July 25th, 2005.

Just another AAA baseball game in Buffalo. Only about a third of the seats filled Dunn Tire Park as the late arriving crowd had yet to settle in. Music begins to blare from the speakers as Brandon Phillips, in rhythm to the music, walks to the dish. Well, not quite yet. First he trots up to the umpire (actually shaking his hand, mind you), draws a line diagonally in the batter's box, places his bat under his arm and adjusts his batting gloves: THEN steps up to the plate.

After the usual ritual of spinning his bat in a circular motion, Phillips laces the first pitch into the corner for a leadoff double. The crowd gets to cheer early tonight, but not for long. Phillips takes his lead, and gleefully chats with the shortstop (presumably about his rocket down the left field line). As he carries on, the pitcher whirls and throws to the second baseman covering- one down. The crowd erupts in boos, showing that this is not the first time a debacle of this nature has taken place.

Talented. Overconfident. Over-the-top cockiness. All may apply to

Brandon Phillips.

The jewel of the largest trade in the Tribe rebuilding process may be the only piece this side of Lee Stevens that does not fit into the long-term plans. Thanks to a rushed trip to the big leagues, poor development, questionable attitude, and call-ups from AAA that had him caddying for Eddie Murray on off days and sitting on the bench instead of playing- B. Phil is out of options.

What lies ahead for the still young Phillips (still just 24) is a spot on the roster as a utility infielder or possibly a trade to another team sometime later this Spring. I personally feel another year (yes, another year) in AAA would actually help him. That will not happen here (or most likely anywhere now), and a year on the bench with 100-200 AB's probably would not suit his style of play or style of behavior. Last year he hit .256 with 15 bombs and 79 runs scored at Buffalo. Those may be modest numbers, but when you consider his mid-summer sabbatical with the big league club and no games in September at Buffalo, they are not to be scoffed at either. Another year at AAA could have easily seen him post .275/22/95.

The only way I see this thing playing out here is if Larry Dolan, unwilling to re-sign Ronnie Belliard after 2006, gives him the job after a season with minimal AB's. As frugal as Larry has known to be, I think it is a stretch, even with few other middle infield options in the system.

The jury is still out on Brandon Phillips. I see the verdict of ballplayer or bust being decided in a courtroom in another city.