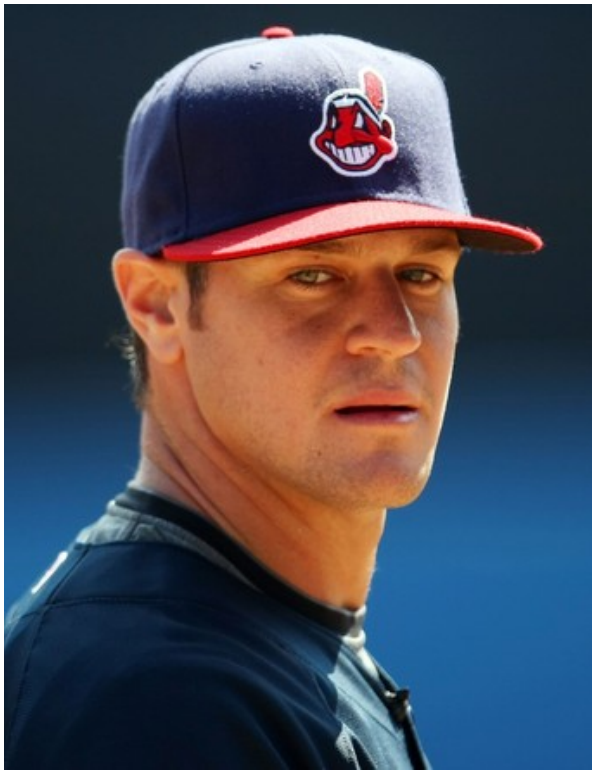
It was coming...we all knew it - the Indians' roster in 2009 was built to evolve over the course of the season as what was called the "best layer of upper-level talent since the mid-90's" sat at the ready when the season dawned to, at some point, augment the parent club and inject talent into the 25-man roster. With the level of talent in AAA and the questions that needed to be answered on the Opening Day roster...we all knew it was coming. Quick show of hands...who had May 1st?



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That's right, the evolution of the Indians in 2009 began for all intents and purposes after Friday night's game with the promotion of Matt LaPorta, Luis Valbuena, and Josh Barfield after David Dellucci was promoted earlier in the day to replace TAFKAP (that's "The Artist Formerly Known as Pronk" if you're keeping score at home). The returns of The Looch and Barfield are ancillary in the grand scheme of things, as neither figures too prominently in the club's future, but the promotion of BOTH LaPorta and Valbuena, with one stroke of the brush, has a much deeper message than the Indians simply promoting two of their top

prospects on May 1st, both of whom happened to be thriving in AAA.

First and foremost, the promotion of LaPorta now, and not in about a month, presupposes that the Indians will make LaPorta a Super 2 player (assuming he's here to stay) and ultimately will pay LaPorta somewhere in the range of $6M to $12M more than what they would have had to before he was eligible for FA by promoting him on Friday and not a month from now.

Not too much money...at least when you spread that over the course of more than a few years, right? Maybe, but all the Indians had to do was wait for about another month to promote LaPorta to AVOID incurring that extra cost. Essentially, this month of games with LaPorta will, in the long run, cost the organization a number probably somewhere in the range of $10M. They could have kept him in Columbus, managed his service time for another month and saved the $10M by simply keeping him for a month.

But they didn't and the fact that they didn't gives a pretty clear glimpse into what the Indians think about what the next month of their season means to this 2009 season. By that I mean, the Indians promoted LaPorta fully aware of the implications; but making the decision based not on long-term ramifications, rather on short-term impact, with the hope that the presence of LaPorta in the next month prevents this season from slipping away.

It's a decision with big financial ramifications, but one which the Indians must have felt was necessary to put the best team on the field today, future worries aside. For those of you who pine for the "best team, regardless of age or financial obligations" - here it comes, starting Saturday.

The move screams of the importance of not simply letting the 2009 season slip away with an eye toward 2010 and beyond as, again, one more month of LaPorta in the minors saves the Indians millions of dollars over the next few years. What it means is that the Indians are not going to simply wait to see "how this whole thing shakes out", but rather they are identifying deficiencies on their team (and well ahead of that 40-game mark that everyone points to as the "evaluative period") and are attempting to improve on those deficiencies by putting what they think is the best ball club on the field today...for the Indians.

