In the days of statistical analysis, teams look for an edge anywhere they can find one. One way of gaining an edge is the use of a platoon. Calling someone a “platoon player” is not a term of endearment with fans and certainly not a glowing review of one’s overall skill. Perhaps fans are disenfranchised with the notion of platoons because it means that both guys aren’t good enough to be everyday players. It’s true, but several players that are penciled in the lineup every day have sharp splits depending on what hand the opposing pitcher throws with.

The Indians are going to use variations of platoons this season whether you like it or not. They may not be traditional platoons, in the sense that the right hander who hits lefties will play every day against a lefty and the left hander who hits righties will play every day against a righty, but Terry Francona is going to play the numbers and percentages to do whatever he can to gain an edge.

Platoons have grown increasingly unpopular with Indians fans because of the failed Dellucci-Michaels and Nixon-Gutierrez platoons. Because platoon situations tend to be attached to the corner outfield positions, it’s understandable why fans aren’t big on the use of platoons. Historically, the corner outfield positions are filled by players who can hit for power and put up numbers.

Over the last three seasons, the dynamic in left field has changed. During the steroid era, which I’ll call 1993-2004, left field was a very productive position, posting an on-base plug slugging above .800 on four different occasions. Since 2010, the combined OPS of left fielders has been .743, .729, and .747. These are still above average values, as the league average OPS has also dropped off over the last three seasons and sits in the .720s.

In 2012, a statistical metric called wOBA, or weighted on-base average, which assigns a run value to each way a batter reaches base (doubles are worth more than singles, home runs are worth more than doubles, etc.), was the lowest it has been for left fielders since 1989. By percentage, left fielders struck out more last season than ever before and posted the lowest on-base percentage, .319, since 1988 and the 22nd-lowest mark since 1901.

The production from right fielders in terms of OPS was the lowest it has been since 1993.

Is the comparison between the steroid era and the current specialized era of the pitcher is a little bit unfair? Maybe, however, it shows the need for managers and players to continue to adapt to the pitcher-dominated current age of baseball. Hence, the use of platoons.

The pitching side of baseball is more unique than ever. Every manager plays matchups with their relievers. Starters are held to strict pitch counts. Rigorous film study and mountains of statistical data are at every pitching coach and pitcher's disposal. Hitters have to adjust to the way the game is being played. Some of them simply cannot. Some hitters are just unable to have the same success against a lefty as they are a righty or vice versa.

It would seem logical that corner outfield spots, which are declining in overall production, are the right place for platoons. Generally, the worse of the two hitters is better defensively or provides other intangibles, like speed or veteran leadership. This is especially true of guys who struggle against right handed pitching. Out of 71,761 plate appearances for outfielders last season, 52,914 were against right handed pitchers, which accounted for almost 74 percent of the plate appearances. Considering that nearly three-fourths of the plate appearances in a given season are against righties, guys who struggle to hit right handers are forced to excel somewhere else.

That brings us to Drew Stubbs. Drew Stubbs is the ideal platoon candidate. By all accounts, Drew Stubbs is an excellent defensive outfielder and his speed is an asset. His defensive skills should shine more playing in Cleveland because Cincinnati's ballpark, its small dimensions and the way the ball carries, is not conducive to being an outfielder. But, the big downfall for Stubbs is that he downright sucks against right handed pitching.

Without getting too detailed into how the formula works and is calculated, I'm going to briefly explain weighted runs created plus (wRC+) because it's going to illustrate my point about using

platoons and splits to gain an edge. wRC+ is a statistical metric that determines weighted runs created using wOBA (mentioned above) and is adjusted for both park factor and league factor. Adjustment for park factor means that it puts Coors Field, a tremendous hitter's park, on an even level with Petco Park in San Diego, a bad hitter's park, or O.co Coliseum in Oakland, another terrible hitter's park.

League adjusted means that the calculation of the stat is proportional to league statistics. It also accounts for the use of the DH in the American League and other variables. If it's a particularly high offensive season, like the steroid era, then wRC+ values are adjusted in relation to the overall offensive output. Likewise, with the dead ball era. This also allows the stat to be compared to past seasons and different eras.

This is the key part: A mark of 100 wRC+ is considered average. A mark of 105 wRC+ would mean that the player is five percent better than average. Similarly, a mark of 95 wRC+ would mean that the player is five percent worse than average.

In 2012, Drew Stubbs, who played in a great hitter's park in Cincinnati, registered 64 wRC+. That would mean that Stubbs was 36 percent worse than an average player offensively. That's terrible and there's no other way to say it.

However, against left handed pitching, Stubbs posted a 111 wRC+, which means he was 11 percent BETTER than an average player. For his career, Stubbs has a wRC+ of 120 against southpaws.

