As the sun rises on the North Coast to begin another chilly Lazy Sunday here in the offseason, we have a little bit of actual baseball news to digest with our morning coffee. The 40-man rosters are set around baseball, players have been DFA'd and added, and Rule 5 speculation has begun. I'm on the record believing that the Rule 5 draft is one of the more overrated spectacles in baseball, and the main reason that there's so much attention is simply that there's very little else going on in the baseball world at that time. Still, the Indians are more likely to lose a player than select one when that day does roll around, as after a few moves their 40-man roster is completely full. I doubt the Indians lose anyone, but I'm bracing myself for the inevitable Jesus Aguilar-David Ortiz comparisons if the big first baseman is selected. At any rate, the free agent dominos and the snowflakes are beginning to fall here in December, so let's kick back on a Lazy Sunday and look at some links…

Grantland's Jonah Keri, the last of the Expos, took a stab at a column rating the top-50 trade commodities in baseball. It's a tough concept because it combines current production, future projection as well as contract status (and most importantly club control), and by its very nature is a subjective process. Still, I think Keri did an outstanding job, and the entire two-part piece is more than worth a full read. No Yankees made the list, as their talent is aging and expensive. Two Indians made the cut, with Carlos Santana coming in at #43 and Jason Kipnis slotted at #31. Both players are listed close to some of their positional counterparts, with Santana appearing next to Matt Wieters, Yadier Molina and Salvador Perez, and Kipnis coming in just behind Ben Zobrist and Dustin Pedroia. The list isn't based solely on talent, as the affordable nature of Santana and Kipnis helped them

make the list over guys like Joe Mauer and Robinson Cano. Both players are under team control long enough that if this iteration of the Indians rebuild goes well, they'll be the vets in the middle of the order powering the offensive engine of the team.

Some personnel decisions came down late this week, as the team announced they DFA'd pitcher Chris Seddon to make room for fromer Blue Jays 1B Mike McDade, and also decided not to tender a contract to either Raffy Perez or Jack Hannahan. Perez will be replaced by Nick Hagadone, who is healthy and pitching in winterball after his embarrassing end to the 2012 season. Hannahan's removal from the roster all but assures that Lonnie Chisenhall will be given the keys to the hot corner full-time in 2013. Chisenhall hit .268/.311/.430 with 5 HR in just 142 AB with the Indians last year, and will play the 2013 season as a 24 year old. His ability to mature into a solid contributor at the plate is a crucial factor to the overall development of the club. The 2008 1st round pick was the first draft choice during the Brad Grant era, and he was universally regarded as a top-100 prospect in all of baseball during his rise through the Indians organization. There are still questions about his overall power profile, ability to hit lefties, and his on-base skills, but if he stays healthy and gets 500 AB this year those questions should be more or less answered. I'm a believer in Chisenhall, as his .442 OPS against lefthanders last season was posted in just 38 AB, hardly a sample size large enough to make any sort of long-term judgments about. After returning from injury, he walked 7 times in 77 plate appearances after earning just one base on balls in his first 74 PA. While it feels like he's been around forever, he'll play all of the 2013 regular season as a 24 year old, so he's hardly done evolving as a player. Bottom line, I really think that Chisenhall is going to be one of the bright spots of the 2013 Indians and this is the season in which he will solidify his position in the lineup going forward.

In addition to the non-tenders and DFA's, the Indians have a couple of players who weren't added to the 40-man roster who could be Rule 5 targets for other teams. MLB.com's Jonathan Mayo lists power hitting 1B Jesus Aguilar as one of his top-20 Rule 5 targets, but I really don't see that happening. Aguilar is still considered a below-average defender, and is very susceptible to sliders down and away. I think he'd get eaten alive by major league pitching at this stage of his career, and I just don't see him sticking on a 25-man roster for an entire season. He's got some power projection, but there aren't many teams that carry an extra hitter who's limited to 1B/DH in the field. The player I'm more concerned about losing is lefthanded starter T.J. McFarland. McFarland turns 24 in June, and spent the majority of 2012 in AAA Columbus where he went 8-6 with a 4.82 ERA. He's close to major league ready, and a team in need of a 5th starter and/or long man out of the bullpen could select him and use him in a variety of roles in 2013. It's telling that the Indians chose to protect fellow southpaw T.J. House instead of McFarland, as House is a similar pitcher who spent most of 2012 at AA Akron so one would think that House would be behind McFarland in the prospect pecking order, but that's clearly not the case in the eyes of the Indians front office. It will be interesting to see if McFarland is

selected, and if he is whether or not House goes on to have the more productive career.

