The Andy Marte Era likely came to a quiet halt this past week when the former top prospect was designated for assignment this past week by the Tribe so they could clear a roster spot for the newly acquired Juan Salas. The Curious Case of Andy Marte has been hashed and re-hashed too many times, but his decline after his successful 2005 season as a 21-year-old in AAA remains one of our great mysteries. Paulie tackles the topic in his latest column for us.

As the Andy Marte Era ends with a whimper, nobody can feign surprise (unless the fact that he's gone before the 1st Spring Training Game has even been played surprises you) as he finds himself likely out of the organization as the writing was on the wall that Marte should have a cardboard box ready for packing up his belongings next to his locker for quite some time. The Curious Case of Andy Marte has been hashed and re-hashed too many times (admittedly here, among other spots), but his decline after his successful 2005 season as a 21-year-old in AAA remains one of our great mysteries.

When examining what went wrong with Marte, quite a few things pop out at you starting with the fact that the guy just never hit well enough in AAA to force himself into the Indians' plans and his demise was exacerbated by the fact that, when he was on the parent club, he was never given any real stretch of time to make that transition to MLB. Indulge for a moment, if you will, by taking a look back at what Marte did while in the Indians' organization and how the Indians' use (or misuse, to some) culminated with his Designation for Assignment on Thursday.

In 2006, the Indians started Marte in AAA despite a 2005 campaign in Richmond (the Braves' AAA affiliate) that put him among the elite in terms of hitting

prospects. Ahead of Marte at 3B in Cleveland was Aaron Boone, who would post an OPS of .684 over the course of the year and ostensibly lost his job to Marte in late July as Marte would start at 3B for 50 of the final 61 games of the 2006 season, posting a line of .226 BA / .287 OBP / .421 SLG / .708 OPS. Underwhelming numbers for sure, but as a still-22-year-old and replacing Aaron Boone in the lineup, Marte performed adequately if not phenomenally. It seemed that the second half 2006 would be the beginning of Marte manning 3B for the Tribe for the foreseeable future...something that did not ultimately happen.

After his 2006, Marte was handed the 2007 3B job in Spring Training with the idea that he would be on a pretty long leash, given his youth and the potential that he showed a mere two years earlier while in the Braves' organization. Marte struggled out of the gate, though no one was surprised as he was purported to be a "slow starter" and posted a line of .179 BA / .220 OBP / .333 SLG / .553 OPS as he played in 13 of the first 15 games of the season until hitting the DL with an injury. His injury opened the door for Casey Blake to assume his regular spot at 3B, a spot that Marte would never get back as an Indian. While Blake produced in Marte's absence, Marte at this point seemed to fall out of favor with the organization as he played three games in late May, then would be sent back to Buffalo until a late-season call-up. His performance in Buffalo when he was demoted didn't create any buzz (.267 BA / .309 OBP / .457 SLG / .766 OPS), but it's not as if he fell on his face as a still-23-year-old in AAA (for comparison's sake, Wes Hodges will be 24 this year in Columbus), so there had to be some hope remaining that Marte could still translate to MLB.

All told though, Marte's "big chance" to take a hold of the 3B job in 2007 consisted of 16 starts in 20 games with 57 at-bats. Granted, his performance in those 57 AB didn't scream for extended time, but we're talking about 57 AB that year - which is 10 less than Mike Rouse saw and 4 more than Chris Gomez saw.

If that's the basis for the Indians deciding that Marte could not make the transition to MLB, that's like making that decision after 2 weeks of games in a season. Because, really, those 13 starts in the first 15 games of 2007 constitute Marte's last long look as a potential starter as his 2008 (when he was out of options and had to be on the team) began with merely 100 AB in the team's first 106 games before Casey Blake was traded to the Dodgers. Marte remained nailed to the bench despite the 2008 Indians' lineup containing gaping holes at 1B and LF for the better part of the first part of the season and with the player ahead of Marte at 3B able to play either 1B or LF, which would have opened a spot for Marte to

receive at least more regular plate appearances. Instead, the Indians promoted Michael Aubrey (2 years older than Marte) and Ben Francisco (also 2 years older than Marte) to take AB at 1B and LF instead of simply moving Blake around the diamond and giving Marte consistent AB for the Tribe.

