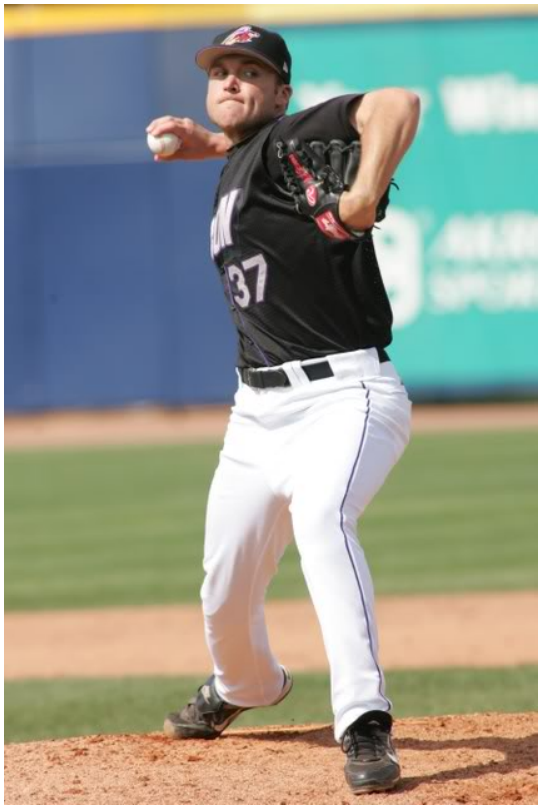
The Indians will be adding five to seven players from their player development system to the 40-man roster over the course of the next several days prior to the November 20th roster deadline. In Tony's latest, he takes a look at the players the Indians are likely to drop from the 40 man, and the minor leaguers he feels will take their place. As always, good stuff from Tony ...



Tony and Paul had RHP Jeff Stevens on their on-line radio show "Smoke Signals " last week , and this Wednesday November 5th at 9:30 p.m. LHP David Huff will be their guest .

Be sure to check them out!

The Indians will be adding five to seven players from their player development system to the 40-man roster over the course of the next several days prior to the November 20th roster deadline. The roster deadline is an important date in the offseason because once this date passes non-rostered players in the system are frozen and are not allowed to be added to the 40-man roster until the start of the upcoming season.

Some of these players left off the 40-man roster who are frozen will be eligible for the Rule 5 Draft on December 11th, but I'll get more into that after the roster is officially locked on November 20th. For more info on the Rule 5 Draft, check out the FAQ I posted a few days

ago on my blog .

The Indians 40-man roster is currently at 35 players after Juan Rincon, Scott Elarton and Brendan Donnelly filed for free agency. Sal Fasano is expected to file for free agency in the coming days, which should reduce the roster to 34 players.

The question remains, will anyone else be removed from the roster and will the Indians use all 40 spots to protect players in their minor league system. Eddie Mujica, Tom Mastny, and Andy Marte look like the best options to be removed, but Mastny still has options and has value as a depth reliever so it is very unlikely he is removed.

Also, the Indians lost players like Brad Snyder, Brian Bullington, and Reid Santos when trying to sneak them through waivers, and Brian Slocum cleared waivers when he was removed.

This was all done over a week ago, which to me implies the roster purge may be over and that everyone that is not a free agent stays on it.

Anyway, when whittling down the Indians 2008 Rule 5 eligibles for consideration to be rostered, here is a listing of the players to pay special attention to and who is lost likely to be rostered to fill the five to seven open spots available before the November 20th deadline, from a lock (100%) to doubtful (25%).

Locks (100%):
Trevor Crowe - Outfielder
Carlos Santana - Catcher
Jeff Stevens - Right-handed Reliever

This list is self explanatory really. Stevens is basically big league ready and can contribute with the big league club right out of the gates next season. He essentially would take the spot formerly held by Reid Santos on the roster before he was lost on waivers to the Blue Jays.

Santana will only be moving up to Double-A Akron next year and is likely two years away from his arrival in the big leagues sometime in the second half of the 2010 season at the earliest, but he is arguable the second best catching prospect in baseball behind the Orioles Matt Weiters and is the heir apparent to Victor Martinez at catcher in Cleveland.

