A weekly Sunday feature, The Indians Roundtable poses one question each week to our Indians panel here at The Cleveland Fan. This week, we set our sights on Jhonny Peralta, who has frequently been singled out by GM Mark Shapiro as the most important person to the teams 2007 success. Is this just a motivational tactic by Shapiro? Or is Honny truly the biggest key to this years Indians? The panel talks Peralta.

"The Indians Roundtable" will be a regular weekly Sunday feature throughout the baseball season. One question. Several different answers from TheClevelandFan.com Indians panel.

Position players have reported to camp this past week, and while there are very few question marks regarding what position players will head north to Cleveland when camp breaks, there are some question marks as to how those players will perform in 2007. One of the biggest question marks is SS Jhonny Peralta, whom Indians GM Mark Shapiro dubbed numerous times this offseason as the "most important player to our team's success in 2007."

Is Shapiro full of it and this is simply just hyberbole? Or, is Shapiro spot on with his assessment? I shared some of my thoughts on Peralta in yesterday’s Spring Happenings report , and the rest of TheClevelandFan.com's stable of Indians writers share their opinions below:

Steve Buffum: I heard Shapiro talk about what went wrong last season. We were second in the majors in scoring, and our rotation had the 4th-best ERA in the AL. That meant our struggles came down to:

1) Bullpen performance
2) Infield defense

(The outfield defense wasn't anything special, either, but it was miles better than the infield defense.)

The bullpen performance is probably the more important FACTOR, but it depends on many different PLAYERS. If one falters, there are others whose good performance would counteract his badness.

When it comes to one PLAYER, you have to look at which player could stand to make the largest improvement in the infield defense. Andy Marte is certainly a tremendous upgrade to Aaron Boone's performance in 2006, but he's probably not going to be a whole lot different from what we saw for a half year. Josh Barfield is better than Ron Belliard, but Belliard wasn't that bad, and second base isn't as demanding as the left side of the infield. First base defense isn't a big factor.

So yeah, I agree, because Jhonny Peralta could improve significantly on his performance from 2006. (He's been good in the past, it is possible for him to be at least average again.) And he could certainly improve at the plate as well, since his 2006 was a bunch of standard deviations south of his 2005. If Peralta splits the offense difference between 2005 and 2006, and raises his range and zone ratings above league average, he would contribute a heckuva lot of runs, really help pitchers like Westbrook and Carmona (whom I think we'll see this season), and generally impact the team more than any other single player is capable of doing in a positive manner.

By the way, the vision problem explanation makes a lot of sense to me in that it explains Peralta's bad defensive positioning, his bad jumps on ground balls, and his waving at sliders in the dirt. I might be a hopeless homer on this one, but I buy it and expect Peralta to rebound in 2007.

Erik Cassano: Water tends to find its level, and I am inclined to believe that the "real" Jhonny Peralta lies somewhere in between the 2005 and '06 versions.

Peralta is very much the Indians' version of Drew Gooden: A highly-talented player who inexplicably loses all motivation at times and mails it in. Unfortunately, Eric Wedge doesn't have the luxury of benching Peralta for Anderson Varejao on nights when he looks dead from the neck up.

I think Peralta will rebound to have a better '07, but probably won't reach his '05 levels when he was playing his way out of the shadow of Omar Vizquel.

As far as Shapiro's take on Peralta, I tend to think crowning him the most important player to the Indians' 2007 success is a bit of an overrated statement. I'd rate the performances of Joe Borowski, Fernando Cabrera and the rest of the bullpen just a teensy bit higher in terms of being the hinge on which way the '07 season will swing.

Offensively, Perallta isn't even a heart-of-the-order hitter right now. A massively-struggling Peralta didn't prevent the Indians from having one of the best offenses in baseball last year. Defensively, Shapiro's statement has more validity. If Peralta continues to be a butcher in the field, there is simply no way he can stay in the lineup. Shortstop is just too important a defensive position to have an error machine manning it.

Rich Swerbinsky: Mark Shapiro is right on in his assessment that Peralta is the most important individual player for the 2007 Indians. He plays the most important position defensively, and underachieved horrifically at the plate last season.

When you watched Peralta last year, it was clearly a case of laziness and lack of focus. Despite being healthy all season, Jhonny's OPS dropped by almost 200 points. He walked less, struck out more, was awful with runners in scoring position, and one of the worst hitters in all of baseball with runners in scoring position and two outs. And despite committing less errors, he was a very bad defensive shortstop with poor footwork and range.

Allegedly, Jhonny has worked on his footwork and conditioning this season. To me, Peralta seems a bit airheaded and aloof as a player, and is prone to falling into bad ruts when things get tough. With his natural talent, and the numbers he posted as a rookie, anything less than .280, 20 HR's, 80 RBI's, and improved range defensively would be a disappointment.