Meanwhile, down on the farm, the club announced the coaching assignments for the minor league affiliates for the upcoming season. Chris Tremie was promoted from Akron to manage the Clippers, former Marlins manager Edwin Rodriguez moves from Carolina to Akron, Dave Wallace is bumped up from Lake County to Carolina and Scooter Tucker, former Mudcats hitting coach, will make his managerial debut and skipper the Lake County Captains. The shuffling started because Clippers manager Mike Sarbaugh moved up to the Indians staff as infield/1B coach. Out of all of those moves, the one I'm most excited about is the Dave Wallace promotion. The former catcher has gone from managing Mahoning Valley to Carolina in three seasons, and really seems like a future managerial candidate at the big league level. The players really seem to enjoy playing for him and he's a young, energetic figure with a knack for motivation. Minor league coaches are essential for the development of an organization's young talent, and the Indians really have a good group of experienced guys to shepherd their talented young players as they make their journey to the show.

The other minor league roster move I wanted to briefly cover here is the loss of Nick Weglarz to the Tampa Bay Rays. Wegz showed a lot of promise as a youngster, flashing prodigious power and a patient approach at the plate that made him a "Moneyball" dream come true. He burst on the scene with an .891 OPS in low-A in 2007, and after posting an .893 OPS between Akron and Columbus in 2010, he seemed on the cusp of the always-open leftfield job at the corner of Carnegie and Ontario. That's when the injuries started, as a torn meniscus, torn ligament in his thumb and tendonitis all limiting him to just 150 games in 2011 and 2012 combined, all with AA Akron. Weglarz was always one of my favorite players in the system and I'm sad to see him go. He's just 25, and I wish him nothing but the best in Tampa as he continues to pursue his major

league dream.

Two articles that didn't get a whole lot of attention in the Cleveland market focus on front office personnel around baseball that stem from the Indians management tree. This piece from the Providence Journal focuses on sophomore Red Sox GM Ben Cherington, his assistant Mike Hazen, first year manager John Farrell and Farrell's bench coachTorey Lovullo, all of whom had worked in the Indians organization at one time. All are complimentary with respect to their time in the Indians organization, with two quotes in particular sticking out for me:

"The process that was created there with Mark and Chris leading it, you could have applied that to any number of industries," said Farrell, who was hired last month to succeed Bobby Valentine as Red Sox manager. "You could take that same setup — with how thorough things were and how challenging it was for everyone involved — and apply that to other areas and it might be successful, even if it wasn't baseball."

----Snip---

"When I left to go to Boston, there were some things we tried to take from there — whether that's in player development or other areas — and we're not the only ones to do that," Cherington said. "There have been other teams trying to copy some of what has gone on in Cleveland for a long time. More and more organizations now look more like Cleveland did 15 years ago."

Encouraging, but also troubling. Small market teams need to remain ahead of the curve when it comes to identifying market inefficiencies If, 15 years ago, the Indians were able to use advanced stats to better identify players to acquire, that's great. But if more and more organizations, particularly organizations with the financial resources of the Red Sox, are also identifying and exploiting those inefficiencies then they no longer exist for all intents and purposes.
 Cherington offers a similar quote inthis MLB.com piece:

"That culture was there, I learned from it, it made a big impression on me," Cherington said. "So when I left to go to Boston, before we hired Mike Hazen or John Farrell or anyone else, there were some other things that we tried to take from there, whether it's some of the

player-development methods we've used, or in other ways -- and we're not the only team, by the way. There's other teams trying to copy what's gone on in Cleveland for a long time. And I think more and more organizations now look more like Cleveland did 15 years ago. Cleveland still looks that way, but there are more teams that look more like that now."

Whether we agree with every move this front office makes or not, it's clear that they are well respected around baseball and branches of the Hart/Shapiro tree will continue to get opportunities to prove themselves in front offices across the game. Between Cherington, Neal Huntington, Dan O'Dowd and others, former Indians executives are spread all over the place.

The free agent dominoes are starting to fall around baseball, and while the highest dollar players (Grienke and Hamilton) remain available, there are some crazy contracts being thrown out there. Allow me to present the old "player A vs player B" scenario for you real quick:

Player A: 30 years old, .874 career OPS, 132 career OPS+, 83 HR, 85 SB

Player B: 28 years old. .758 career OPS, 105 career OPS+, 118 HR, 232 SB

Player A is in his final year of arbitration. Player B just signed a 5-year contract worth $75 million. So if B.J. Upton (player B) can command $15 million per season over 5 years, what is the S.S. Choo (player A), captained by one Scott Boras, going to cost? Upton has a little more pop and a little more speed, but the argument can certainly be made, and you can be sure that Boras is going to make it, that Choo is the superior player. So does anyone really think that Choo is going to resign here? Is he really worth $12-18 million per season? Choo can only fetch draft pick compensation if he's on a roster at the beginning of the season, so if teams are looking for a 1-year rental for the South Korean outfielder, they're more likely to try and deal for him prior to opening day. I just can't see any reason for Choo to be in the Indians opening day lineup, and fully expect that after Bourn, Swisher and Hamilton sign, a team in need of an outfielder will come calling and the good ship Choo will go sailing out of town.

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