Piece by Piece is an offseason long series that covers the Cleveland Indians organization and their outlook in a position-by-position process. Today's position is first base.

What is that they say about people not walking through a door?

Jim Thome is not walking through that door!

And if he did, he'd probably walk literally right through the door.

That was the kind of power Jim Thome had (and still does) when he was at first base for the Cleveland Indians in the glory days of the 90's. He was your prototypical first baseman, power bat, run producer, middle of the order anchor. You look around the league and there are few that are elite, Albert Pujols, Prince Fielder, until Fielder arrived in Detroit, Miguel Cabrera, Paul Konerko, Joey Votto, Ryan Howard, Mark Teixeira. So hard to find, yet so valuable if you happen to have the luxury. Most teams can't afford that type of player though, so they opt for cheaper, yet still effective options.

The Indians as of late have opted for... Well they've not opted by choice, but have fallen down a path where they have no option. If you can't get a big slugger, you try and find a solution. Some teams go for a solid player, while others may focus on a more defensive minded guy that can give you some production and look to fill that power void elsewhere.

Now that isn't to say the Indians haven't tried to get themselves a first baseman, even a prototypical one, but they certainly haven't done a good job with their efforts of trying, to say the least.

So again, Jim Thome is not walking through that door. At least not someone like him. And it brings us to a position that is hotly debated, much maligned, and incredible crucial to the Cleveland Indians. The position of first base. Last year it was Casey Kotchman. The year before that it was supposed to be Matt LaPorta's time to shine, a year after they tried giving him a shot, only to ask Russell Branyan to help.

Hell, forget Jim Thome.

Ryan Garko isn't even walking through that door. Ryan Garko!

Any day is a good day when I get to drop Ryan Garko, un-provoked. I might as well take the time to point out that Ryan Garko hit 11 home runs in 78 games in 2009 before getting traded to San Francisco. In 2008 he hit 14 home runs and knocked in 90 runs! 90 runs! he hit 21 the year before (the magical 2007 year) proving that it doesn't take much to provide some pop.

And while I mention his name, almost in jest, it drives the point home. You can find a fixable solution if you don't have one of those elite guys. Unfortunately, a fixable solution has not really emerged and while the Indians went at it with Casey Kotchman, a defensive specialist for the entire year at first, they didn't have the power in other spots to make up for it. They didn't have a middle of the order bat that could anchor the lineup. If they did, Kotchman's solid glove and 55 RBIs might have done well. But when Jack Hannahan is getting a lot of at bats at third, that formula doesn't work.

So with that, onto the analysis, free of Ryan Garko name-drops. Admit it, you're sad.

[ORGANIZATIONAL OUTLOOK]

When we talked about shortstops, there was paragraphs and paragraphs of me gushing with excitement after I got the chance to rattle off names and numbers and ages.

You will not get that for first base. In fact, I may not even give you more than two names. The simple fact is that the Indians have been hurting in this department for years and it stems back to a failure to draft and the big mistake that Matt LaPorta was. Because he was supposed to lock down first base for years to come, you can't really blame the Indians for not making the position a priority. Sure you can blame them for not having capable of players or not having depth, but you can't really blame them for not having focused on the position more heavily in terms of stock-piling it with upper-echelon type talent like they did other spots.

Part of it goes to availability. Sure the Indians had Cabrera and a host of other guys when they decided to draft Lindor, but he was available and at that point, you take for talent, not need. There simply hasn't been a guy readily available when they were in that position.

And there was a thought that when the Indians drafted Beau Mills way back when in the first round, that he'd be either a DH or a first base option. Mills was decent, but not what you would expect from that caliber of a draft pick, and this past season the Indians jettisoned him to Cincinnati.

Fact of the matter is, in addition to all of this, first base is not really one you draft for. There are plenty of guys who play in high school and college in other spots that you draft, like third or short and center field, that most teams eventually end up just moving players. Does anyone know what Ryan Braun started as? Certainly not a left fielder. He started as a third baseman because he was one of the best players on his college team and probably played that position better than anyone else on the team. He actually started in Miami as a shortstop before moving to third.

Albert Pujols? Didn't start as a first baseman.

Ryan Howard? If the guy played in the American League, he'd be a designated hitter.

There are very few Mark Teixeira's who are just brilliant defensively at first and a prototypical first base slugger. You rarely come across those guys, so really, while this is a problem, it makes sense that the Indians are in this position as a result of their failure from Matt LaPorta.

But there are names and ones that are significant and one demonstrates this example perfectly.

That would be none other than Chun-Hsiu Chen, better known as Chun Chen, who played for the Akron Aeros the past two seasons. Chen started as a catcher since being signed out of Taiwan and has steadily moved up the ranks as a polished hitter for average until he ran into the Double-A level last year. He had his best year home run-wise, but his doubles went down and he struck out an incredible 122 times.

This year he got to repeat and in-addition to, the Indians moved him full-time to first base, completely ditching the catching spot. It just is another example of what teams do with guys as they get to higher levels. They start putting them at positions that are not ones that need the sharpest defenders.

One thing Chen did do was rebound in the OBP range and while his home run total took a dip, his average went way back up, his doubles started to come back, and he struck out a whole lot less.

One guy that could play a role in Chen moving forward is Jesus Aguilar, who continues to climb up the ranks himself. Aguilar is a little less athletic than Chen because he's much bigger, so when all is said and done, the Indians may prefer to have someone like him spend a lot of time at DH, but the honest effort is there to have him play first. He's a legit power guy, sporting 15 home runs this past year, but 23 with 30 doubles the year before. He's still really untested and lightly seasoned as far as full-seasons go as he spent several years playing in short-season leagues until his full-time shot in 2011 with Lake County. He could progress to Columbus by the

end of 2013 and by then, be on the big league radar.

