The ball has dropped, the calendar has flipped, and the smoke has cleared to a degree on the New Year's Eve move that saw the Indians acquire IF Mark DeRosa from the Chicago Cubs for three minor league pitchers. The move fits one of the remaining needs on the Indians' roster for 2009 as DeRosa projects immediately into the infield mix, while also allowing newly acquired 2B Luis Valbuena more time to mature in AAA. In Paulie's latest, he analyzes the trade, talks about DeRosa, and lays out the 2009 Indians lineup.

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DeRosa arrives to Cleveland with one year left on his deal for $5.5M and with a reputation as a super-utility player with on-base skills and some pop in his bat. He grew up in the Braves organization, before making his way onto the Rangers, where he was given his first real chance to become a regular contributor at the age of 31 in 2006. After the 2006 season, DeRosa fled Arlington to sign with the Cubs, where he became a gap filler for the team, logging time at 2B (188 games over 2 years), RF (60 games over 2 years), 3B (59 games over 2 years), LF (28 games over 2 years), in addition to a rare game at 1B or SS.

According to **numerous published reports** , the Indians see DeRosa as their full-time 3B, replacing Casey Blake on the roster in more than just that regard as DeRosa is essentially the same type of player that Blake was in his unappreciated time with the Indians - one that can play wherever the team needs him most while providing steady, if unspectacular, numbers at the plate.

To wit, here are the lines for the last two years for DeRosa and Blake:

DeRosa 2007

.293 BA / .371 OBP / .420 SLG / .791 OPS with 28 2B, 10 HR, and 72 RBI in 502 AB

DeRosa 2008

.285 BA / .376 OBP / .481 SLG / .857 OPS with 30 2B, 21 HR, and 87 RBI in 505 AB

Blake 2007

.270 BA / .339 OBP / .437 SLG / .776 OPS with 36 2B, 18 HR, and 78 RBI in 588 AB

Blake 2008

.274 BA / .345 OBP / .463 SLG / .808 OPS with 36 2B, 21 HR, and 81 RBI in 536 AB

Pretty similar players, no?

DeRosa has better on-base skills than Blake, with a higher likelihood to take a walk (DeRosa had 127 BB in 118 fewer AB than Blake had in accumulating 103 in the last 2 years) and not much less power than Blake.

If there was a school of thought out there that Casey Blake coming back to the Indians was the right stop-gap move, Mark DeRosa joining the club trumps it. The main problem with bringing a player like Blake back was the financial commitment it was going to take (3 years) to get him to return to Cleveland when it was unnecessary for the club to lock down that role on the roster for that long given

the acquisition of Luis Valbuena.

One of the other prevailing ideas about the Indians augmenting their infield was to Orioles' 2B Brian Roberts to the club to improve the team's overall infield and to add a player with high OBP to the top of the lineup. Here's how Roberts fares against the numbers for DeRosa for the last 2 years (I'll show DeRosa's again for comparison's sake):

DeRosa 2007

.293 BA / .371 OBP / .420 SLG / .791 OPS with 28 2B, 10 HR, and 72 RBI in 502 AB

DeRosa 2008

.285 BA / .376 OBP / .481 SLG / .857 OPS with 30 2B, 21 HR, and 87 RBI in 505 AB

Roberts 2007

.290 BA / .377 OBP / .432 SLG / .809 OPS with 42 2B, 12 HR, and 57 RBI in 621 AB

Roberts 2008

.296 BA / .378 OBP / .450 SLG / .828 OPS with 51 2B, 9 HR, and 57 RBI in 611 AB

Roberts' game relies more heavily on speed than that of DeRosa, but the on-base skills are similar, and that is what the Indians were really targeting Roberts for to fill the hole in the #2 spot in the everyday lineup. Considering that the Orioles were allegedly asking for Fausto Carmona and Asdrubal Cabrera for 1 year of Roberts, how do you feel about getting a comparable player for 1 year for Jeff Stevens, John Gaub, and Chris Archer?

To that end, the Indians gave up some arms in their organization to net DeRosa, with the most notable name being Stevens, who projects as a potential late-inning option in MLB and is ready to play a role in an MLB bullpen in 2009. But the Indians, to their credit, dealt from depth again as the names in front of or on par

with Stevens who figure to start the season in Columbus (Meloan, Miller) remain in the system and ready at beck-and-call when needed for the parent club. Giving up Stevens hurts in the long-term, given that DeRosa is only under contract for one year, but due to the organizational depth at reliever, the dearth of infield options, and the alleged demands of the Orioles for Roberts, it's a move that you make.

