In anticipation of Monday's opener against the White Sox, we assigned Paul Cousineau to do a little recon work for us, having him do a little Q & A with Jim Margalus, who pens the very entertaining Sox Machine blog. Paul asked him ten very direct questions about our hated division rival. The answers were insightful, revealing, and somehow ... got me even more excited than I already was for opening day.

In anticipation of Monday's Opener against the White Sox, I had a nice exchange with Jim Margalus, who pens the very entertaining Sox Machine , where we asked 10 questions of each other about the other's team. The questions I asked of him (in bold) about his White Sox and his responses (obviously, following the bolded questions) are both informative and unflinchingly honest:

Are the White Sox rebuilding or contending? Does anyone really know if this elevator is going up or down and are you truly comfortable with Kenny Williams pulling the levers?

I'm going to say they're "retooling." They didn't do enough to contend, in my opinion, because 60 percent of the rotation is a mystery. On the other hand, they didn't sell off their veterans, so they're not rebuilding. They pretty much exchanged young players for slightly older (but still young) players who are under their control for the next five years or so, so "retooling" seems to work. Now, whether the tools are good enough to make the playoffs? I have serious doubts.

Is there an actual betting pool with an over/under date on when a wildly offensive comment by Ozzie Guillen becomes the lead story on PTI?

We're still a ways away from it, I think. We just cashed in on the annual "I don't deserve the Sox's money" pool last week, so we are looking for a new game. But I think C.C. Sabathia will have his way with the Sox Opening Day, Ozzie will go too far out of his way to praise him, and we'll check another item off his list .

Instead of a pool, we should just take bets on what specific group he trashes. For instance:

People from a specific South American country: 3-1
Homosexuals: 5-1
Women: 8-1
Mormons: 40-1
The Welsh: 75-1

The “homosexuals” one could be a bargain at that line, considering he’s offended them twice already. But on the other hand, he may have learned his lesson. A lot of interesting wrinkles to this game.

Did the White Sox give up too much in their acquisitions of two young quality OF in Carlos Quentin and Nick Swisher?

Swisher was a fair deal. The Sox really only gave up two pitchers (Ryan Sweeney is a non-factor), and one of them – Gio Gonzalez -- is an maximum-effort, undersized lefty who strikes out a ton but also gives up a lot of flyballs, which doesn’t play well in the Cell. Fautino De Los Santos is the real gem, but he hasn’t pitched above high-A. Meanwhile, the Sox get an OBP machine in Swisher who’s highly affordable for the next five years ($35 million).

The Quentin-Chris Carter deal will be fun to monitor. Quentin is a guy with massive production in the minors and injury problems in the majors. Carter hits the ball really, really hard and can take a walk, but has zero defensive value. He’s barely a first baseman. Too many unknowns to judge, but I think both teams got something out of it.

Both of them address the Sox’s crippling lack of OBP last year, which is a major step forward.

How do the AB’s break down for the suddenly crowded OF with Dye, Owens, Fields, Swisher, and Quentin fighting for time and Thome ensconced at DH? Does anyone REALLY think Swisher can play CF?

Swisher is the second choice for center, behind Jerry Owens. He wouldn’t be awful in a smaller outfield than Oakland’s for a game or two at a time. We lived through Rob Mackowiak’s misadventures, so we can live through Swisher’s, but if

Brian Anderson is the fourth outfielder, we shouldn't see that very often.

Dye isn't moving from right, which is a shame because there isn't a ball in play that he can't turn into a triple. Owens will probably start in center and lead off, because Ozzie likes his leadoff hitters fast, with sketchy on-base skills and zero power.

Swisher's in left, and Quentin will probably start in Triple-A because he's looked rusty this spring while recovering from offseason non-throwing shoulder surgery. A month wouldn't hurt him, and he'll probably find time when either Thome (nagging back), Dye (nagging hamstrings/quads) and Owens (nagging groin) finds his way to the DL.

Does the landscape of the Farm System resemble scorched earth?

It's more like a recently logged forest. The Sox have some interesting looking prospects in the low minors like Jose Martinez and Aaron Poreda, but they're years away from contributing.

If given the opportunity, would YOU take a swing at A.J. Pierzynski?

Nah. He doesn't have a discernable jaw or chin, so it wouldn't be that satisfying.

Which young starter is going to step in behind Buehrle and Vazquez to settle the rotation…is there one?

John Danks is the guy to watch. He got smacked around in the second half last year, but he developed a cutter in the offseason, which is a pitch that has made Mark Buehrle tougher than he should be. And Danks has about 3-4 m.p.h. on him, so on paper, we should see a pretty hefty jump in his numbers and in-game stamina.

Gavin Floyd, on the other hand, will be a success if he gets his ERA under 5.00. He gives up too many homers, or rather has given up too many baserunners before that ton of homers, to get too excited.

How old was Jose Contreras during the Cuban Missle Crisis…16?

He's only 36 in Cuban years. There have been some jokes around Sox camp that

Alexei Ramirez is the first Cuban to actually look younger than his listed age (26). I'm guessing he'll get carded if he goes out to Rush Street after games this season.

Will the additions of Octavio Dotel and Scott Linebrink settle the bullpen to finally get a lead to Fat Bobby Jenks?

God, I hope so. I had higher hopes for Dotel than Linebrink, because Dotel is a great Tommy John Surgery rebound candidate, and Linebrink's peripherals have all trended in the wrong direction for the past three years. I thought the Linebrink deal was "paying for past performance" to the highest degree.

But Linebrink has survived in Arizona this spring, which is an awful place for pitchers to get a feel of their stuff. Dotel, on the other hand, has been smacked around. Both pitchers could get crushed for the exorbitant sum of $10 million combined. Last year has left enough scars to make me perpetually pessimistic about any reliever entering the game.

Will the White Sox finish higher than the Royals in the Central?

I think so. I certainly hope so. The Royals do have a lot of things in line with their 2003 aberration – new, optimistic manager, young pitching staff with upside, lineup that isn't awful – so I wouldn't be completely surprised if they made a jump. But I've settled on 79 wins as my prediction, and if that's a last-place number, then the Central is better than anybody thought. If nothing else, I hope they finish ahead of the Twins.

A big thank you goes out as this is absolutely terrific remarks from Jim, particularly the line that A.J. lacks a discernable jaw or chin. My answers to his questions about our Tribe can be found at The Sox Machine here .

Also, in case you missed it, here's an absolutely fantastic piece by Buster Olney on ESPN The Magazine's cover boy for their 2008 Baseball Preview, the Hefty Lefty.

The Baseball Previews are on the newsstands, the boys at Yahoo (I thought I loved Jeff Passan before his linked comments on the AL Central, which are just spot on) are peering into their crystal ball, "games" are being played in Japan, 25-man rosters are essentially set…it's close…very close.