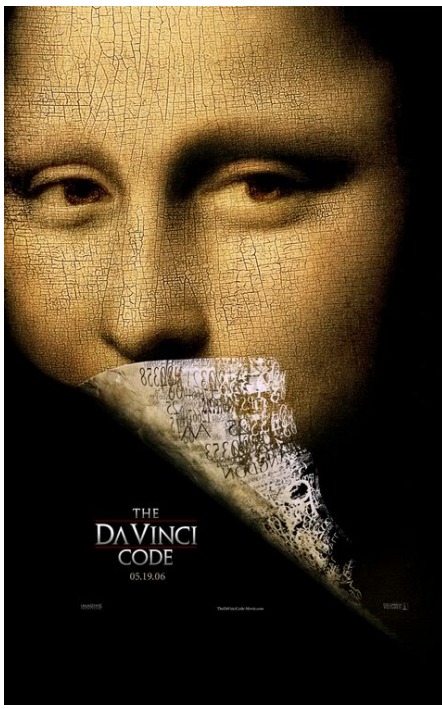
In his latest, Tony Lastoria tries to make sense of the David Dellucci signing, which underwhelmed many Tribe fans that were looking for the team to make a bigger splash in free agency this year. In attempting to unravel The Dellucci Code, Lastoria theorizes that this signing could lead to another move that could affect the Indians outfield.



David Dellucci.

The final piece to the offense? Or, is this a signing that hints of bigger and better things to come?

Bottom line….what does this signing really mean?

There has to be a method to Shapiro's madness with this signing, right? I'm no Robert Langdon, but some clues and answers to The Dellucci Code and what this signing means are there.

It goes without saying that this signing has left Indians fans very disappointed. This off-season, most of the fans were expecting a significant player to be acquired in a trade or through free agency. It came very close to happening with Gary Sheffield a few weeks back, and could still possibly happen with Manny Ramirez or some other player in a trade in the coming weeks.

But, right now, Cleveland fans are impatient and no longer want to hear anymore excuses. While I consider myself much more patient than the average fan, I really can't blame them. So, when the Indians first move in free agency is for a veteran career platoon player, the loud negative backlash from such a signing should be expected.

The fans in this town are already in a fowl mood because of the Browns being stuck in an endless tailspin of suck, and the Cavaliers playing uninspired basketball in a year when the Eastern Conference is ripe for the taking. The Indians are just a capper to that their frustration

level. The Indians absence in making any big plays for free agents this off-season has done nothing to change the very pissed off mood of the fans. Frustrated is no longer the word to describe the fans….more like seething anger.

With that said, what does the Dellucci signing mean as the Indians plod through the rest of this offseason?

It means that someone might now be available in a trade, and that the Indians feel they have addressed their left-field situation without getting a big-time bat.

What, you ask? How can David Dellucci address our outfield situation! The guy is a platoon player!

While in the past I have been accused of being the spawn of Mark Shapiro, let me for a moment put on my Mark Shapiro hat and explain:

Dellucci is a pretty productive player, if used properly. Even though his agent stated otherwise, Dellucci's value to the Indians in 2007 is more as a platoon player. And, the Indians reportedly signed him with the exact intention of platooning him in the outfield with a right-handed hitter, possibly Jason Michaels.

A left-handed hitter, Dellucci is a very good hitter against right-handed pitching. In the last three years (2004-2006), Dellucci has hit .264/.366/.509 with 56 HRs and 156 RBIs in 949 at bats against right-handed pitching. By the same token, in the last three years he has hit .185/.284/.321 with 3 HRs and 9 RBIs in 81 at bats against left-handed pitching. His extreme splits to go along with only 81 at bats in three years against left-handed pitching shows he is strictly a platoon player. For Shapiro to force him to play full-time and start facing left-handed pitching on a regular basis now would be completely foolish.

With Dellucci starting in left-field regularly against right-handed pitching, he'll likely command around 70% of the playing time in the platoon. The other piece to the platoon will need to be a right-handed hitting outfielder with a good history against left-handed pitching, and right now it looks like that person may be Jason Michaels. For as much flack Michaels gets, he still hits lefties well as over his last three years he has hit .300/.385/.444/.829 with 10 HRs and 51 RBIs in 403 at bats. A starter Michaels is not. A good right-handed platoon option he is.

A Michaels/Dellucci combination in 2007 could very well be the second coming of the Eduardo Perez/Ben Broussard platoon at first-base in 2006. Apparently, Shapiro was so impressed with that combination, that he is going to try to do it again. This time, in left-field. With top level free agents being so over-priced, and an elite prospect not ready for the position, going with a platoon option in left-field may be a smart move for the short-term. Plus, prior to the platoon being broken up last year, the Perez/Broussard combination was performing better than any other first-baseman not named Albert Pujols.

It is also possible that young Indians farmhands Franklin Gutierrez or Ben Francisco could fill the right-handed hitting portion of the platoon if Michaels is non-tendered or traded this

off-season.

So, hopefully you can see where Shapiro may be coming from with this platoon idea with Deullici. And, even if viewed as a platoon option, the acquisition of Dellucci may have also made someone else expendable in a trade.

Who is available, you ask?

The addition of Dellucci may very well mean the subtraction of Ryan Garko, for one. The Indians have gone way out of their way to let it be known he does not have a firm hold on the starting first-base job in 2007. While I appreciate the Indians guarded approach to first-base in 2007, there is no reason Garko should not be the starting first-baseman for this team next year sans a signing or trade for an elite first-baseman. There have been numerous rumors that the Indians may be trying to flip him to another team for a reliever or two.

Dellucci's arrival may also mean Casey Blake is being used as part of a package deal (possibly with Westbrook) to get a bonafide closer or bat. Or, that Blake alone may be flipped for a reliever. Dellucci may be viewed as a Blake replacement, which seems plausible since the two are very good platoon and bench options. And, it is possible Shin-Soo Choo may be on his way out, as the signing of Dellucci could replace Choo as the 4th outfielder in the platoon with Jason Michaels.

Dellucci looks more like an addition to fill a hole they are about to create with a Garko, Blake and/or Choo trade, and not just a signing on its own that Shapiro thinks completes this team offensively. In other words, the Dellucci signing is the first domino to fall in what looks like a potential big trade or a series of smaller trades the Indians will make to improve the team.

Hopefully, the next domino that falls is one that will be received with much higher praise by the fans. Right now, there is a huge black cloud like the one in the movie "Independence Day" rolling into Cleveland, ready to sit and hover over Jacob's Field and ignite a firestorm. If things get any worse, and the Indians fail to deliver the promise to improve this team, we just may well see the rancor of the fans as they revolt and retaliate much like what happened in that "Independence Day" movie when cities went up in flames.

It is only early December still, which is very early in the off-season. The GM Meetings which start early this week is usually a time when a flurry of trades and free agent signings go down, and there are rumors that the Indians may be involved in a bevy of signings or trades. That said, if come February this team has failed to deliver promised improvements, then we just well may have complete anarchy on our hands. And deservedly do.

If that happens, the Indians won't need a religious symbology expert like Robert Langdon to decipher what the fans are really trying to say because the message from the fans will be loud and clear. Crystal.