The other name of note is another upper-level guy that the Indians got their hands on at the trade deadline. The Tribe acquired Lars Anderson from Boston and after he arrived, played in just 18 games. He was seemingly a lost-soul with Boston and lost in the shuffle and may be even more lost here in Cleveland. But we'll see.

[MLB OUTLOOK]

I kind of mentioned how other teams are faring in the intro. There are a lot of teams that seem set in one way or another, be it a guy like Prince Fielder or a young upcoming guy like Kansas City's Eric Hosmer, or Chicago's Anthony Rizzo.

There are teams though, like Cleveland, that don't have options that are looking. You have to wonder hat a team like Boston is planning on doing with Adrian Gonzalez now traded. Toronto has had a constant problem with Adam Lind, similarly not panning out like Matt LaPorta. Seattle has a guy in Justin Smoak that they hope is the answer, but are working things out with him.

There doesn't seem to be any sort of situation out there where one team is looking to unload a guy or have two options and one that is expendable. If anything, a lot of the movement happened last year when the big names were available to sign.

[FREE AGENTS]

After his injury-riddled year, it will be interesting to see what kind of interest Lance Berkman draws, as he could be probably one of the bigger names to be had if he was healthy given the production he had in St Louis. There are other names, like Adam LaRoche, Casey McGehee, Carlos Pena, Ty Wigginton that could draw those on-year or short-term type offers.

Kevin Youkilis could be in-play, and was specifically mentioned as a remote possibility only

because of Terry Francona's presence with Cleveland. And then you have a guy like Mike Napoli, who while he is a catcher, could fit into first base for some team, especially since he got hurt in 2012 and missed a significant amount of time.

If a team really needs a first baseman, there is no big name out there. If they need a one year option, there are plenty of choices. I hesitate to throw Nick Swisher's name out there because I think more teams look at him as an outfielder, but if there is a need and he fits, then team's could go that route. Ultimately very few that I could see the Indians pursuing, if any. Perhaps James Loney if he could be had on the cheap and the Indians want to throw a low-risk, potentially marginal reward type of player into their mix of... options?

[THE TRIBE'S GUY]

Do I use this section to ramble on for five or six paragraphs about Matt LaPorta? Does he even count considering he didn't play a lick compared to others in 2012, at least in Cleveland? I mean, Casey Kotchman was technically "the guy" last year at first.

What about a guy like Russ Canzler?

Hell, should I even bother mentioning any of them?

All of these are questions that went into my thought process as I walked from my desk to the bathroom, and back from the bathroom to my desk in preparation to writing this section. Don't worry, I washed my hands.

I made a promise though back when the season ended and his name came up and Antonetti said "this is an important offseason" for Matt LaPorta, considering the fact that he's out of options. I promised that LaPorta was done and that there was no sense in wasting breath or line-space on the guy. So I'm going to ad-hear to that promise in regards to his future. The present mentioning does not count considering we talked about him in a past-sense and a reason for us having this discussion in the first place.

Casey Kotchman deserves little space considering it is highly unlikely that he even returns. It was nice having him. I did say little space, didn't I?

And Russ Canzler? Well he was kind of nice for a few weeks towards the end. But he's kind of integral to the next section.

[WHERE TO GO?]

The nice thing about shortstop was that the Indians didn't have to worry about what they were going to do. Sure they had a decision, but that's a good decision to have. The decision they are faced with is rather difficult in that you are at the mercy of no one. You have to weather the storm if you can't find a temporary option.

The Indians do have Russ Canzler that they can try out, but given how they were so aggressive in getting a backup shortstop to Asdrubal Cabrera, it seems like they have intentions on going forward next year as a competitive team and I don't think they plan on having Russ Canzler being a piece to that competitive team, or at least they don't think he is.

Sure he may at some point present the best option, combined with a Yan Gomes and whatever else the Indians decide to do. But if they have their choice? They'd probably like to have an alternative or two. Even if it is a low-risk sign veteran or some scrap-heap pick up.

One avenue to explore has been the popular idea around this position and that is moving Carlos Santana there full-time. And heck with Gomes being thrown into that Aviles/Rogers deal, it makes it even more of a good idea. You get a third catcher, someone who can also play elsewhere as well as backup that could push Lou Marson into more of a regular role and Santana into more of a first base/designated hitter role.

And that's even a new aspect, the open designated hitter spot, that adds some intrigue to this first base decision that I have failed to bring up thus far.

But if you have Santana as more of a full-time first baseman, you have solved a problem. The next point though is, at what cost? You've now opened up the spot for Lou Marson to potentially provide some of the same offense he has in years past, which is perhaps worse that what you could have received from someone like Canzler at first.

Let's be honest, Marson is best suited as a guy who plays against most left-handed pitchers and backup. If he wasn't hitting, I'd start him 162 games behind the plate because he's a field general and an excellent game-caller.

But he has to hit and if he's hitting against right-handers, he's not very good.

And now you can see why the Indians are hesitant to make Santana a full-time option at first. Putting him there once a week is a way to keep him fresh and get his bat in the lineup, but now with DH open, he may even have less starts at first.

So you need an option. Be it Canzler, or something, the Indians need to fill this space. There is no one immediately ready to step in at the minor league level unless you include Canzler and there is no one on the roster with Kotchman likely gone. First base is really open and it is anyone's guess who the Indians start there in 2013.

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Nino can be found with glue and scissors and pictures of Vinnie Pestano and himself on The Tribe Daily, his own Indians blog. Hearts may or may not be invovled.

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