Brrrr. As the temps dip below freezing here again on the north coast, it is time for Paulie C to start hurling his first tomahawks of the 2009 Indians season. In today's piece, Paul hits on Jhonny Peralta's sizzling start to spring training, the lineup he would go with if opening day was tomorrow, the real reason the Indians are playing Garko in the outfield, and the first veteran he sees getting cut (and his name isn't Dellucci). 23 days till opening day!

As the temperature dips below the freezing mark again on the North Coast...I mean, come on...let's imagine ourselves in Arizona, sitting under the sun looking at all of the cacti that surround us. Now, let's imagine ourselves hurling tomahawks at those cacti because it's time to release the first tomahawks of 2009.

While Spring Training stats are just that, who else is excited that Jhonny Peralta has continued the momentum from the end of his 2008 season into swinging a hot bat in Arizona? With questions still legitimately surrounding how frequently Hafner is going to play (and how effective he'll be when he does), Peralta's bat may play a huge role as middle-of-the-order presence with a healthy Victor and a full season of a (seemingly now healthy) S.S. Choo.

Everyone knows about the second-half emergences of Choo and Show Pack last season, but how about Jhonny, whose production took off once he was inserted into the #4 spot? Starting on June 22nd (his first appearance in the clean-up spot), Peralta posted a line of .306 BA / .365 OBP / .512 SLG / .877 OPS with 12 HR, 28 2B, and 59 RBI with 68 K and 30 BB in the 378 plate appearances over his final 86 games.

What number stands out there? And don't you dare say RBI, Mr. and Mrs. Garko.

How about 28 Doubles in his final 86 games in 2008, when Peralta had 28 Doubles over 149 games in 2006 and 27 Doubles in 152 games in 2007? Over the course of a season, that pace puts Peralta at about 52 Doubles, a number reached by two Indians since 1926 (Sizemore with 53 in 2006 and Belle with 52 in 1995).

So much is made of where Peralta figures to play on the diamond, what's overlooked is that Peralta looks to have fully recaptured the magic of his breakout 2005 season to become an excellent offensive player, regardless of what patch of dirt his cleats dig themselves into on the infield.

While Jhonny isn't likely to continue the phenomenally torrid pace he's setting in Goodyear (and does anyone else feel like someone should pull him aside and tell him to save for games that count), slotting him in the #5 hole behind Victor allows the lineup to stretch out in terms of quality.

Speaking of the lineup, is anyone else interested to see how the names are going to appear 1 through 9 when the games count? It's assumed that Sizemore and DeRosa will hit first and second and that Victor will hit in the clean-up spot, but where do the Indians go with the #3 hole?

Are they really convinced that Hafner should sit in that #3 hole or would they be better served to give The BLC the first shot at it, allowing Hafner to work his way back into the groove without the added pressure (real or imagined) that he's being counted on to carry a good deal of the offensive burden from Day 1?

If you were to ask me right now, I'd say the lineup should look like this:

CF - Sizemore
3B - DeRosa
RF - Choo
C/1B - Martinez
SS - Peralta
DH - Hafner
C/1B - Shoppach/Garko
LF - Francisco
2B - Cabrera

In that lineup, the first redundancy of handedness doesn't come until the #7/#8 spot with Shoppach/Garko leading into Francisco, all of whom are RH. Otherwise, the lineup balances out the hitters pretty well and allows Hafner to ease into the mix, with the unused portion of the Garko/Shoppach combination taking Hafner's spot in the lineup when Hafner needs a day off to rest his shoulder.

Does anyone else see where this "versatility" for Garko that we keep reading about is going?

The Indians keep talking about how Garko's looked good in LF, about how they might take a look at him in RF, and how they want to "keep his bat in the lineup"...but why wouldn't it be in the lineup seeing as how there's not an "obvious" everyday 1B that figures to take playing time away from him?

I don't think I'm telling any secrets to say that the answer is pretty simple - the Indians are going to be playing Victor at 1B a LOT more than they're letting on, allowing Shoppach to get as many AB as the catcher as his 2008 merited. While the Indians have publicly commented that ShopVac will catch C.P. Lee and that Victor will catch Carmona, the fact that they're so interested in adding "versatility" to Garko's bag of tricks is telling. It's telling because a decent amount of AB look, at least on the surface, to be available for Garko if he and Shoppach are truly in a convoluted platoon at C and 1B and Hafner's going to need days off, making AB available at DH.

That is, unless, the Indians are figuring that Kelly and Victor figure to be getting the bulk of the playing time from the C and 1B positions (and last time I checked, Shoppach isn't a 1B) and the Indians are figuring that Garko will see his plate appearances only at DH when Hafner's taking a day off or in the OF.

It may be too much to say that Victor's going to be playing 1B every time Carmona's not on the mound, but Garko's time in the OF means that the Indians are going to be getting Shoppach's bat in the everyday lineup (and rightfully so) as much as possible and the player on the outside looking in if Shoppach's going to get the bulk of the playing time is Garko.

Take that assumption that Victor's going to see a lot of time at 1B this year and throw in the fact that DeRosa figures to really be the 4th OF out of camp and you have to wonder where and how often Garko's going to find himself in the starting lineup this year.

Hence, the outfield experiment...that is, until the likes of LaPorta and Brantley are ready to emerge (perhaps at some point this year) to further muddy Garko's role on the team going forward.

If you asked me to guess right now who the first veteran would be that would find himself off the Indians' 2009 roster, my answer wouldn't be David Dellucci.

I'd pick Masa Kobayashi, whose second-half performance last year, combined with the arms in camp in Goodyear that are making good impressions, might lead the Indians to make the decision to eat Kobayashi's salary and go in another direction as they've shown they're not hesitant to do with relievers in the past few years.

With that in mind, it makes the performances of the guys that figure to start the season down in Columbus this Spring and when in AAA that much more important as the faces and names that make up a bullpen are in a constant state of flux and spots are sure to open up as the season reveals itself. The impressions that some of the NRI's (like Chulk) are making as well as what the youngsters (like Sipp) are doing in Goodyear could go a long way in determining who gets the call to join the parent club if a pitcher like Kobayashi is sent on his merry way.

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