo we came to know a few years ago.

[RANDOM RUNDOWN]

One guy that will be in that left field battle is **Ryan Spilborghs**, who I really like. He's attempting to [overcome a foot injury](#). The man they call "Spilly" had a battle with plantar fasciitis last season. He's one option that you have to like as he claims he is completely healthy, he has had success at this level in a multitude of roles, and he is right-handed. Plus he has an at least average glove in the outfield.

Spilborghs and the other outfielders really started this "battle" for left field off with a bang. As mentioned, Canzler hit a grand slam, Spliborghs hit a two-run double, a healthy Weglarz had an RBI, and Felix Pie hit a solo home run.

Another note from a link above, both Perezes have been sidelined. Rafael Perez has been shaking off some soreness, but the Indians don't seem to be worried.

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Some comments on generally intriguing notes [via Bastian on Wednesday](#) ...

We'll have the knowledge of Opening Day Starter this morning. The honor will be between **Justin Masterson**

and Ubaldo Jimenez. Bastian is leaning Masterson and I think it would be cool if he got it. Knowing Acta, he'll pick someone and have some sort of strange unforeseen reasoning like "we wanted to line-up our rotation with all our 6'6" starters spaced out." Or "The bald headed starter should lead off." I'm kidding of course. But Masterson would be a nice pick and it would certainly reward him for his 2011 season.

Good to see **Tony Sipp** working on controlling the run-game. He was atrocious last year, so much so that even I noticed it. If you do it enough times for me to say "Wow it seems like gives up a lot of steals" out-loud, you have a problem. Sipp gave up 13 steals out of 15 attempts and I have to wonder how many times Marson was back there. If [#LouMar](#) can't throw him out, something is wrong.

Contrast that to Josh Tomlin not even having someone attempt and things even out but... not there were times I distinctly remember Sipp not even seeming like he minded someone was going to steal, which is probably how most people end up stealing off a left-handed pitcher.

Good to see praise headed Aaron Cunningham's way... I'm sort of on the bandwagon there with him. I think he could surprise.

I wouldn't be shocked to see Matt LaPorta win a Home Run Derby. I would however be [shocked to see him make an All-Star Team](#)

Trevor Crowe is wearing 80 now? Dang man, guy gets booted off the roster and can't even keep a normal number?

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I guess the upside is that a bunch of Indians fans (or rather Jason Kipnis fans) [now know](#) [Crave exists](#) .

Hey, there is a fun game we're playing called Guess the New Indian.. [You should go on over](#) [and play it](#) ...

Finally, I point you over to a fellow BBA (Baseball Bloggers Alliance) cohort C70 At The Bat. Daniel is the presidente of the BBA and he runs this Cardinals blog that does an [annual "playing pepper" series](#) that features blogs from around the MLB. I took part along with [Did The Tribe Win](#) and it was much fun.

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Nino has a blog and he is just as fun there (but not too much)! Give it a vist at [The Tribe Daily](#) .

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