Santana likely will take the roster spot of Sal Fasano, who will officially declare free agency in the next few days or be resigned to a minor league contract as a non-rostered player.

Crowe is valuable because of his versatility and ability to get on base and create some havoc on the basepaths with his speed. He is a good backup plan in the outfield if an injury befalls one of Grady Sizemore, Ben Francisco, Franklin Guterriez and Shin-Soo Choo, if any of them are traded (Gutierrez, Francisco, or even Crowe), or suffer a decline in their performance (Francisco). Crowe essentially will be taking Brad Snyder's

spot on the roster as he was lost on waivers to the Cubs a few weeks back.

Probables (75%):
Jordan Brown - First Baseman
Chris Gimenez - Catcher
Hector Rondon - Right-handed Starter

To me, Brown and Gimenez are virtually locks to be rostered, but they are listed here as probables in the odd chance the Indians only roster five players. If the Indians do only roster five players then it will come down to one of these two and Hector Rondon for that fourth and fifth spot. If they roster six or seven, then all three should be rostered.

Gimenez is extremely versatile in that not only is he improving and holding his own as a catcher, but he can play any corner infield and outfield position, would be an excellent right-handed power bat off the bench, has a very good approach at the plate where he has learned to be more patient and take walks, and is off the charts as far as character goes. Brow n has some versatility as well in that he has some experience in the outfield in addition to playing his more normal position of first base.

With first base and left field hardly settled in Cleveland, he is someone who can factor in there very early next season.

While he only has average power, his incredible bat-to-ball ability is an asset this team severely lacks at the major league level and cannot afford to leave unprotected.

There is a ton of value there with Gimenez and Brown for the Indians to protect considering both are near major league ready and especially when the Indians need players in the minors next season who can help now instead of being two to three years away. I think many forget that the 40-man roster is just an extension of the active 25-man roster with 15 additional players who are depth options for teams to use right now in case of injury or performance issues.

Maybe one or two spots are used on a high level prospect in need of protection who is still a few years away, but since Carlos Santana is already getting this treatment it is likely that only one or neither of Rondon or Kelvin De La Cruz are rostered.

If one of the two is rostered, Rondon would most certainly be the one given he is a year further along and will start at a higher level (Akron) than De La Cruz (Kinston) next year.

So, if they roster six players, which is my best guess, then all three of these probables should be added.

Questionables (50%):
Kelvin De La Cruz - Left-handed Starter
Ryan Edell - Left-handed Starter
Stephen Head - First Baseman/Outfielder

Frank Herrmann - Right-handed Starter
Chuck Lofgren - Left-handed Pitcher
J.D. Martin - Right-handed Pitcher
Randy Newsom - Right-handed Reliever
Neil Wagner - Right-handed Reliever

Okay, here is the tough part. Of the players on this list, only one will be protected if the Indians do roster a seventh guy, which is possible but does not seem likely at the moment unless a one or more of Mujica, Mastny, Marte, and Josh Barfield are traded or put on waivers.

In addition, when the dust settles on the Indians' roster selections, these players will likely be the biggest candidates for Rule 5 selection once the draft commences on December 11th.

It is very possible a player or two from this list could get selected.

First off, when I initially put this list together I had J.D. Martin as a probable and a likely roster candidate. But the more I thought about it, the more I believe that the Indians will not roster him as he is a minor league free agent and could likely resign with them. By the same token, teams may be less inclined to draft him as well knowing they can also just sign him to a minor league non-rostered deal.

It wouldn't surprise me though that if there is a seventh guy rostered that the guy is Martin.

Martin resigned last year after he was put on and cleared waivers when the Indians acquired Jamey Carroll in early December.

He had a good season, is primed to be an excellent depth option in Columbus, know this organization well, and does not seem to have any issues with the organization to make him spurn them for another organization.

He'd be a depth option here and non-rostered, yes, but this same scenario will apply with any team he would potentially sign with.

