As the Indians get ready to commence with their first workout of the season this weekend, this spring training is going to be more about getting the team ramped up and ready to go for the March 31st season opener than it will be about a competition for jobs to make the opening day roster. There are very few question marks regarding roles on the team, but there are some intriguing situations with certain players to watch develop this spring and into the season. Tony hits on them in his latest.

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Such is the life of a contender that is moreorless returning the same team from last year that has very few holes, if any, to fill and iron out in spring training. The Indians arguably have every roster spot locked up for the start of the season, but there are some position battles that could emerge, and there are some young players to watch who are of great importance to the team in 2008 and beyond.

We know Victor Martinez will catch, and about every fifth day he will play first base and that Kelly Shoppach will catch on those days. We know Travis Hafner is the designated hitter, Ryan Garko the regular first baseman, Asdrubal Cabrera the second baseman, Jhonny Peralta the shortstop, Casey Blake the third baseman, Grady Sizemore the center-fielder, Franklin Gutierrez the regular right-fielder, and Jason Michaels and David Dellucci will platoon in left field. We know that the four spots on the bench will consist of Shoppach, Jamey Carroll, Andy Marte, and the one not starting in the Jason Michaels and David Dellucci left-field platoon.

We know the first four starters in the rotation will be C.C. Sabathia, Fausto Carmona, Jake Westbrook and Paul Byrd. We know that six of the seven spots in the bullpen will be Joe Borowski, Rafael Betancourt, Jensen Lewis, Rafael Perez, Aaron Fultz, and Masahide Kobayashi. The only thing we don't know is who the fifth starter and seventh man in the bullpen will be.

Here is a brief look at those two positions up for grabs, and also some key players to keep an eye on this spring:

Taking the Fifth

The only true battle in camp will be who takes the fifth starter spot, which won't be for a lack of good options as three quality left-handers in Cliff Lee, Aaron Laffey, and Jeremy Sowers will duke it out all camp for the job. Lee has to be the favorite going in to win the job, but Sowers and Laffey will give him a run for his money. With Lee scheduled to make $4 million this season, it is very unlikely the Indians send him to Buffalo for long (if at all). Also, with him likely to be very upset being sent to the minors again, it looks like it is his job to lose.

What most likely happens if Lee loses the job is the Indians use the six weeks of spring training to showcase Lee for other clubs looking for a quality starter to round out their rotation. It could be similar to what happened in 1998 when the Indians agreed to a trade with the Cincinnati Reds where they acquired Dave Burba at the end of spring training, which filled a much needed spot in the Indians rotation.

There will be a few teams looking to fill holes in their rotation, and the feeling here is Cliff Lee is at the top of many of those wish lists.

If Lee has a good camp, the Indians undoubtedly will choose to hold onto him and insert him into the fifth starter spot as he provides good value for the Indians and is still young, left-handed and under the team's control the next three years. But, if he still shows signs of inconsistency, a piss-poor attitude and pouts, the Indians would be best served to send him packing and giving the job to one of Sowers or Laffey, with the loser going to Buffalo as the sixth starter.

Also, by trading Lee, he could potentially be flipped for a need elsewhere, like in left field or for a couple good near major league ready prospects to fill gaps in the middle infield and pitching.

Bullpen Cheerleader

With the six main spots in the bullpen locked up, the only spot open is the seventh and final spot which is usually reserved for the guy who only pitches when 1.) the Indians starter gets bombed and can't get through the first few innings of their start or 2.) the Indians are bombing the other team by seven to ten runs and they need someone to save the bullpen the final few innings in mop up duty. In other words, the seventh guy in the Indians bullpen is a pitcher who pitches about once a week, collects dust, and essentially is the cheerleader in the pen passing time playing Pinnacle, picking his nose, and messing around with his song rotation on his iPod.

That said, there looks to be a battle being staged for this final spot in the bullpen, although on the surface it appears Tom Mastny has a decided edge and hold on the spot going into camp seeing how he spent all last season in the Indians bullpen. When Indians GM Mark Shapiro recently commented that high touted prospect Adam Miller would not be in the mix for a bullpen or starting spot on the big league club out of spring training, it effectively leaves just Mastny, the

mystery that is Eddie Mujica, and recently signed non-roster invite Jorge Julio as the only pitchers realistically vying for that last spot.

The loser of Laffey and Sowers will not be an option for this spot because April provides so many off days where a seventh bullpen option is really not needed, plus the Indians will want their immediate starting pitching alternatives throwing every fifth day in Buffalo. Mastny is a decent reliever and has been what the esteemed Steve Buffum likes to call "just some guy" in the bullpen the last two years, and is easily replaceable.

He also has options remaining where the Indians can send him to the minors without having to pass him through waivers.

Non-roster invite Jorge Julio looks to be someone who could challenge Mastny for the final bullpen spot. In fact, I would be willing to bet that no matter what Mastny does, if Julio pitches well in camp he will win the job. Julio offers what Shapiro likes, a low risk high reward reliever with past bullpen success, especially as a closer.

Unless a run of injuries hit the team, Mujica is non-existent and really not an option for this spot out of spring training.

There is a remote possibility that the Indians could skip on the seventh bullpen option, and instead open with a six-man bullpen and 11-man pitching staff and use the extra spot for another bench player. This seems plausible especially when you consider Andy Marte will clog up one of the bench spots. This probably does not happen though, as Wedge likes a 12-man pitching staff, so that is most likely what we will see when camp breaks.

