With the Trading Deadline a mere 10 days away and the status quo remaining inexplicably in vogue at the corner of Carnegie and Ontario despite a season that cannot find a bottom, Paulie C thought it would be a good time to break out a little series on players that could be moved prior to July 31st. Today, he starts with the position players that the team may look to deal to the droves of "buyers" out there in the MLB marketplace.

With the Trading Deadline a mere 10 days away and the status quo remaining inexplicably in vogue at the corner of Carnegie and Ontario despite a season that cannot find a bottom, I thought it would be a good time to break out a little series on players that could be moved prior to July 31st, in terms of position players, pitchers, and...oh, those two guys...what are their names again?

Obviously, roster moves are overdue for the Indians as an organization as the current incarnation continues to mire away below the Royals (in the midst of an improbably bad 19-43 stretch) in the standings, but what fungible pieces on the parent club could be moved to deal from areas of strength (or at least "relative strength") to shore up weaknesses in the organization?

Some of this is rehashing old news (or just blatantly re-posting previous thoughts with some addendums), but in terms of position players that have an undefined role for the team past 2009, here are some names that could be embroidered on the back of some new laundry at the end of the next 10 days:

Jhonny Peralta

From the land of "What Have You Done for Me Lately", we find Jhonny Peralta in the crosshairs of those looking for a target as to what's gone wrong in the 2009 season. While bemoaning his struggles this year is certainly valid and beyond frustrating to see for a now-27-year-old player in his 5th MLB season, let's all take a moment to remember what Peralta did in the 2nd half of 2008 after he was moved to the clean-up spot in mid-June:

.306 BA / .356 OBP / .512 SLG / .877 OPS with 28 2B, 12 HR, and 59 RBI in 86 games

After that display to close out 2008, the thought was that Peralta was ready to take the next step as a player, to provide the consistency that had eluded him in his MLB career. This "consistency" obviously has not occurred, but let's take a look what has happened with the handling of Peralta since the close of the 2008 season:

The Indians plant the seeds for the idea that Peralta may play 3B in 2009 by targeting both 2B and 3B in the off-season...

Peralta goes to Winter Ball to play 3B...

The Indians trade for Mark DeRosa and immediately declare him as their 3B in 2009, removing much thought that Peralta would play 3B on any more than an occasional basis as the plan going into Spring Training has an IF alignment of DeRosa at 3B, Peralta at SS, and Cabrera at 2B...

Proving that Spring Training stats do not serve as a harbinger for regular season stats, Peralta thrives under the desert sun, posting a .391 BA with 8 extra-base hits in 64 AB in 20 games, leading the club in total bases in Spring Training...

Peralta struggles out of the gate, posting a 30-game line of .246 BA / .303 OBP / .320 SLG / .623 OPS with only 6 extra base hits in 132 plate appearances. While his dreadful first six weeks do not represent a sharp departure for the notoriously slow starting Peralta (career April OPS - .678), when combined with other developments on the team, a change is in the offing...

On May 14th, in the 31st game of the season, Peralta is moved to 3B and will start only 9 more games at SS over the next 54 games despite now-de-facto-SS Asdrubal Cabrera missing 23 games in the month of June...

Now, I'm not ready to simply chalk up Peralta's struggles at the plate this year to his position change, but let's look back on the comments of another player who made the transition from SS to 3B at the big-league level, one Travis Fryman in an interview with Baseball Prospectus' David Laurila last Augus
t:

***David Laurila**: What was your transition like for you going from shortstop to third base?*

***Travis Fryman**: Well, mine took place in the big leagues. I never played a day at any position other than shortstop until my second day in the big leagues. That's when they asked me to play third, so I learned on the job. Again, I think you learn patience from your coaching staff, and looking back now, I made a lot of mistakes as a young player. But I was allowed to make them, and I was expected to learn from them. I don't ever remember a time when a coach expressed negative feelings toward me because of my mistakes; I just think they were very patient with me. But third base is a pretty difficult position to learn, and it's a position that's unique. There are things that everyone needs to do, and do well, to play third, but I don't think there's just one way to play third in order to do it successfully. You need to give people time to get a feel for the position.*

Let's forget for a moment what a great idea it would have been for the Indians to make this decision of "Peralta-to-3B" this winter and put Fryman in Jhonny's back pocket in Goodyear and see that Fryman is actually an interesting comparison here as most Indians' fans remember him for his phenomenal 2000 season in Cleveland, but don't remember that Fryman was a SS who made the full-time transition to a 3B as a 25-year-old in 1994.

