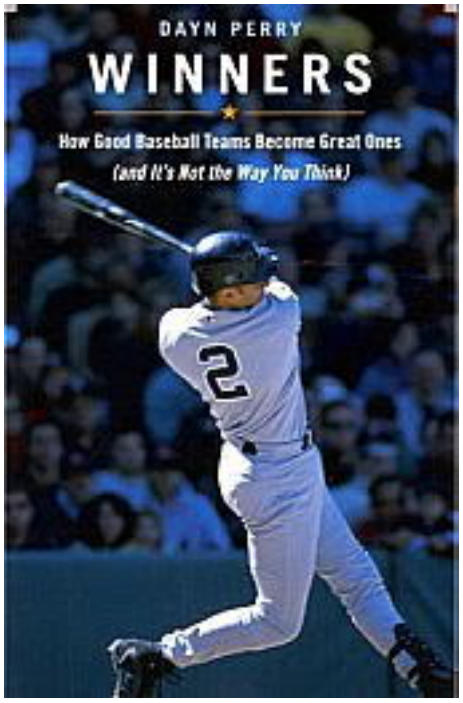
Dayn Perry is a highly regarded baseball writer who writes for Fox Sports and Baseball Prospectus. Lastoria recently caught up with Perry and talked Tribe, asking why so many national writers expect big things from the Indians. Dayn answers several questions regarding the Indians from the minors up to the players on the major league team. A great read, and thanks to Dayn for taking the time to stop in and share his thoughts on the Indians.



For those unfamiliar with who Dayn Perry is, he is a highly regarded baseball columnist who mainly writes for Fox Sports and Baseball Prospectus, and covers a wide range of topics in baseball from the minor leagues to the majors.

Perry also writes for The Chicago Sports Review, which is a weekly magazine circulated in the Chicago area. The magazine features writers and stories not exclusive to Chicago, and has gained attention because many of the articles bring to the forefront various touchy topics such as race, sociology, politics, law, crime and economics in the sporting world.

Perry also wrote the book *Winners: How Good Baseball Teams Become Great Ones (And It's Not the Way You Think)*, which is a book that looks at the 124 teams that made the playoffs from 1980-2003 and the trends they have in common. The book also serves as a very good introduction to the advanced statistics used in sabermetrics by taking the works of people like Bill James, Nate Silver and Voros McCracken and explains them thoroughly in plain English.

I recently had the chance to hook up with Dayn to get his views on the Indians upcoming season as well as the Indians farm system. A big thank you to Dayn for taking the time to answer the many questions thrown his way, especially considering he was just wrapping up a vacation. Thanks Dayn.

With that, onto the Q&A:

Q: On a personal note, why do you spell your name as "Dayn"?

Dayn Perry (DP): Because my parents made me spell it that way. I'm not sure why they opted for the unconventional spelling. Needless to say, I get a lot of pre-sorted mail addressed to "Ms. Dayn Perry." My Dad's named Bob, my mom is Sue, my sister's Cathy, and my brother's Steve. I get the weird name. Go figure.

Q: Is being a baseball sportswriter something you always wanted to do?

DP: I always wanted to write in some form or fashion, and I always loved sports. Growing up in Mississippi, college football was my first love, but as I grew older I cultivated a deeper interest in baseball. Forging the two loves—writing and sports—has been beyond my hopes.

Q: Any interesting stories from your first days, or that got you started in the business?

DP: Winter Meetings, Nashville, 2001 or so, hotel gym. Working out next to Andre Dawson is a terrifically humbling experience.

Q: Shifting to the Indians, here in Cleveland a lot of people do not appear to take this team seriously this upcoming season, yet just about every person in the national media are predicting big things for the Indians this year. In a column in January, you considered the Indians may be the AL Central's Best . What does the national media see that people here do not?

DP: I think perhaps native pessimism is to blame. Many fans don't want to buy into the hype because they irrationally fear the jinx, or allowing themselves such thoughts just sets up the disappointment down the road. In the case of Indians fans, it's probably more the latter.

More specifically, the Indians' strong run differential last season portends a rebound this season, and maybe Tribe fans aren't mindful of that.

Q: To many fans this team is Grady Sizemore, Travis Hafner, C.C. Sabathia and a collection of nobody's. Is this just typical Cleveland cynicism and this team is more talented than many fans may realize?

DP: Well, those are three very good starting points. Overall, though, yes, it's an unfair criticism. Victor Martinez isn't much with the glove, but his level of offensive production is exceptional by catcher standards. The Indians figure to have workable platoons at the outfield corners, Josh Barfield will be an above-average second baseman with the bat, Jhonny Peralta should rebound to a degree (albeit not to 2005 levels), and Andy Marte should make strides. If there's a concern, it's the bullpen and the need for a lefty-swinging first baseman.

Q: What about the division the Indians are in? Four teams have the potential to win 90 games and each of them play each other 19 times a year. While they are all contenders

now, two of these fanbases will be disappointed at seasons end since at most only two can make the playoffs. Is the AL Central the toughest division in baseball, and should fans be disappointed with a 90-win non-playoff team?

DP: Beyond a shadow of a doubt, the AL Central is the toughest division in baseball. You've got four playoff-caliber teams, and no other division can say that. The shame of it is that the unbalanced schedule means that the Wild Card, undeservingly, will probably come from another division. There'll simply be too much attrition in the Central. That raises the stakes considerably for the Indians, Tigers, Twins and White Sox.

Q: The Indians starting pitching and offense have consistently been ranked near the top in all of baseball the last three years. But, the bullpen has fluctuated from year to year and the defense went from 3rd in defensive efficiency rating (DER) in 2005 to 26th last year. Shapiro took a buckshot approach with the bullpen this offseason, and players like Josh Barfield and Andy Marte will now be available all year defensively. Can we expect improvement in the bullpen and on defense this year, and will it be enough?