It is a two man competition for the rights to be the bullpen errand boy for the rest of the relievers in April, and it really comes down to the performance of Julio.

Marte's Last Hurrah?

Andy Marte is not going to supplant Casey Blake as the everyday third baseman in spring training. We know this. But, with a good camp Marte could lay the ground work where he could potentially replace Blake at third base sometime later in the year. He is someone to pay close attention to in camp, and it will be interesting if he can show that he can become the player he was brought in here to be, which is an everyday third baseman who puts up good power numbers and plays very good defense.

Let's face it, with no help in the minors ready to really help anytime in 2008 and most of 2009 at third base, and with Casey Blake pricing himself out of Cleveland after this year, it is imperative that Marte rebound and resurrect his once

promising career. Otherwise, the Indians will have an expensive hole to fill at third base next season, which is not what they want with C.C. Sabathia contract negotiations looming this offseason. As noted above, Marte has been guaranteed a spot on the bench by the Indians to start the season because he is out of options and the Indians are mindful of the Brandon Phillips Debacle from two years ago.

This is a good thing, as it appears the Indians have not given up on Marte and are committed to seeing him through and not making the Phillips mistake again.

That is, to dump a still young former top prospect before seeing him through, especially when your alternatives at the position after the season are severely limited.

Marte will need to come into camp in shape, work hard, and start showing some production from his bat to earn playing time, and he likely will start the year in some sort of rotation where he gets a start or two a week. If he plays well, the playing time will be increased.

If he continues to struggle, the Indians likely would cut the cord by June 1st.

In any case, the Indians will be closely monitoring Marte this spring to see if he has anything to offer the Indians this season and beyond, and whether or not his days as an Indian are numbered.

Looks Great, Very Unfulfilling

When it comes to right-hander Adam Miller, he has been like a beer commercial in that he looks (tastes) great and has so much promise, but he has been very unfulfilling as injuries have sidetracked him over the past three seasons. He is slated to be starting depth for the Indians this year, and right now is the 8th starter on the Indians depth chart after Sabathia, Carmona, Westbrook, Byrd, Lee, Sowers and Laffey.

The Indians have already admitted that they are open to the idea of

using Miller in the bullpen this year to get him to get a chance to use his talents at the major league level. That said, Miller has already been ticketed for Buffalo after a questionable decision by Shapiro.

Before any pitches have been thrown in camp, Shapiro already has pre-decided that Miller will not start the season in the Indians starting rotation or bullpen.

While this is the probably the right call after camp concludes, it is foolish to proclaim such a decision before camp even starts.

What happens if there is a rash of injuries in the rotation and/or bullpen?

What if Miller is the talk of camp again like last year when he threw 14 shutout innings in spring training?

Why limit your options because you still handle your best prospect with kid gloves?

To defend Shapiro, it makes sense to send Miller to Buffalo to get his strength and rhythm back. Last year, he had a very good start at Buffalo until a middle finger injury sidelined him a month and a half into the season. The rest of the season was marred by injuries and a lot of missed time, and he needs to get ramped back up to his regular pitch counts and not have any restrictions.

Still, it is about time to take the diapers off this kid and throw him out there and see what he can do.

Miller has the power stuff and control where he could be a dominate pitcher in the bullpen sometime this season, and the Indians could look to break him in as a reliever like the Tigers did with phenom Joel Zumaya in 2006. It will be interesting to see what happens if Miller

dominates in spring training again and shows he is healthy.

Or, if someone in the pen goes down with an injury, if Shapiro has to go back on his words somewhat and give Miller a spot on the team out of camp.

Who Stays On Second

While Asdrubal Cabrera has already been anointed the starter at second base in 2008, Cabrera is still an unknown. Plus, if the struggles that Barfield encountered last season should prove anything, it should be that the performance for a young player can be volatile, especially in a sophomore campaign.

This is why the Indians would be best served to see Barfield come in and light it up and continue to display a good attitude. This would help provide a security blanket for Cabrera if he struggles, and more importantly would help push Cabrera in spring training and throughout the regular season knowing he has someone ready to take his job. Competition always brings the best out of people, and there is no exception in this case.

Both players are very competitive, and Barfield is going to come into camp with a chip on his shoulder looking to reclaim his former position or at the worst re-establish his value and become attractive to another team as a trade option.

Still, Barfield's ticket to Buffalo has already been printed, which may benefit him in the long run as it will give him a chance to take a step back and work on some things. He would also be yet another depth option for a loaded Buffalo team that is going to be bursting at the seams with players all over the diamond and on the mound who could fill roles at the major league level with just about any other team in baseball.

The Indians have very good depth, and with two good options in Barfield and Cabrera to turn to at second base, it should help ensure that second base is a productive position in the lineup and in the field.

Other Random Things To Watch

Is Travis Hafner over the problems that plagued him physically and mentally in 2007? Or, is he really at the start of a rapid downward slide?

Is David Dellucci healthy, and can he fill the role against right-handed pitching in left field the Indians sabermatricians thought he could when they signed him last year?

Is Jamey Carroll yet another Shapiro whiff on a utility player, or is he finally that much needed backup in the

infield who can actually play and give the regulars a break from time to time?

Could another strong spring by Ben Francisco lead to the eventual trading of Jason Michaels near the end of spring training to a team looking for a 4th outfielder, or could Francisco be that guy shipped out?

Oh, and of course, even though they say negotiations are tabled until the end of the season, what new developments (if any) will be see in the C.C. Sabathia contract situation?