What was Fryman's OPS his first 4 years as a full-time 3B?

1994 - Age 25 - .801 OPS
1995 - Age 26 - .756 OPS
1996 - Age 27 - .766 OPS
1997 - Age 28 - .766 OPS

Peralta's OPS at the same ages?

2007 - Age 25 - .771 OPS
2008 - Age 26 - .804 OPS

2009 - Age 27 - .700 OPS to date

This is not meant to suggest that Peralta is Travis Fryman as his glove will likely never approach Fryman's; rather, it's meant to point out that a player like Peralta is not without worth to the Indians, current season considered.

Is he still considered one of the core players that he was after his break-out 2005 season as a 23-year-old?

No chance...and watching his demeanor on the field is certainly frustrating. But playing a new position by mid-May after being told throughout Spring Training that SS would remain his position has to play some sort of role in his season at the plate, does it not?

While some may be more than willing to cut bait on Peralta, consider that he's still 27 years old (17 months older than Marte and 28 months older than Wes Hodges) with a track record of performing at or above the league average for 3 out of his 4 completed big-league seasons. In those 4 completed big-league seasons, he has averaged a .273 BA / .339 OBP / .450 SLG / .789 OPS line (106 OPS+) with an average of 20 HR and 33 2B as a SS. He's also scheduled to make $3.4M next year and $4.6M in 2010, all while likely still transitioning into the position of 3B. To put that number in perspective, Jamey Carroll (career 82 OPS+) made $2.15M this year, so it's not as if Peralta's salary is breaking the bank while providing a track record of moderate success.

But back to the idea that he could be moved, the question really becomes whether the Indians feel confident enough about Andy Marte to assume 3B in Jhonny's place than anything else as the idea that Wes Hodges and his career MiLB OPS of .816 now at the age of 24 in AAA is much of a viable option is quickly losing steam.

Is Marte ready for another shot at MLB?

Given his performance in AAA this year , it would certainly seem to be the case. But the issue with moving Peralta to "make room" for Marte is that below Marte, the Indians realistically have Lonnie br>Perhaps the Indians feel that Peralta has regressed (and there is certainly evidence to back that up) or reached his plateau as a player, but to move a player to a new position mid-season after a season in which he anchored the middle of the lineup seems to be a rush to

judgment and a condemnation of Peralta's inability to make his immediate move to 3B a seamless one in that it would have no effect on the rest of his game.

Forgive me if us about either going forward, particularly because it would mean that neither would be playing on a consistent basis?

Don't those small sample sizes already exist for Marte with inconsistent playing time?

If the Indians are ready to cast their lot with Marte and truly commit to seeing what they have in him for the remainder of the 2009 season (at the very least), moving Peralta is certainly an option as (even despite his sub-par 2009 season) the trade market would have some demand for a 27-year-old with an extended MLB track record playing under a relatively club-friendly deal.

Ultimately, there's little question that Peralta hasn't developed the way the Indians thought he would, but what role has his position change or perceived disagreements with his lame-duck manager played in his struggles? We'll never know and, if he is moved, we'll never know what Peralta would put forth at the plate playing 3B full-time with the knowledge that he's playing 3B every day sometime before mid-May.

Perhaps the Indians feel that Peralta has regressed (and there is certainly evidence to back that up) or reached his plateau as a player, but to move a player to a new position mid-season after a season in which he anchored the middle of the lineup seems to be a rush to judgment and a condemnation of Peralta's inability to make his immediate move to 3B a seamless one in that it would have no effect on the rest of his game.

Ryan Garko

Forgive me if you've heard this before, but it bears repeating as the likelihood of a deal involving Ryan Garko looks more and more possible with each passing day. At this point in Garko's career, we know Garko is what he is (a high-OBP, medium-SLG, mediocre place-holding 1B) and with that combination of "skills", it's possible that Garko could be seen as an offensive upgrade for a playoff contender whose price (in terms of what the playoff contender would have to give up) may not be as high as other offensive players purported to be on the market.

At the very least, Garko would have some value as a RH bat who has hit LHP well this year, with his numbers against RHP looking about average for a ML player:

Garko vs. LHP - 2009

.291 BA / .361 OBP / .491 SLG / .852 OPS

Garko vs. RHP - 2009

.264 BA / .344 OBP / .411 SLG / .755 OPS

That being said (and acknowledging that his numbers against LHP have been dropping in the past few weeks), Garko would have some value on the trade market given his ability to hit LHP and to provide some increased production for contenders without costing too much in terms of what the Indians would be looking for in return (that would be an arm...any arm) and in terms of salary. Also working in the Indians favor would be the fact that a number of contending teams find themselves in need of an offensive upgrade at 1B or thereabouts.