DP: That's the big reason I'm predicting serious improvement for Cleveland this year. In 2005, the Indians had the best bullpen in baseball, but last year they backslid considerably. Credit Mark Shapiro for recognizing this and taking steps. Roberto Hernandez, Joe Borowski and even Aaron Fultz will help the cause, and I also expect Fernando Cabrera to exhibit skills growth. It won't be a great pen, but it will be an improved one.

Q: As an unbiased national baseball sportswriter, what is your opinion regarding the likelihood the Indians are able to resign any of the following: C.C. Sabathia, Travis Hafner and Jake Westbrook?

DP: I think they re-up with Sabathia and Hafner but let Westbrook walk (despite the fact that Shapiro's dad is Westbrook's agent). Sabathia's finally realizing his ace potential, and Hafner is one of the best hitters in the game today. He's a DH, but he's not a readily replaceable DH. The Indians are no longer in rebuilding mode, and that means endeavoring to keep your stars. As for Westbrook, I think they'll bid him adieu and plug in Adam Miller.

Q: Who is the least replaceable player on the Indians between Sabathia, Hafner and Grady Sizemore?

DP: Sizemore. Excellent defense at a vital position, excellent bat, 24 years of age. This didn't get enough pub last season, but Sizemore's 92 extra-base hits in 2006 were the fourth-most ever by a center fielder. He's a future MVP and a perennial All-Star.

Q: What is your take on the Ryan Garko situation? Should the Indians just hand him the starting first base job, or are they wise in working him in and having Casey Blake start there for now?

DP: I think Garko and Blake profile similarly in terms of power, but I like Garko's on-base skills better. I think Garko should get most of the playing time, but both should be in the lineup whenever a lefty is on the mound for the opposition (Blake at one of the outfield corners). If Garko's platoon issues persist, then the Tribe might need to go fishing for lefty-hitting first baseman at some point. That's a wait-and-see situation, though.

Q: Many fans were not impressed with Andy Marte offensively last year, but many liked what they saw out of Shin-Soo Choo. Do you see good things in the near future with Marte? Choo?

DP: I'm much more bullish on Marte than Choo. Marte put up some excellent numbers in the minors despite being younger than his peer groups and playing in some tough parks for hitters. He'll hit; it's just a matter of giving him time to adjust. I don't know that he's a future star, but he does figure to be an above-average third baseman with the glove and with the bat. Choo's a highly useful spare part, but I don't know that he has the power to hold down an every-day job as a corner outfielder.

Q: If Jhonny Peralta's struggles from last year continue well into this season, what do the Indians do? Or, do you see Peralta having a bounce back year?

DP: Short answer (as hinted at above): better than last year, not as good as 2005. Overall, though, an asset by shortstop standards.

Q: What are your thoughts on Eric Wedge as a manager? A lot of people in this town are not a big fan of his, but he is apparently tight with Indians General Manager Mark Shapiro. Is he on the hot seat right now or not?

DP: Yeah, there's pressure on him to win this year. He's not a guy I'd put on the hot seat shortlist, but the team needs to contend. Tactically, Wedge is a bit too slow to go to the bullpen, but overall he's solid.

Q: As you look at things now, what is the Indians biggest weakness and strength?

DP: Strengths: offense, rotation (even without Cliff Lee). Weaknesses: defense, left-handed relief (early arrival for Tony Sipp?).

Q: You recently ranked the general managers in baseball and listed Indians General Manager Mark Shapiro 13th out of the 30 general managers (GM). Is Shapiro really a middle-of-the-pack GM according to your ranking, or this a result of so many strong GMs in the game today? Do you think retaining Shapiro is a good or bad thing for the organization?

DP: Shapiro's a good GM, and his ranking is a reflection of the strength at the top of the list.

It's a much narrower gap between, say, one and 13 than there is between 13 and 26, for instance. Re-signing him is certainly the right move for the Indians. I think he'll be considerably higher on that list in the coming years.

Q: Shifting gears to the prospects, in your recent Top 100 Prospect listing , you rated Jacob Ellsbury over Trevor Crowe. What makes you put him above Crowe?

DP: Short answer is defense and a clearer path. Crowe is probably headed for a corner spot, and that raises his offensive bar significantly. Ellsbury is a Gold Glove-caliber center fielder who's going to stick at the position. Both have good on-base skills and dubious raw-power indicators.

Q: After Adam Miller, Chuck Lofgren, and Trevor Crowe, who would you say is the Indians next best prospect and did he just miss your Top 100 list?

DP: John Drennan almost made it. If he shows up in the Carolina League this season, he'll definitely be there next year.

Q: What is your opinion of Brad Snyder? Has his stock dropped significantly, or do you see a rebound year coming from him?

DP: I'm not big on Snyder at this point. Too much of an uppercut, and he can't hit advanced breaking stuff. He's a left-handed Tagg Bozied with better defense. A Major League role player, at best.

Q: Who would you say is your prospect sleeper in the Indians organization to come out of nowhere and have a breakthrough season this year (i.e. like Brian Barton last year)?

DP: I'm going to repeat myself and say Drennan. There's a lot of center-field depth in the organization and in the minors as a whole, and Drennan doesn't get much attention as a result. I think he'll adjust to full-season ball and take off this year.

A special thanks to Dayn once again. Also, look out for another Q&A later this month with Baseball Prospectus' prospect guru Kevin Goldstein as we dive deeper into the Indians minor league system. And look for additional Q&A's throughout the season from various national baseball writers.

*Also, look for my final **Winter Haven Live** report mid-late afternoon tomorrow (Saturday) as I wrap up my coverage of the Indians in spring training.*