As the Indians scan MLB for the infielder that they've addressed as their off-season need, with Asdrubal and Peralta shifting accordingly in the infield depending upon whether a 2B or a 3B is added, it's hard not to notice how the ultimate failure of the two moves to fill these exact two positions over the last couple of years has put the Indians in an identical position facing 2009 - still looking for an infielder. Paulie C tackles the issue in his latest.

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How did it come to this, though, where 2B and/or 3B becomes the annual search in terms or adding a player if the two major trades that the organization has made to add players (note the "add", not simply overall trades) over the last few years were to address both of those positions? Marte was added to take over 3B for years after racing through the Atlanta organization and Barfield was meant to do the same at 2B after a solid rookie season in San Diego.

Before hindsight comes too clearly into focus and these players are simply written off (which seems like has happened within the organization), let's go back to the time when each was added to examine the numbers for each of the players.

At the time of the trade with the Red Sox in January of 2006 that netted Andy Marte (among others), he had just been moved by the Braves to the Red Sox for a starting SS in Edgar Renteria, who was a 5-time All-Star about to turn 30. Why did Marte command such a return in the Renteria deal?

Because he was coming off this season in 2005 in the Braves' organization:

Andy Marte - 2005 Richmond - Age 21

.275 BA / .372 OBP / .506 SLG / .878 OPS with 26 2B, 20 HR in 389 AB

Knowing what we do about how important age is at particular levels of the minors (i.e. a 22-year-old thriving in AAA is much more impressive than a 25-year-old doing so), that's more than just a little impressive.

How impressive, you ask?

Here are the players in the Indians' organization spent significant time in AAA at the age of 21 in the last 15 years:

Grady Sizemore - 2004 Buffalo - Age 21

.287 BA / .352 OBP / .438 SLG / .790 OPS with 23 2B, 8 HR in 418 AB

Jhonny Peralta - 2003 Buffalo - Age 21

.257 BA / .302 OBP / .329 SLG / .631 OPS with 12 2B, 1 HR in 237 AB

Brandon Phillips - 2002 Buffalo - Age 21

.283 BA / .325 OBP / .453 SLG / .778 OPS with 4 2B, 8 HR in 223 AB

David Bell - 1994 Charlotte - Age 21

.293 BA / .349 OBP / .457 SLG / .806 OPS with 17 2B, 18 HR in 481 AB

Manny Ramirez - 1993 Charlotte - Age 21

.317 BA / .424 OBP / .690 SLG / 1.114 OPS with 12 2B, 14 HR in 145 AB

That's it...no Richie Sexson, no Sean Casey, no Brian Giles, no Jim Thome - all of those guys were older than 21 by the time they spent significant time in AAA in the Indians' organization. Doesn't it now become clearer as to how disappointing the disappearance of Andy Marte as even a remotely viable option for 2009 truly is?

Now look again at the numbers that Marte posted as a 21-year-old in the Braves' organization compared to what players who made it to AAA as 21-year-old's while in the Cleveland organization and all of whom went on to varying degrees of MLB success. Only Manny (arguably the greatest RH hitter of his generation) outperformed what Marte did as a 21-year-old in AAA prior to joining the organization. Seeing that in proper context, isn't it plain to see why he was that highly-thought-of given his age and accomplishments?

Of course, all Indians' fans know what happened to "The Dominican Dandy" after he arrived in the Tribe organization as his numbers dipped for him while in AAA and he struggled in his brief time in Cleveland over the course of 2006 and 2007. Over the course of the next 3 years, he was done in by ineffectiveness, injury, and ultimately being underused as he went from "can't miss prospect" to "can't play player" over the course of 456 MLB over those 3 years. Whether the Indians can be blamed for a lack of patience is certainly an argument that can be made, though Marte's performance when given his brief chances didn't make a compelling argument to keep him in the lineup on a regular basis.

Regardless of his overall performance as an Indian, one doesn't have to look too far for an example of a young player who struggled out of the gate (in 2007, no less) as Marte did , then was able to rebound successfully when given the opportunity to ride out the storm. Like him or not, Dustin Pedroia overcame a start similar to what Marte put forth before his injury to put together a 2007 that garnered him the Rookie of the Year Award, one year before being the first player under five-and-a-half feet to win the MVP.