Beyond Stevens, I'm not going to pretend to know too much about Gaub and Archer, so I'll let **Tony Lastoria's scouting reports on all three** (that he had compiled for his annual prospect book) clue you in on those two. Just know that neither has thrown an inning past Lake County, so if the Indians do ever regret giving up either, it's not going to be anytime in the near future.

So now with all of that out there, let's get to the idea that the Indians plan on playing DeRosa primarily as the 3B and plan on keeping Peralta at SS and Cabrera at 2B. Given that these 3 players are going to fill 3 infield spots in the lineup, regardless of where they're playing, it would only make sense to put them in the strongest defensive alignment possible and, while Cubs' sources have listed 3B as DeRosa's best position, keeping Cabrera away from SS remains the elephant in the room. Perhaps the Indians feel that Peralta's transition to 3B was not going to go well or that DeRosa and Garko on the right side of the infield was not an ideal alignment. Regardless of the thought process, I think that DeRosa playing 3B only delays the inevitable move of Peralta to 3B, if only for a year. There's a chance that the Indians could give Peralta some time at 3B in 2009, because of the versatility of DeRosa, Cabrera, and Carroll - though I would think that the transition would be made over a longer period of time than that, perhaps in anticipation of him moving to 3B in 2010.

For now, though, it keeps Peralta at SS and Cabrera at 2B with Carroll as the Futility Infielder and buries Andy Marte deeper on the bench (if he's even on the team in 2009, though it's not like DeRosa took his spot on the roster) and clouds Josh Barfield's future with the organization as Barfield is only able to play 2B and the acquisition of Luis Valbuena precludes Barfield from playing 2B in Columbus.

So maybe more moves are afoot to fill that last need in the rotation as DeRosa's acquisition is precisely what the Indians were looking for after the first two moves of the off-season. They've augmented the bullpen by adding a closer (Wood) and depth (Joe Smith), they've shored up the infield for 2009 (DeRosa) and added quality depth at the upper levels of the minors in the middle of their infield

(Valbuena) for beyond 2009 and they've done all of this while trading only Franklin Gutierrez, Jeff Stevens, and two low-A pitchers.

They have addressed their needs through FA and by dealing from depth in the organization (young OF and young relievers) to fill holes that were identified as problems for 2009. The losses of Gutierrez and Stevens don't affect the 2009 club that drastically and the players that were acquired for them change the face of the club quite significantly.
Right now, the Indians are looking at a pretty-fleshed out 25-man roster:

Starting Lineup

Martinez
Garko
Cabrera
Peralta
DeRosa
Choo
Sizemore
Francisco
Hafner

Bench

Shoppach
Carroll
Marte
Dellucci

Rotation

Lee
Carmona
Reyes
Laffey
Sowers

Bullpen

Wood
Lewis
Perez
Betancourt
Kobayashi
Smith
Jackson

The starting 9 and the bullpen look pretty set (remember, I see Jackson as the long man in the bullpen), with some players that still represent "depth" in the organization to perhaps add that middle-of-the-rotation starter that remains on the "To-Do" List. The Indians have filled most of their holes without firing their potential biggest bullet in the trade market (Show Pack) or compromising all of their MLB-ready depth that could serve as throw-ins for a deal (Sowers, Barfield, Marte, etc.) in that they would fill out a roster at the league minimum.

With the DeRosa trade, the Indians filled an enormous hole on their 2009 team, laying waste to any idea that the team was gearing up for 2010 when the likes of Matt LaPorta, Luis Valbuena, Dave Huff, or Michael Brantley may play more important roles, if they don't make it topside at some point this season. The $5.5M they'll spend on DeRosa likely means that they money that they had to spend is gone ($16M on Wood and DeRosa to come from Wrigleyville) and that a starter (if added) is either coming via trade or from the bargain bin (which, to me, is no better than simply going with the in-house options). The $5.5M they'll pay him will be $500,000 more than Casey Blake will earn with Dodgers (plus it will buy **DeRosa's wife** some nice things to wear), but unlike Blake, the financial commitment runs only through 2009, giving the Indians' youngsters time to develop and ease onto the club this year or in 2010 instead of being thrust onto the club ill-prepared out of Spring Training.

All told, the Indians crossed off another off-season need for the 2009 club by adding a versatile veteran to their infield and to the top of their order while not compromising the 2009 roster in terms of who they gave up and retaining financial flexibility beyond this year with DeRosa's contract running only through this season.

42 Days Until Pitchers and Catchers Report!