You won't find another website that delivers the type of hard hitting Indians analysis you'll find here, and Paulie Cousineau is a huge part of the reason why. In this Sunday column chock full of Indians goodness, Paulie hits on the following topics: his mom running into Kerry Wood at Kohl's, the final numbers and impact of the Wood deal, the two guys we got in the Franklin Gutierrez trade, and the moves he sees Mark Shapiro making next in what he feels will be a very busy off-season for the Wahoo Warriors.

Trying to put a nice bow on the week that was before a trip to the Christmas Tree Lot presses me to the Great Outdoors, let's get right into another Lazy Lazy Sunday:

In case you hadn't heard, the Wood deal is done , something that I assumed to be true when my mom called me to tell me that she was behind Kerry Wood in line at the Kohl's in Highland Heights on Thursday as he was buying a winter jacket...no, seriously.

The deal is for 2 years and $20.5M guaranteed with a third year option worth $11M that vests if he finishes 55 games in either 2009 or 2010. If he does not finish 55 games either of those years, the third year becomes a club option. All told, the deal has the potential to be a 3-year, $31.5M deal - which is only $6M less than what the Mets gave K-Rod, but in a completely different context as the vesting option gives the Indians some flexibility to get out of the deal after two years, while the Mets do not have that luxury. So, the deals are similar, but there's a big difference in the $17M that is guaranteed in the Mets-Rodriguez deal for those wondering why the Indians didn't just "pony up" more cash to net K-Rod...not even attempting to imagine what the Mets might have had to give up if there was actually another serious suitor for K-Rod.

As for the vesting option, here are the Indians' leaders in games finished for the last 10 years:

2008 - Lewis - 28
2007 - Borowski - 58
2006 - Wickman - 29
2005 - Wickman - 55
2004 - Riske - 27
2003 - Baez - 46
2002 - Wickman - 30
2001 - Wickman - 56
2000 - Karsay - 46
1999 - Jackson - 65

What do you notice about the years that the Indians' leader in games finished topped 55?

How about this?

2007 - 96 wins
2005 - 93 wins
2001 - 91 wins
1999 - 97 wins

Yep, it's the 4 years with the most wins in the last 10 years, which led to more opportunities for the team's "closer" to finish off games in the 9th.

Don't think that the "55" number came about arbitrarily, because it didn't.

If the Indians have two down years (knocking firmly on Wood...pun intended, check the capitalization), there's little chance that the 3rd year option vests, making it a club option and allowing the Indians to make the decision. Additionally, if Wood is injured - even for a short time in the season - look how those numbers above show that he would have to be closing, essentially, nearly every victory when healthy to have that 3rd year vest.

For more on the Wood acquisition and how the Indians approached the situation, Terry Pluto has quite a bit of insight

as to how the Indians surveyed the FA market and made the decision to go with Wood as well as touching on the infield situation.

The 2009 infield and how the Frank the Tank trade (about which Tony Lastoria has a superb write-up summarizing the players acquired) affected it is the move that muddied the waters for me. Getting Joe Smith for Gutz makes sense as it adds another arm to the bullpen (showing that Shapiro is not past his "throw it up against the wall and see what sticks" philosophy...despite the Wood signing) but adding Luis Valbuena is the move that, again, looks to me like the opening for more activity.

Adding Louie V.B. (whose "Lucky Louie" was underrated during its brief stint on HBO) makes sense as it fills a hole in the upper (and middle) levels of the Indians organization for middle infielders. But it also creates a redundancy at 2B in Columbus as every indication from the Indians has been that Josh Barfield does not fit into the 2009 plans of the parent club. Perhaps that's changed, but I seem to remember a quote from Shapiro that the Indians could NOT go into 2009 with the infield as it's presently constructed (that is, with Marte, Barfield, and Carroll handling 2B or 3B). So, does the acquisition of Louie V.B change any of that? Are the Indians truly content to try a platoon of Carroll and Barfield in 2009, while they wait for Valbuena (or Mr. Good Valley...I think, though I'm no Spanish expert) to develop at AAA?

Valbuena has played 58 games at AAA and has 49 AB in MLB, wouldn't AT LEAST a season at AAA benefit him, particularly if he's been "rushed" through the Seattle system (who must fast-track everyone, if the players the Indians have acquired is any indication)? While he may eventually figure in as the 2B, I'm not so sure that 2009 is the year, even in the middle of the season like Asdrubal did in 2007 as, if you remember, the Indians dropped Cabrera back to AA when they received him from the M's.

Is it possible that Valbuena (whose swing, according to Rosenthal , "one club official likens to "Robinson Cano lite.") some sort of answer at 2B in 2009? Sure, anything's possible, but this, to me, sets up something more to happen - and I don't just mean the fact that the Indians can now get that stop-gap 2B now that there is a legitimate option in their farm system at 2B.

Examining this 3-way deal (and does anyone else feel a little dirty talking about this so openly...this, I believe the term is "ménage a trios") a

little further, it shows me that more is coming, a sentiment spelled out by none other than himself :

"Obviously, we have more work that we haven't completed yet. But we hope we have more on the heels of this, and a big portion of our offseason work will be done...We've got a lot of time left to utilize, and we're going to continue to address what we think are some holes in the team. I would expect us to get more done before we get to Spring Training."