Beyond the overall scope of the move, how do the promotions affect this team on

a day-to-day basis?

For sure, the every day starting OF will usually look like LaPorta, Sizemore, and Choo with LaPorta's absence in LF meaning that he's playing 1B or DH'ing, as they didn't make this decision to sit him on the bench, regardless of how The Atomic Wedgie spins the promotion as a "complement to Dellucci". LaPorta is on the Indians to play every day and the presence of Dellucci should not (and will not) prevent that.

What that means for Francisco is that he'll be relegated to the role of 4th OF (or even 5th if you think DeRosa's going to morph into more of a super-utility guy with Valbuena's promotion...which I do) and will likely see an occasional start in the OF, but more than likely will be used as a pinch-hitter.

This...this is not a bad thing for the Indians.

Valbuena (whose promotion is unfairly overshadowed by LaPorta's) figures to fill in as a "utility" player, but not in the Mike Rouse sense, more in the "play 4 or 5 times a week" sense as his versatility to play 2B, SS, or 3B can be utilized with the versatility of DeRosa, Cabrera, and maybe Peralta to mix and match these guys around to put a strong lineup together in a number of different variations.

Valbuena ostensibly becomes the fill-in-the-gap infielder that Graffanino was, except that he's not Tony Graffanino and represents a viable option, both offensively and defensively that should be utilized to optimize match-ups or give certain players days off when they are needed without the drop-off to a Graffanino-esque player being the result. It's more than likely that Valbuena figures to be on the team until Jamey Carroll comes back as his permanent spot on the team is not as obvious as LaPorta's is...yet. Given Valbuena's performance in Columbus, it's possible that he turns into a pleasant surprise and the evolution of the infield that we all saw happening after this year gets fast-tracked by Valbuena's success.

So if that is how LaPorta and Valbuena are likely to fit, who gets affected by these moves?

Well, obviously Trevor Crowe, who showed that his bat is not ready for MLB and that he needs to prove quite a bit at AAA to merit another legitimate shot at

playing even in a part-time role, Tony Graffanino, who may make his way back to Columbus to...um, well to be in Columbus, and Joe Smith, who can hopefully take this time on the DL with his "injury" to ready himself for the bullpen and to be a solid contributor to a bullpen so badly in need of one instead of just being another inconsistent option.

Beyond the guys that were actually involved in the move, as I stated before, Francisco and DeRosa are likely to find themselves in new roles with Francisco filling the role of the 4th or 5th OF with Josh Barfield while DeRosa could move into more of a super-utility in the way that Casey Blake never was in his time as an Indian.

With Francisco, it's a welcome change and one that revealed itself very obviously in his 2009 start. With DeRosa, it's a role that he thrived in with the Cubs last year, becoming the essential "glue" guy that can play 3B, 2B, 1B, LF, and RF and essentially play to take the place of a slumping player or to give a guy a day off. Don't get me wrong, he's still more the everyday-3B than anything else, but the presence of Valbuena means that the infield configuration could be such that it does or doesn't include DeRosa and not see the drop-off it did when the likes of a Graffanino played.

Of course, the moves can be taken as the team essentially spinning its wheels as LaPorta and Valbuena aren't going to suddenly solve the unsettled pen or pitch every fifth day in the rotation. While that may be true on the surface, what it does is improve the offense in terms of balance and particularly depth to the point that the added firepower may be enough to make those 10-8 shoot-outs that we talked about a couple of weeks ago that are looking like they may be the rule and not the exception fall in the Indians' favor and not against them.

All told, the Indians have just entered May and the contributions from players that started the year in AAA have already been significant with Laffey and Sipp looking like cogs in this machine going forward. What Friday's moves did furthered that reach into the Indians' AAA pocket as they now have promoted their top prospect in AAA to fill a hole in LF and have augmented their weak bench by promoting a player thought to be firmly in the team's 2010 plans a little early to signal that the team is not ready to wave the white flag on the 2009 season, regardless of how early the calendar tells us it still is in the baseball season.

Starting today, the "all hands on deck" philosophy begins with more

help possibly coming in the near future as the imminent evolution that was expected to occur throughout the 2009 season already looks to be in full swing.