With the demotion of Jeremy Sowers to Buffalo, and Jake Westbrook not ready to return from the DL, the Indians suddenly find themselves shorthanded on major league ready starting pitchers. And this is just a couple weeks after many of us felt the team was so loaded there, that we should entertain dealing Paul Byrd. The Indians just decided to call up Jason Stanford to start tomorrow's game against the Marlins ... but Paul Cousineau gives us his thoughts on the matter.

With the demotion of Jeremy Sowers to Buffalo, and Jake Westbrook not ready to return from the DL, the Indians face a decision to find a starter for Thursday's game in Florida.

Easy, right? Um…no.

The obvious answer (already on the 25-man roster) to take the spot start would be the 130 lb. wrecking ball, Rafael Perez, who started 7 games for the Bisons before earning a promotion to the parent club. However, prior to Sunday's game, the Atomic Wedgie stated that Perez's success in the bullpen for the Indians thus far have convinced the Indians not to shuffle Perez in and out of the rotation, and rightfully so. They prefer to keep him in the bullpen, where he has been extremely successful (0.64 ERA, 0.93 WHIP) through 14 innings and shows a good deal of promise as a late-inning option, not just a match-up lefty, down the road.

So, with Perez out of the equation, we're back to square one.

Recall that going into the season, the depth of the Tribe system's rotation was one of the deepest in all of MLB, extending deep into the Bisons' squad. Arriving in Winter Haven, the Indians' starters under the surface, number 6 through 9, worked out this way:

#6 – Carmona

#7 – Miller

#8 – Slocum

#9 – Perez

We all know where Carmona and Perez are currently plying their trade, and Atom Miller and Smoke 'Em Brian Slocum are currently taking up spots on the Buffalo DL, so it's time for everyone to put on their thinking caps, sit in their GM chairs, and get a little creative.

The pitchers listed above represent those currently on the 40-man roster thought to be able to help the Indians if such a situation arose this year as you usually don't have to go 10 starters deep by June. The only other pitcher on the 40-man roster who would fall under the category of possible spot starter would be J.D. Martin, who is 2-3 with a 4.25 ERA in 9 starts in Akron. Given his struggles at AA, however, an unprepared Martin is unlikely to fill the void tomorrow night against Dontrelle Willis and the Marlins.

With one open spot on the 40-man roster, the answer is going to have to come from a player that will be added to the 40-man in the next few days. Those candidates, which are currently in Buffalo, would consist of:

Jeff Harris – 2-4, 5.69 ERA, 1.33 WHIP

Jason Stanford – 4-1, 3.41 ERA, 1.27 WHIP

Sean Smith – 5-4, 4.45 ERA, 1.48 WHIP

Aaron Laffey – 2-3, 5.46 ERA, 1.48 WHIP

Bubbie Buzachero – 2-2, 3.96 ERA, 1.24 WHIP (only 2 GS in 15 appearances)

Not exactly the cream of the crop, eh?

These players fall into two categories:

The Youngsters

Those first are those who are under the club's control because of the relatively few years that the players have spent in the organization and whose addition to the 40-man roster would mean that their option clock would start. The upside to this path is that the player, after their spot start, can simply be sent back to Buffalo with an option exercised.

However, their removal from the 40-man (if it came to that) would mean that the Indians would have to designate them for assignment and expose them to waivers. Smith (23 years old), Laffey (22 years old) , and Buzachero (26 years old) fall under this distinction, which the Tribe may be reticent to do as it means that if the Indians add another player to the 40-man roster at some point, the aforementioned spot starter would be the most likely to be exposed to waivers.

With young players, particularly Smith and Laffey, who have reached AAA at a young age, it might be best to let them get through a full year in Buffalo to determine whether or not to add them to the 40-man at the end of the season, when Rule 5 issues arise. Buzachero projects as more of a pugilistic reliever (he broke teammate Eider Torres' jaw in Akron last year in the clubhouse at the end of the season), so letting him cut his teeth as a starter in MLB is highly unlikely.

The Journeymen

The second category of player would be the pitcher who has already gone through one organization's system (Stanford with Cleveland, Harris with Seattle), passed through waivers, and has since been signed by the Indians to a minor-league contract. Stanford or Harris would have to be added to the 40-man roster for Thursday's start; but, unlike the youngsters, they cannot simply be sent back to Buffalo as their contract precludes them from simply being optioned back to AAA.

If the Indians wanted to send Stanford or Harris down (presumably when Westbrook returns from the DL), the player would be exposed to waivers, then become a Free Agent. So, if one of these pitchers were to make a start on Thursday, (then get replaced by Westbrook) they would essentially be making one start then be released from the organization. With the pitching depth as thin as it is in Buffalo, this represents the downside of the "call up Stanford or Harris"

path.

The final thing to consider in the whole equation is the fact that Cliff Lee continues to struggle and can be sent to Buffalo with a remaining option. So, for instance, if Jason Stanford comes to Cleveland and pitches extremely well while Lee continues to falter, it stands to reason that Stanford could stay in Cleveland to assume Lee's spot in the rotation while Lee would join Sowers in Buffalo to work out their troubles together.

Wedge and Shapiro have given an indication that they know which direction they plan on going with Thursday's starter, but have yet to tip their hand and probably won't until they have to. Just prior to Thursday's game, they will call up a starter (the guess here is Stanford, who pitched last Sunday and would be pitching on normal rest) and send Matt Miller back to Buffalo (unless Hernandez is handed his walking papers) to open up the necessary spot on the 25-man roster.

The danger in calling Stanford up is the risk in losing him after one or two starts. On the other hand, isn't that what Stanford is in Buffalo, or much less the organization, for? He's not really a prospect anymore because of his age (he's 30), and losing him after a couple of starts isn't going to send anyone into hysterics.

If, however, Lee is unable to right himself and Stanford puts together some quality starts, I would have no problem with seeing Stanford stay with the parent club to put the best five pitchers in the Indians rotation, regardless of contractual obligations owed to them.

It remains to be seen which direction the Indians will go in for their Thursday starter, but after using 1,000 words detailing the options of one start against the Marlins, a roster move, and the ramifications of those decisions…who said being a GM was easy?