Even after Blake was traded, Marte played in only 43 of the final 60 games of the season, cementing the idea that the decision that Marte's standing within the organization was non-existent as Utility IF Jamey Carroll played in only 2 fewer games than Marte after the Blake deal. Now, it should obviously be noted that Marte (when he was on the Indians) did look overwhelmed at the plate and the numbers in Cleveland bear that out when you look at the 3-year line he compiled from 2006 to 2008, posting a cumulative .221 BA / .268 OBP / .315 SLG / .583 OPS with 9 HR, 30 2B, 29 BB, and 99 K over 456 AB in those three years.

As a quick aside here, the 456 AB that Marte logged in his three years in MLB as an Indian are 9 fewer AB than Ben Francisco compiled in 2008 alone (after Frisco "forced" his way into the mix by posting a .623 OPS in the first 24 games in Buffalo), and Francisco didn't enter the everyday lineup until May 6th, seeing 441 of his 447 AB in the 119 games he played over the final 130 games of the season.

Are you seeing yet how Marte's chances were so few and so far between when you see it in that context? That is to say, the irregularity with which he played and the limited opportunities that he saw really didn't give Marte much of an opportunity to find that rhythm in MLB or give the Indians an extended look to see if he was going to make the transition to being even a serviceable MLB player as the Indians' handling of him give off a feeling that something outside of Marte's performance on the field caused them to sour on him as a long-term option at 3B.

Maybe it was conditioning or his underwhelming stints in AAA, but the Indians really didn't have an obvious reason not to move Blake around in a super-utility role or not to give Marte every AB from 3B in the lost 2008 season after Blake was traded unless, at some point between the beginning of the 2007 season (when Marte was handed the 3B job) the Indians came to the conclusion that whatever deficiencies they detected in Marte were not fixable and that he no longer figured into the long-term plans. Their usage of him screams that there was a moment that even Marte's biggest supporter in the organization gave up on him.

Whether the Indians were right to think that will reveal itself in the coming years as questions still surround Marte's viability as an MLB player. Whether Marte will ever rediscover that magical season as a 21-year-old in AAA will find an answer over the next few seasons as Marte is still just 25 and multiple teams (notably the Twins and the Giants) are looking to upgrade at 3B without a huge outlay of cash or committed years. Perhaps him being DFA'd (and I can't think of any good reason for the Indians to keep him this Spring, eating up reps that Wes Hodges could get at 3B or that Victor, Garko, and the bevy of young 1B could get at 1B) allows him to find a team that's interested and gives him the whole Spring to catch onto said team instead of getting cut the last day of camp and scrambling for a new employer. Regardless of whether he ever does find his footing in MLB, one thing that is certain is that he won't do it in an Indians' uniform.

As for the player the Indians acquired that needed to be added to the 40-man roster, **Juan Salas** looks like another RHP to slot among many that don't figure too prominently in the Indians' long-term plans (not unlike the Greg Aquino, Jack Cassell, etc. contingent) with the difference between Salas and the non-roster invitees being that Salas has an option remaining and is likely to be on the Cleveland-to-Columbus shuttle, if he makes it topside at all. He has a power arm and throws a cut fastball, but little else and now, at the age of 30 finds himself in a new organization who, presumably, thinks that they can tweak something with Salas to allow him to find the consistency that eluded him in Tampa.

Salas, to me, looks like nothing more than insurance against the inevitable attrition that takes place in a bullpen over the course of a season and represents an arm that can be moved up and down (if he even gets that high on the ladder) without starting anyone's option clock too soon or promoting a more-highly-thought-of reliever to simply sit in the Indians' bullpen until the roundtrip ticket to Columbus gets punched.

If the Indians are able to get anything out of Salas resembling a consistent reliever, well...huzzah; but the addition of Salas shouldn't be taken at much more than face value in that it adds an arm to the organization that may become something special, but is more likely to become just that...an organizational arm.

For now, we enter our first Andy Marte-free weekend since 2006.

Fare thee well, young Marte.