Second, I don't see Kelvin De la Cruz being rostered and if in fact he is it would be a big surprise to me. Everyone will point to guys like Johan Santana and Joakim Soria as young pitchers plucked out of Low-A as Rule 5 draftees who have gone on to have stellar careers in the bigs. For starters, these two are but two players out of thousands of eligibles left unprotected over the years in Low-A or below who have had success as a Rule 5 draftee. Second, and most important of all, Soria was 22 and Santana was 20 when they pitched in Low-A while De la Cruz pitched at 19 years of age all year and did not turn 20 until August when he was up in Kinston for a month, a stop he struggled a lot in the month he was there (6.44 ERA and 2.05 WHIP in eight starts).

His performance in Kinston showed he is still very raw and has a lot to learn still and is not far

enough along to merit consideration as a near ready player at the major league level.

He's an awesome talent for sure, but needs another few years to finish his development.

In the odd chance he is selected, it would certainly be a shock, but even so I believe he would certainly be returned near the end of spring training.

Third, Chuck Lofgren. He is the wildcard here to me and the best option to get selected if left unprotected by the Indians. Many fans have already written Lofgren off after what really was a disaster of a season for him numbers-wise where he went 2-6 with a 5.99 ERA in 28 games (15 starts) at Akron this year, and in addition to that he has really struggled in the Arizona Fall League so far (34.94 ERA, 5.2 IP, 18 H, 22 ER, 3 HR, 12 BB, 5 K).

There is a lot going on behind the scenes with Lofgren from a mechanical standpoint, and he is searching his way through what has really been a hard year for him on and off the field.

Lofgren has been bothered by a serious personal issue, one which he agreed to talk to me about and write about here soon.

That all said, I still believe Lofgren is very much a prospect and has value.

He turns 23 in January, so he is still young and contrary to other reports his stuff is still there.

Lofgren is already at the top of my list as the frontrunner for Indians Comeback Player of the Year next season, that is if he is still with the organization and not selected in the Rule5 Draft.

The Indians won't roster him, and clubs I have spoken to say he still has "it" and may be someone worth the $50K gamble to take on Rule 5 Draft Day.

Fourth, Herrmann to me has the second most potential to be selected because of his low 90s sinker, durability, and ability to pitch deep into games and keep his team in the game. He'd make a good fifth starter right now on a bad team that is rebuilding and can live with the ups and downs of a young, unpolished guy like Herrmann could provide (think Jason Davis 2003 and 2004).

Knowing this value, Herrmann could get the nod over Martin if there is a seventh guy rostered by the Indians.

Last, guys like Head, Edell, Newsom, and Wagner all have value and most certainly could figure in as Rule 5 draftees. Edell is a quality left-handed pitcher, but he doesn't fit the mold of a Rule 5 draftee as far as a loogy goes in that he has little experience as a reliever and doesn't throw very hard. Newsom has the gimmick submarine style that some teams may like, but they also may be scared off by his penchant to walk people and get hit.

He certainly has value, but he may be passed over and instead be someone teams file away to possibly sign next year when he is a minor league free agent, provided he is not rostered by the

Indians before then.

Wagner very much fits that Rule 5 label with his power upper 90s fastball that a team could take a shot on and stash away in their bullpen as a long man.

Wagner's big drawback is he has only played about a month above the High-A level so he is far from a finished product.

Head's flexibility to play first base and any corner outfield position, good pop, excellent defense, and athleticism could see him selected as well.

The Indians won't protect him.

In any case, all these guys on this questionable list likely will be the ones that are talked about most by fans as the Rule 5 Draft nears on December 11th.

Doubtfuls (25%):
Kevin Dixon - Right-handed Starter
Lucas Montero - Outfielder
Niuman Romero - Infielder

These guys have virtually no shot to be drafted, but are listed here since they have the most value of those yet to be talked about here on the 2008 eligibles list . Dixon is probably at best a fifth starter in the bigs because of his good size and durability, and someone may take a shot on him at some point down the road.

Romero is interesting and is a minor league free agent, so he could be lost in more ways than one, although it is likely he returns to the Indians.

Up until this year Romero was a nobody, and in the end is only a utility guy so it would be no great loss if he signs elsewhere or were to get selected.

Montero has barely played above Low-A, so he is a longshot to get picked.

He has a nice power/speed combo that someone may take a shot on.

Photo courtesy of Ken Carr