

Indians Get Their Man At Second Base

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Tuesday, November 07 2006 7:00 PM -

The Indians made a big trade today, acquiring 2B Josh Barfield from the San Diego Padres for 3B Kevin Kouzmanoff and reliever Andrew Brown. Lastoria profiles Barfield, and gives the scoop on what this trade means for the Indians as free agency begins, and how much of a steal he feels this trade was for the Indians.



Wow. Talk about a great way to kick off the most important offseason during Mark Shapiro's tenure as GM.

The Indians today announced the trade of third base prospect Kevin Kouzmanoff and pitching prospect Andrew Brown to San Diego, and in exchange they received second baseman Josh Barfield.

Right now, there is absolutely nothing to not love about this deal for the Indians. According to sources, several MLB officials who made the Indians offers said they came away with a total steal in acquiring Barfield. In time, hindsight may prove otherwise, but for now the Indians capitalized by trading from a position of strength to fill a position of need. And, they did so without having to deal anyone off the expected 25-man roster in 2007.

While the Indians have stated the payroll will increase significantly this offseason, they were able to fill the second base void with a very productive player without affecting the payroll. Instead of spending \$4-5M per year to sign an Adam Kennedy or Ronnie Belliard, in Barfield the Indians acquired a player just as productive and with much more potential, but he will make the league minimum in 2007 and in 2008 before he is eligible for salary arbitration after the 2008 season.

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Also, it is possible that the Indians were so impressed with Barfield that they may in fact consider signing him up to a multi-year sometime this offseason (or in-season) to lock him in at a fixed cost for the next 5-7 years. Either way, with this trade, the Indians have obtained a player who could potentially lock up the second base position for at least the next five years. Since Barfield only has one year of service time, he is under the Indians control through at least the 2011 season.

In Barfield, the Indians have obtained a middle of the diamond player who immediately becomes a part of the core of this team going forward. Barfield already has a year of major league experience under his belt, as well as some post-season experience. After he hit .280 with 13 HRs, 58 RBIs and 21 stolen bases with San Diego in 2006, the intriguing part of Barfield is he may have just scratched the surface for what he can do offensively. A shift to the American League and to Jacob's Field could cause his production to increase significantly now that he is out of the offensive graveyard known as Petco Park, and he no longer is hitting 8th in front of the pitcher every night.

Prior to his rookie campaign with the Padres, Barfield was a top prospect in the Padres system for several years. According to Baseball America, in 2004 and 2005 Barfield was the Padres #1 prospect, and was their #3 prospect in 2006. His bat speed and ability to drive the ball the opposite way to right-center are his biggest strength as a player, and he has worked hard to become a good defender. He also has good speed, although it wasn't displayed much in San Diego since he primarily hit 8th and had the pitcher hitting behind him. His biggest weakness, though, might be his patience at the plate. He doesn't strike out a lot and makes consistent contact, but he doesn't draw a lot of walks or work counts. When he develops this part of his game, he will likely hit in the 2-hole in the lineup. But, for at least the start of 2007, he'll likely hit somewhere in the 7-8-9 hole in the lineup.

Barfield should be a good fit for the team not only on the field, but off it as well. Shapiro mentioned today that Barfield is a great teammate, and that his work ethic is second to none. Scouts rave about his makeup. After listening to him on the radio today you can hear how mature of a player he is, and how much of an influence his father was. Barfield comes from major league bloodlines, as his father Jesse Barfield was one of the game's best power hitters in the American League in the 80s and early 90s, and had what many people considered the best outfield arm in baseball during that time. His brother Jeremy is also a highly touted high school prospect, and his godfather is former Tribe reliever Mike Jackson.

According to Shapiro, Kouzmanoff was sought after aggressively by the Padres. Kouzmanoff won the Lou Boudreau Award as the organization's top position player in 2007 after he hit a

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combined .379 with 22 HRs and 75 RBIs in only 94 games and 346 at bats at Akron and Buffalo. In dealing Kouzmanoff, the Indians lose a valuable backup plan at third base and first base. With Andy Marte and Ryan Garko slated to play third base and first base in 2007, Kouzmanoff would have been a phone call away at Buffalo had Marte or Garko gotten hurt or struggled. With all that said, Kouzmanoff was yet another player in the system who was a player without a position (Garko and Hafner). With such a logjam at the corner positions, and with so many one dimensional players that can only really hit, someone had to go. Also, it should be noted that Kouzmanoff has battled back injuries for most of his career with the Indians, and the Indians may have been able to trade Kouzmanoff at peak value.

Andrew Brown was once an exciting pitching prospect, and figured to be an electric arm to use out of the bullpen in the very near future. But, Brown's future with the Indians even before the trade was in doubt since he is out of options. With the Indians ready to acquire 2-3 bullpen arms from outside the organization, the Indians are overloaded with internal candidates to fill the other 3-4 middle relief roles in the bullpen. Barring a trade, Rafael Betancourt will fill a role in the bullpen, and others like Matt Miller, Tom Mastny, Juan Lara, Eddie Mujica, and Rafael Perez are options as well. In addition to Brown, players like Jason Davis, Jeremy Guthrie and Fernando Cabrera are also out of options. Shapiro mentioned that with these four players out of options in the bullpen, someone had to go. Of the four players out of options, Brown had very little chance to make the team out of Spring Training, and would have been lost anyway if we tried to get him through waivers when camp broke.

Going into the offseason, the Indians have repeatedly mentioned that their top two priorities were to find a second baseman and to rebuild the bullpen. With second base now dropped from the offseason shopping list, the focus of the Indians attention now gets shifted to filling the many needs in the bullpen. By not having to go out and overpay for a veteran stop-gap player to fill second base, it is reasonable to expect the Indians now will have a lot more money to throw at some free agents or in trades to fill the bullpen voids.

Or, because they filled second base so cheap, the Indians may in fact get into the running for a premium corner bat like Carlos Lee, or can take on salary in a trade for a Gary Sheffield or Pat Burrell. In Shapiro's press conference today, he sort of alluded to this possibility when he stated that "there may be some surprises along the way with some of the other things we do this offseason."

Free agency starts in a few days, but for the Indians, they already have taken a huge step in improving the team for 2007 and beyond.

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