The 2009 Indians infield. It seems safe to say that Jhonny Peralta and Asdrubal Cabrera will be a part of it. But beyond that? It's wide open. And we don't even know where Honny and Droobs will be playing next season. In his latest, Paulie says Andy Marte and Josh Barfield are no longer part of the teams future plans. And in anticipation of their departure, Paul takes a look at the top free agent second and third basemen the Indians may look at this off-season.

In a recent radio interview, Indians' GM Mark Shapiro was asked about what pieces fit where for the Tribe in 2009. While most of these interviews with Shapiro become exercises in trying to figure out is being said or attempting to read between the lines (known as the translation of "Shapiro-Speak", which should not be confused with its derivative form "Antonetti-Speak"), his candor about certain topics in this particular interview (sorry, WTAM does not provide a link to the audio) was both jarring and telling.

The most interesting portion of the Q & A came when the Tribe GM was asked about some of the specific positions and players that figure to be in play for next year. When asked, in a roundabout way, if more help was needed in the outfield, Shapiro stated that he felt that the three OF positions would be filled by some mix of seven (that's right, kids...SEVEN) players.

Count them out with me:

Sizemore
Francisco
Gutierrez
Choo
Dellucci
Crowe

The WangBanger (click on name for explanation)

How much of that is true and how much movement could we see with one (or more) of those players perhaps being moved this offseason? Whether it be a player moving to another team (Frank the Tank to an NL team in need of a defensive CF who is not counted on to be an offensive presence or The Looch to any team that will take him) or to another position (the whole LaPorta to 1B thing could gain steam if Victor is deemed healthy enough to go back behind the plate without affecting his offense and Shoppach's value on the trade market outweighs his value as a backup C), the whole outfield mix still feels very much in flux. However, compared to his comments on the infield, the outfield at least looks like the answer will come from within, as opposed to the team ultimately getting help from the outside.

To that end, when asked about the infield (I believe the specific question was where Jhonny fits for 2009), Shapiro said that he felt very comfortable with Jhonny and Asdrubal taking up 2 spots between 2B, SS, and 3B and implied that the answer for the position between those three not occupied by Peralta and Cabrera may not be an internal option.

As an aside here, before you say..."well, what about _____...?" - know that Shapiro was asked to name which SPECIFIC players he figured to be in the mix for 2009 and notably absent are the two names that would fill in that blank. The words "Josh", "Barfield", "Andy", and "Marte" were notably left unspoken by a man who generally is not known for oversight or being careless with his words, as he is instead generally being more inclusive and vague than this notable omission.

So pack your bags, Andy...and start apartment hunting in Columbus, Josh!

Because, according to the Indians' GM, you don't figure into the club's plans in 2009. Now, whether this should be taken as gospel truth or not as this interview does come flying at us in the month of August is debatable. But it's hard not to see the rationale behind this as Marte has struggled in his time as the everyday 3B (though his sample size is still relatively small) and Barfield JUST started playing in Buffalo again. Thinking that either of them doesn't play a prominent role in the 2009 plans isn't exactly a leap of faith, but Shapiro's comments (or lack of names in his comments) are surprising nonetheless.

While not getting into whether Marte deserves more of a look at 3B or why Barfield fell completely off of the MLB map after making his move from San Diego, let's go with this notion that neither player is being counted on to complement Peralta and Cabrera in the infield (1B is a whole other story) and see where this exercise leads us.

First, raise your hand if you think that the Indians will be content to give Jamey Carroll starts at either 2B or 3B before the likes of Wes Hodges or Josh Rodriguez may be ready to move up from Buffalo, where they both figure to start next year.

Or how about that they'll go with a player like Hodges out of the Spring with no AAA time?

Yeah...me neither.

So that would mean that another player would need to be added to the mix either via trade or FA and, not even attempting to project what the trade market might look like this offseason (it is still August) or who may be available using that route, here are the 2B and 3B scheduled to become FA after this season.