Jeff Rickel: Shapiro is overstating a bit when it comes to Peralta's offensive contribution. While Jhonny Peralta swinging the stick like the 2005 model would be a nice boon for the Tribe, there's enough offensive talent to recover for another mediocre performance at the plate. The defense is a different ballgame and Shapiro's statement holds true. Peralta improving his defensive game would help the pitching staff, especially Westbrook. Poor fielding doesn't always count as an error and I saw several moments where the infield defense reacted poorly, costing the pitcher a run or allowing a runner to get on. As the shortstop, Peralta is the cornerstone to the infield defense. If he improves then the rest of the infield should get better, especially with Barfield and Marte appearing to be defensive upgrades.

I do think Peralta is primed for a rebound season. There've been a couple of juicy tidbits about Jhonny the past few days. Apparently he had a growth spurt last season, at least according to Peter Gammons (I think that's where I read it). That would require adjustment and could cause problems. He also was diagnosed with myopia (near-sightedness) and it appears to have become more pronounced prior to last season. Peralta didn't wear contacts until the end of the season because they were uncomfortable. Tellingly, I did think he looked better in the last month when it comes to fielding. Near-sightedness can also have a negative effect on hitting, making it far more difficult to determine what a pitcher is throwing and where he's throwing it to. Unfortunately, the September numbers didn't improve at the plate but I'd imagine there'd be some adjustment needed when visual ability changes so much.

To my knowledge Peralta has not had another growth spurt and he had successful Lasik surgery in the offseason. In addition, Jhonny Peralta has reportedly been working hard in the offseason to improve his game. I think Jhonny will have a nice bounce back season. I'm not expecting 2005 numbers at the plate but I do believe an OPS at or around .800 is probable. I also believe he will be able to read the catcher and react better than last season, so we will see an improvement in the defense. If both do happen, as I think they will, then the Tribe is in

great shape.

Cris Sykes: I would qualify Jhonny Peralta being the most important player on the 2007 Indians as this: if we are talking position players, then yes he probably is. Overall, I think any of the starting pitchers are equally in control of the success of the Indians, and even they pale in comparison to the importance of the group of Band-Aids currently making up the bullpen.

Jhonny Peralta is as important to the Indians as any starting shortstop is to his team. Throw in the fact that he is our best (?) right-handed bat and his importance grows. However, if Peralta is that guy from 2005, and the bullpen is the worst in the AL, it won't really matter. If Peralta is the guy from 2006, but the bullpen is brilliant, the Indians will be fine.

I think we will see a Peralta that is much closer to the 2005 version. A lot of players need that year (2006) to get their head on straight. I think Jhonnny grew up over the course of last season, but was already in such a downward spiral that it could not be rectified. If there is truth to the growth spurt, or the eye problems, then those are some pretty significant physical issues to deal with, all while trying to overcome a horrible start and another disappointing season for the team. It would not surprise me one bit for Peralta to get off to a good start, and carry that momentum through to a comeback player of the year type season.

Jarad Regano: Peralta certainly will be a focal point for the 2007 Indians. Some of it has been brought on by himself, including a sophomore slump and at times lethargic play. Some if it, though, has to do with him physically being a third baseman being asked to play shortstop.

He is always going to have limitations defensively based on his size and build alone. Peralta should bounce back somewhat offensively, and I feel will be an above average hitting shortstop. Defensively, the odds are stacked against him. He should continue to get bigger as his career goes along, making him even less of a fit at short.

No doubt Peralta is one of the most important pieces to the 2007 Indians. Some of the expectations placed on him by management, however, may be unrealistic.

Todd Dery: For the Indians lineup to be all it will need to be and all that GM Mark Shapiro hopes it will be, Jhonny Peralta MUST be the guy we saw in 2005, not the regressed version

of 2006. Peralta's confidence took a severe hit as he continued to swing and miss at the low and away breaking pitch. He was very reminiscent of Matt Williams in 1997 and the days of Cory Snyder in the late 80's. Manager Eric Wedge stuck with Jhonny way too long in the 3 hole and let him flounder before our very eyes.

This season, Jhonny will start off most likely hitting 6th or 7th. Without Shapiro getting a big bat this offseason (sorry Mark, David Dellucci and Trot Nixon do not count), the hope is that Peralta will fill that void the way he did during the 05 stretch-drive when he was so masterful. He seemed to come up big in the clutch every time they needed him. Unlike last season though, expectations for the young shortstop seem to be low. That should play right into his wheel house. Let’s not forget that Peralta was a AAA MVP at age 22 who could hit to all fields. Nobody thought he was even close to worthy of replacing Tribe legend Omar Vizquel. It took no time at all to make the experts think this was a wise decision. That line of thinking changed last year. Did he rest on his laurel's after he got his locked in 5 year contract? Who knows. Peralta does know however that he'd better produce this season or the Tribe will take a hard look at replacing him.

As a prediction, I think we see something in the middle of the last two seasons - .280, 15 HR's and 75 RBI. I think you would take that all day from your shortstop, wouldn't you?