What "more work" he refers to remains to be seen, but the picture is getting quite a bit clearer, if only that's it's clear that the Indians' philosophy of dealing from positions of depth to fill holes on the roster and in the organization is alive and well. Between Coco Crisp, Kevin Kouzmanoff, Max Ramirez, Franklin Delano Gutierrez, etc., the Indians have shown that they will trade a player (it would seem) only if they play the same position as other strong prospects in the organization or if a glut of players at a particular position reveals itself (as OF did, with Choo, Frank, Frisco, Brantley, LaPorta, and Crowe all playing at AAA or above with CF pretty much locked down), allowing the Indians to make another move.

Essentially, when depth presents itself or a redundancy is revealed to the degree that trading one of the pieces of that depth or redundancy is not going to significantly damage the overall depth of the system, the Indians are willing to make that move. And this is where I'm going with all of this now as you consider, after the Gutz deal, how certain positions are suddenly overloaded with players, while some obvious holes still exist:

Catcher

Victor
Shoppach
Torregas
Gimenez

AAA 2B

Barfield
Valbuena

Young LH Starters (not yet established in MLB)

Laffey
Huff
Sowers
Lewis

Young RH Relievers (not yet established in MLB)

Miller
Meloan
Stevens
Newsom

Even if the Indians were to trade a few of the names off of each of these lists (excluding Victor), there's not going to be a huge effect on the parent club (remember, I'm in the "Trade Kelly" camp) as depth exists elsewhere to fill the holes that would be created. Now, with the economic environment that we are all experiencing (and I'll have more on this thought this week), these young players - under club control at low salary numbers become the kind of commodity that becomes invaluable to other teams.

What I'm saying, I guess, in all of this is that the Gutz trade seemed to add the depth that could make it possible for the Indians to package a number of players, who play positions that are areas of strength, for the Indians to upgrade the weaknesses (middle-of-the-rotation starter, infielder for 2009) that still exist on the roster.

An enormous corollary to the 3-way (that's just with chili and cheese on top of the spaghetti) is how it essentially blocked the Tigers from adding JJ Putz to their bullpen. Now, with Hoffman rumored to perhaps be LA-bound and the Cardinals romancing Brian Fuentes, the Tigers could find themselves with a dearth of options at the closer position in a market that seems so full of them. Actually, I think that this "block" played more of a role in this than we may ever know.

The situation was addressed, somewhat by Hoynes' account of the negotiations in the 3-way today , but think about it - couldn't you just see Minaya hitting a roadblock in getting Putz out

of Seattle and calling up Shapiro, telling him that he's got a deal for Putz that would keep him out of Detroit - as long as the Tribe sends Gutz to the M's? As long as Shapiro is somewhat pleased with the returning players and can get Joe Smith (who the Indians have had their eyes on) and a young Seattle middle infielder, it had to have played a role in preventing the Tigers from adding Putz to their inconsistent bullpen for 2009 and beyond.

Elsewhere, the Rule 5 Draft came and went without much activity involving the Indians' minor-leaguers that were thought, by some, to be potential Rule 5 Picks. Tony Lastoria, as is his wont to cover all things related to the Indians' farm system, has a nice summary and commentary on the Rule 5 passing harmlessly into the night . The accompanying sound on Tony's site is our show from last Thursday, when we addressed the Wood signing, the 3-way, and spoke to Indians minor league reliever Randy Newsom, who was thought, again by some, to be a potential Rule 5 pick...which obviously didn't happen. One of the most intriguing things about the Newsom interview is the fact that Newsom has been told by the Indians' brass that he needs to improve his performance against LH hitters as his ¾ arm style baffles RH hitters but allows some LH hitters to find more success. Knowing this, Newsom was surprised (relatively speaking) at the Joe Smith acquisition as Smith's splits are pretty close to what Newsom has done the past couple of years .

Also, I know I linked the same Rosenthal piece above, but he says to forget about Ty Wigginton as an option for 3B in Cleveland as *"the Indians would not want Jhonny Peralta and Wigginton manning the left side of their infield with so many sinker-ballers on their staff. Peralta could shift to third base if the team acquires a second baseman or shortstop; he is playing third in the Dominican Republic."*

Cross him off the list, if he was even on your list...because he was not on mine.

From the ever-growing file of "I wish I were that guy", here's a link that shows Grady in Vegas at Tryst nightclub during a party thrown by a certain Hefty Lefty who hopes that pinstripes will have that "slimming" effect. I'll let you do your own search on the girl on

Grady's arm, because she's known in some circles as "Miss June 2007" and (apparently) hails from Bellevue, Ohio...the name's Brittany Binger, if you didn't catch it. Despite the fact that CC's boy Milton Bradley is tagged repeatedly as Torii Hunter (and how odd is it that CC counts the Game Boy as one of his close friends), it's pretty cool to see these guys kicking it in Vegas during the De La Hoya-Pacman fight weekend...and, um, Grady's Lady (legitimately) is not difficult to look at either.

Finally, let us all take note of the season that we are in and join these fine gentleman in acknowledging the goodness that is Christmas Ale.

Time to go get a Christmas Tree...