Would Marte have found his footing the way that Pedroia did in 2007, making the need for an infielder inconsequential this off-season? It's an answer that will never be found, because Marte's 2007 once he got healthy and back in Buffalo and his 2008 (spent intermittently between being stapled to the bench and being pinch-hit for at every possible opportunity) have left the Indians with the sense that he's not in their future, made very clear with the news that Jhonny Peralta is seeing playing

time as a 3B in the Dominican Republic.

Truly, who knows if the promise that Marte once showed as a 21-year-old, tearing up AAA, will ever come to fruition in MLB. What is known is that if it ever does, it is not likely to come in an Indians' uniform. Maybe the transition from AAA to MLB proved to be too much for Marte or maybe external factors were at play, but regardless of the reasons, Marte finds himself on the outside looking in at 3B, leaving the Indians to scramble once again to augment their infield.

Of course, the addition in the infield made necessary by the decision to omit Marte from future plans was supposedly addressed about 9 months later after the Indians added Marte as the Indians attempted to fill their organizational hole at 2B by acquiring Josh Barfield from San Diego. If Marte's numbers in the minors seemed to portend a bright future, Barfield arrived to the Indians one step further along than Marte as he spent his 2006 season in MLB as a 23-year-old, posting a very respectable line of .280 BA / .318 OBP / .423 SLG / .741 OPS with 32 2B and 13 HR in his first 539 MLB at-bats.

Barfield had made the leap to MLB successfully as his rookie season numbers put him very respectably around the middle-of-the-pack among MLB 2B in 2006 , with remarkably similar numbers to those put up by Brandon Phillips in Cincinnati the same year. While attempting not to invoke the name of "The Franchise", Mr. B-Phil, in a discussion of why the Indians presently have a hole in their infield, compare the stats of Barfield and Phillips in 2006, both playing 2B for NL teams:

Barfield - 2006 (age 23) - 539 AB

.280 BA / .318 OBP / .423 SLG / .741 OPS with 32 2B, 3 3B, 13 HR, 21 SB, 30 BB, 81 K

Phillips - 2006 (age 25) - 536 AB

.276 BA / .324 OBP / .427 SLG / .751 OPS with 28 2B, 1 3B, 17 HR, 25 SB, 35 BB, 88 K

When Barfield arrived to the Indians, then, he had parlayed his success in the minors (all at young ages for the respective levels) into success as a legitimate MLB 2B, establishing

himself during his rookie season as, at the very least, an adequate offensive player at 2B for the next few seasons.

Of course, Barfield's 2007 turned out to be an unmitigated disaster as whatever ability he had to take a walk disappeared (14 in 420 AB in 2007), resulting in an embarrassingly low OBP of .270 as he apparently struggled to adjust to the AL or his new surroundings or something simply went horribly wrong for Barfield in 2007. After ultimately losing his job to Asdrubal, his nightmarish downward spiral continued into the 2008 season that saw him post a .660 OPS as a now-25-year-old in AAA, then injured himself after being promoted to Cleveland to replace the also struggling Cabrera at 2B for the parent club.

As 2009 looms, the decline of Barfield from being an up-and-coming steady MLB contributor at the age of 23 to a player that isn't likely to factor into the Indians' 2009 plans as a 26-year-old is nearly complete.

So as the decisions of the 2008 off-season include where to find the infielder to complement Asdrubal and Jhonny among 2B, SS, and 3B, it bears mentioning that the need for an infielder has been addressed twice by the Indians in the last 3 years without either player "fixing" the problem. Despite those moves, one for a hotshot "can't miss" prospect and a young player with one successful MLB season under his belt, the Indians find themselves lacking the very positions they thought were addressed when Marte and Barfield were added.

Whatever "Arrested" the "Development" of either of these players (no, not that...but go ahead and lose yourself in hours of "AD" clips - or just go out and by the DVDs), both inarguably have to work their way back into the Indians' plans to become prominent in 2009, much less beyond. Because of the downslide of each, in terms of production and perception within the organization, the Indians find themselves in the same position they found themselves in prior to adding each - looking for a long-term solution at 2B or 3B...again.