Talk about the Indians off-season and the composition of the 2008 squad is already raging in our Indians message forum, and chief amongst those discussions is talk of how the 2008 infield will look. In newfound celebrity Paul Cousineau's latest, he says that former super-prospect Andy Marte is going to have a lot to do with that. Marte has underwhelmed since coming over in the Coco Crisp trade, but is now out of options. The time has come for him to step up or step out.

The composition of the Indians' 2008 infield has caused a good deal of debate over where Jhonny Peralta should play, how Asdrubal Cabrera fits into the plans, and whether Josh Barfield's 2007 was a "sophomore slump" or a harbinger of things to come. As it would be foolish to simply throw Jhonny under the bus, or out the window, he should remain the Tribe SS for next year until the 2B situation sorts itself out, as moving him to 3B (or out of town altogether) would leave Barfield at 2B and Cabrera (who was certainly impressive...but only has 159 career AB in the Majors) at SS with few viable "in-house" options if one of them struggles or gets hurt.

But larger issues exist here - namely that the Indians have essentially gone on record to say that Casey Blake is the starting 3B for 2008 (eliminating any thought of Peralta at the Hot Corner) and, regardless of your feelings on Blake, the real message is that Andy Marte looks to be the odd man out. Without evoking the name of a certain 2B that plays on the shores of the Ohio River, hasn't this scenario played out (in some form) already? Will the Indians give up on the 24-year-old Marte, once considered a strong enough prospect to be dealt for Edgar Renteria (and cash) straight up just 2 years ago because he's out of options?

Will the Andy Marte Era end before it even started?

The Indians have gone on record to say that Marte will have to play some 1B to make the team out of Winter Haven next year, but what about LF? The Braves, prior to dealing Marte to Boston in the Renteria deal, thought about giving Marte a shot in LF . Though he's never played there, could he be an option for platooning in LF with the left handed Dellucci (assuming he's still around), who should NEVER face a LHP?

Consider Marte's minor league splits:

2007 - Buffalo (AAA)

.827 OPS vs. LH
.748 OPS vs. RH

2006 - Buffalo (AAA)

.894 OPS vs. LH
.730 OPS vs. RH

2005 - Richmond (AAA)

.936 OPS vs. LH
.848 OPS vs. RH

Position changes, particularly from the infield to the outfield (ahem...Ben Broussard) are never quick or seamless; but if Marte can get some regular AB against LHP to improve his confidence and play a decent LF, it may be his ticket onto the Indians next year as a quasi-super-utility player. If he adapts well to LF and takes some plate appearances away from Dellucci, so be it.

If a position change is deemed to be too drastic for the youngster, what about some sort of convoluted platoon of LF and 3B to ease Marte into the Majors while facing only LHP? Against LHP, Marte would play 3B and Blake would play LF

while against RHP, Blake would move in to 3B and Dellucci would play LF. Blake would remain in the everyday lineup and Marte could transition onto the 25-man roster while playing 3B and facing only LHP. Again, if at some point, Marte takes AB's away from Dellucci and Blake ends up in LF full-time (isn't his versatility outstanding), let it be.

The odd man out in the situation is Michaels, who may be dealt back to the NL for a reliever at some point anyways. Wouldn't seeing what the Indians have in Marte be preferred over what we already know about Michaels?

Instead of Blake and Dellichaels guarding the LF line, it would simply be Blarte and Blakucci (don't say that out loud...it sounds dirty) - and is that really such a bad thing to keep Marte on the roster?

It's important to remember that Marte is still only 24 and the numbers he put up in Richmond (overall .275 BA / .372 OBP / .506 SLG / .878 OPS) as a 21-year-old in AAA show that the talent is there. Does anyone else remember a player that "struggled" in Buffalo after being sent down in 2006?

Garko (AAA - Age 25 in 2006) - .248 BA / .353 OBP / .421 SLG / .775 OPS
Marte (AAA - Age 23 in 2007) - .270 BA / .312 OBP / .461 SLG / .773 OPS

While Marte's career OBP causes some concern, giving up on him because of some (allegedly) down years in Buffalo would be astonishingly short-sighted.

While the argument rages over whether the LASIK surgery for Peralta really took, whether Asdrubal is really the next Omar, and what in the world happened to Josh Barfield's bat, it's important not to dismiss Andy Marte and his future with the team too quickly as the spot seems to be there for him.

If given the opportunity, it's up to him to finally seize it.