Against right handers, his career wRC+ is 77, which clearly shows that he is well below average. He strikes out more and walks less against righties than he does against lefties. His average is 48 points lower, his OBP is 43 points lower, and his slugging percentage is 121 points lower against righties compared to lefties.

From the stats, it would appear that the Indians shouldn't use Stubbs every day in right field. If Jason Giambi makes the team, I don't see Stubbs getting a lot of starts against RHP, but that remains to be seen. In any event, Stubbs is taking over for Shin-Soo Choo. From 2008-12, Choo was an absolute monster against righties. His 152 wRC+ is the ninth-best mark in all of baseball over that span, ahead of guys like Josh Hamilton and Robinson Cano. Against lefties,

however, Choo ranked 112th among qualified - to qualify, a batter needs 3.1 plate appearances per game played over that span - players with a wRC+ of 97. His OPS ranked 135th.

The downgrade from Stubbs to Choo against right handers is enormous. The upgrade to Choo against LHP plus the defensive upgrade is enough to close the gap somewhat. Stubbs will never be on Choo's level in terms of player value. However, if used properly, Stubbs can be an effective player.

Stubbs will play right field against lefties, whether Giambi makes the team or not. Nick Swisher would play first base. From 2008-12, Swisher has a wRC+ of 128 against southpaws. Swisher as the first baseman would put Mark Reynolds into the game as the designated hitter and he has a wRC+ of 126 over the last five seasons against southpaws. Add in continued improvement from Carlos Santana, who has a wRC+ of 138 for his career against lefties. Remember when the Indians couldn't hit lefties? Oh, yeah. That was last season. That shouldn't be the case again.

The Indians also have Mike Aviles, who has a career wRC+ of 111 against lefties. He could fill in for Jason Kipnis or Lonnie Chisenhall to give the Indians another above average bat against lefties.

Even Lou Marson has a wRC+ of 106 against lefties. That could give the Indians more options, with Santana at first base and Reynolds at DH or Santana getting a pseudo day off as the DH.

Ryan Raburn, who seems to have a good shot at making the team, has a career wRC+ of 111 against lefties and 85 against righties. It's worth noting that Michael Bourn's wRC+ against lefties is just 75. The Indians may opt to use Stubbs in center field against tough lefties to protect Bourn and give him a day off. That could put Raburn in the game in right field or give Jason Kipnis or Lonnie Chisenhall, who also struggle with lefties, a day off.

Now, enter Giambi into the fold. The Giambino isn't the same player he once was. Last season, battling injuries, he was brutal against RHP. In 2011, however, Giambi posted a 155 wRC+ against righties in 113 plate appearances, yes, a small sample size. Against right handers since 2008, Nick Swisher has a wRC+ of 118, so the smart move would be to play him in right field against righties and put Stubbs on the bench. Mark Reynolds has a wRC+ of 104, which isn't

great, but is still a vast upgrade to Stubbs. He should play first base with Swisher in right. Another option is Carlos Santana, who has a wRC+ of 118 against right handers, at first base.

Like all stats, wRC+ is not foolproof, nor is it an all-encompassing stat, but it's pretty close and it is a good gauge to show how much better than average a player is offensively. Also, it's a good metric to follow to gain a platoon advantage, which is what I illustrated above.

Again, the important thing to keep in mind here is that wRC+ is based on a scale where average is 100. The amount above 100 that a player is, the percentage above average he is.

The Indians have a lot of guys who are above average offensive performers overall and some who really excel given the opposing pitcher. If managed properly, which Francona should be able to do, the Indians should be able to maximize every position player's value throughout the season.

These abbreviations and sabermetric concepts can be confusing, but the important takeaway is that the Indians have lineup options and they are good options. The way they handle the lineup won't be in true platoon fashion, but, like the game itself, platoons are evolving. Unlike some sabermetric stats, exact wRC+ amounts are not predictive nor are they guaranteed that to stay in the same range. But, players who tend to be above average against a lefty or a righty are extremely likely to continue being better than average against those pitchers.

Platoons may be frustrating, but they are based on logic, statistical analysis, and cost-benefit analysis. Platoon players like Stubbs, who will make $2.825M in 2013, tend to come at a cheaper rate because their offensive production only comes in certain situations. For a platoon to truly work, both players need to hold up their end of the bargain, which is why they are often scrutinized. For this one to work, Stubbs will have to be good against left handed pitching and play tremendous defense when he is in the lineup with a right hander on the mound.

I hate to harp on it, as the Indians did not spend like a small-to-mid market team this winter, but these are things that teams with financial constraints need to do. Add in a questionable starting rotation that is going to need every run that the Indians lineup can muster and it's safe to assume that Francona and his staff will be using these numbers to their advantage.