Their current age is in parentheses and they are ranked by OPS this year with the * indicating that an option exists on the player for 2009:

Second Basemen

Orlando Hudson (30) - .305 BA / .367 OBP / .450 SLG / .817 OPS in 407 AB
Ray Durham (36) - .285 BA / .375 OBP / .415 SLG / .790 OPS in 316 AB
Jeff Kent (40) - .285 BA / .333 OBP / .430 SLG / .763 OPS in 400 AB
Mark Grudzielanek (38) - .299 BA / .345 OBP / .399 SLG / .744 OPS in 331 AB
Nick Punto (30) - .280 BA / .339 OBP / .403 SLG / .742 OPS in 211 AB
Mark Loretta (36) - .271 BA / .344 OBP / .385 SLG / .729 OPS in 218 AB
Mark Ellis (31) - .236 BA / .323 OBP / .378 SLG / .701 OPS in 437 AB
Felipe Lopez (28) - .244 BA / .315 OBP / .326 SLG / .641 OPS in 365 AB
Pablo Ozuna (33) - .263 BA / .289 OBP / .325 SLG /.614 OPS in 80 AB

Third Basemen

Chipper Jones* (36) - .362 BA / .462 OBP / .573 SLG / 1.035 OPS in 356 AB
Casey Blake (34) - .285 BA / .351 OBP / .472 SLG / .823 OPS in 417 AB

Joe Crede (30) - .255 BA / .323 OBP / .474 SLG / .797 OPS in 310 AB
Hank Blalock* (27) - .273 BA / .331 OBP / .438 SLG / .769 OPS in 121 AB

That's it...and your RBI leader (though I don't list RBI production, just trust me) among prospective 2B and 3B Free Agents is none other than Lacey Cake.

Now, it should be noted that injury concerns surround Larry Jones (age), Joe Crede (back), Hank Blalock (rib) in very serious ways and that Orlando Hudson is out for the season with a left wrist injury...a year after a left thumb injury in 2007 sidelined him for the D-Backs' playoff run last year.

So, even the names that look most attractive on this list come with caveats.

Outside of those caveats, there is the matter of the other 29 MLB teams possibly also having needs at 2B or 3B and looking over this very same list that the Indians have probably memorized. What interest from multiple teams means is more dollars over more years...which is where a mistake or an injury becomes the albatross that the Indians HAVE to avoid this offseason, given

Westbrook's TJ and Hafner's mysterious shoulder ailment.

Who looks good there?

Hudson for sure - though only if the years are limited to two or maybe three - and perhaps a guy like a Grudzielanek or Loretta if you're simply looking for a stop-gap on a one to two year deal...but outside of that, there's not much.

The other option that the Indians would have, of course, would be to keep around a veteran like Morgan Ensberg (currently in Buffalo) around to allow Wes Hodges to get his feet wet in AAA before making the presumptive trip to Cleveland at some point next year.

That, however, would mean that a possibility that Ensberg (or someone like him) could potentially become the 3B for a longer amount of time than originally thought if Hodges struggled in AAA or suffered some sort of injury.

But isn't that again getting into the old Trot Nixon/Roberto Hernandez placeholder argument, of which merit and logic can be found, but ultimately just raises the ire of the fanbase and ends up in a decent amount of dollars being wasted

needlessly? To a degree, but outside of trades, not much may exist by way of options for filling these holes that doesn't involve some wild creativity that comes off like the old George Costanza comment that "I figured out a way to get Bonds and Griffey...and we really wouldn't have to give up that much" in terms of likelihood or feasibility, or lack thereof.

There's doesn't seem to be any question that the Indians are not sold on the internal options for 2B and 3B for next year and where the two players assumed to take two of the three spots to the left of 1B (Jhon and Asdrubal) end up may depend more on what is available (and at what cost) than it does the players themselves. No answer is clear right now, but with some ingenuity, or some hard dollars at some FA, may go a long way to settling two positions that are weaknesses in the Indians' organization far below Cleveland.