



Sweeps Week is fast approaching, and like any struggling sitcom, the 2012 Cleveland Indians are pulling out all the stops to turn their dwindling ratings around. So far, just five episodes into its 112th season, “The Tribe” (as the show’s hardcore fans call it) has been getting buried by more star-studded, big-budget programs like the critically acclaimed “Prince of Tigers.” So, as of this morning, Executive Producers Mark Shapiro and Chris Antonetti are reportedly bringing in a former A-List celeb to take on the show’s much-maligned role of “Left Fielder.” That’s right, ladies, Johnny Damon is a Cleveland Indian!\*

*\*At least, according to various “insiders” (including [Johnny Damon himself](#) ).*

Long time fans of The Tribe need no reminders of the laundry list of performers Cleveland has cast in that Left Field spot over the past decade or so. After great success in the ‘90s with surly but rugged leading men like Albert Belle and David Justice, the 21st century has introduced audiences to an endless series of forgettable character actors—from short-lived prospects to failed reclamation projects: Marty Cordova, Matt Lawton, Chris Magruder, Ben Broussard, Jason Michaels, David Dellucci, Ben Francisco, Austin Kearns. This year, it was more of the same, as the Indians tried to expand the popular cameo appearances of bit character Shelley “Don’t Call Me Sandee” Duncan into a prominent part of the nightly storyline. No dice. The people didn’t find Duncan believable as a leading man. And so, accordingly, Shapiro and Co. seem to have reacted-- as television producers often will—with a wee bit of panic.

After flirting with other faded stars like Vlad Guerrero and Bobby Abreu, it appears The Tribe

has seemingly found its new Nielsen savior in the formerly Jesus-ish looking journeyman Johnny Damon.

Casual viewers of other baseball dramas may remember Damon best from his four years on the Boston based programs “Nomaaaaaar” and “Manny Being Manny.” He won an Emmy for his portrayal of “Center Fielder” on the latter show in 2004—the famous season in which the Red Sox jumped the shark and became the most annoying franchise in sports. But long before all that, Damon was already a veteran of the Central Division scene, having cut his teeth on the low budget comedy “Come On Royals!” from 1995 to 2000. From there, he became a reference point in *Moneyball* and eventually—after an ugly departure from Boston—the star of his own short-lived spin-off, “Yankee Doodle Johnny.”



Without question, Damon still brings some much needed name recognition to a Cleveland Show that’s been decried in the press lately as “lifeless,” “dull,” and “uneven at best.” And with the ill-fated renewals of the prophetically titled “Grady’s Back!” (he is now on the 60-day DL with an injured back) and “How I Met Your Fausto” (apparently it wasn’t that funny of a story), the Tribe could use some good, old-fashioned star power.

Is Johnny Damon the same power-hitting, base-stealing Caveman he was in Boston eight years ago? Certainly not. Is he still the guy who posted an .854 OPS in New York just three years ago? Well, evidence would seem to indicate the contrary, considering his prolonged struggles down the stretch in Tampa last season (he hit .238 in the second half) and the surprising lack of interest he received from any other networks all winter long.

Even so, when you’re scraping the barrel already, might as well go with a better promotional chip. It’s like when David Caruso left “NYPD Blue” in the ‘90s, failed miserably as a movie actor, then came back to TV with his tail between his legs to star in an essentially identical and yet utterly inferior cop drama called “CSI Miami.” In the end, it worked out great for everybody. So,

for a 1-4 Cleveland Indians team drawing about 7,000 people to their "studio" right now, what's the harm of one more banjo-hitting left-hander in the nightly line-up?