Contenders like San Francisco, Texas, Atlanta, Boston, Florida, and the Mets could have an interest in Garko, whose usefulness to the Indians may be coming to an end with LaPorta likely coming up in the very near future (wish I had a nickel for how often I've written that) to presumably play LF and 1B when Victor is not so...the odd man out there would be Garko, right?

Factor in that Garko is arbitration-eligible after this season (meaning his production vs. affordability relation is about to go out of the Indians' favor) and the writing appears to be on the wall.

Take a quick look at what comparable players to Garko at arbitration received this past off-season:

Jason Kubel - MIN - 2-year deal for $7.2M in January of 2009
($2.75M for 2009, $4.1M for 2010, with a $5.25M club option for 2011)

Mike Jacobs - KC - 1-year deal for $3.25M in February of 2009

Anyone interested in committing those kind of numbers (or even thereabouts) to Garko past this year?

Not me, and if Garko has some trade value and can be packaged as part of a deal, now would be the time to do it instead of giving him AB for the remainder of the season over a player like LaPorta who significantly figures into the future of this organization...or at least he should.

Kelly Shoppach

I know...you always try to "sell high" on a guy and moving Kelly now would be the antithesis of that strategy. But I fear that the "sell high" period has passed for Show Pack and there are contenders in the NL that could use an upgrade at C - (MIL, NYM, CIN) - meaning that including Shoppach in a deal could net more arms when more arms are so obviously needed.

If I may put on my salesman hat here, how about telling an NL team that Shoppach could sit an the #8 hole ahead of a pitcher in the NL and just feast on fastballs to provide some power from behind the dish?

But, he's a windmill, right?

No question, but I go back to a comment that Terry Pluto made some time back before the season when he joined Tony Lastoria and I on "Smoke Signals" when he was asked if the Indians had missed their chance to get maximum value for ShopVac. Pluto responded that in MLB, if a player had ever experienced prolonged success (and Shoppach certainly did in the 2nd half of last year), another team would point to that success and say that "they could fix him" to get the player back to that success. I'm not sure if that would hold in terms of a team seeing Shoppach as a reclamation project, but as a catcher with power in a league full of catchers providing little or no offense, he would have to retain some value despite his prodigious K totals.

As an interesting aside here, as Shoppach's 2009 certainly has been a disappointment, particularly after the promise of his 2008 season when he assumed the reins of being the starting catcher to close out 2008, how many times do you think that Shoppach has started more than 3 games in a row this season?

Once...only one time this season has Shoppach started for a stretch of games longer than 3 in a row, and it was a 4-game starting stretch in late-May and early-June.

This after the 82 game stretch to end 2008, in which Shoppach started 74 times and posted a .273 BA / .366 OBP / .564 SLG / .930 OPS with 19 HR and 23 2B. After that, he's started a little over ½ the games at C (47 of 93) and has yet to start 5 consecutive games with 93 games now played.

If Shoppach thrived in full-time duty last year, the Indians certainly have not extended that full-time duty into 2009 with the disappointing results either coming as a product of that sporadic use or as the cause of the sporadic use.

Chicken, egg, whatever...

Nevertheless, it does seem that Shoppach's time on the roster is running out as another factor in the decision of whether to move Shoppach would be (not unlike Garko) that Shoppach will find himself affected by his salary number, now that he'll be entering in his second year of arbitration after this year and figures to make more than the $1.95M he signed for after last year, if only by the designs of the arbitration process. Depending upon where the Indians see Victor ultimately playing will play a role in Shoppach's future, but as that salary number increases, so does the likelihood that Shoppach will not be drawing that paycheck from the Indians

Could the Indians wait on this until the off-season?

Sure, but at this point, the catchers are backing up behind Shoppach and, depending upon Victor's ultimate position, moving Shoppach now for a young arm may serve everyone involved the best in the long run.

Jamey Carroll

If the players above have cloudy futures past 2009, there's no question that Carroll does not figure into plans for the team into 2010 as a Futility IF making over $2M a year simply does not enter any conversation past this year in terms of roster options. Carroll has been what he was supposed to be when he was acquired from the Rockies, a versatile player who could contribute at multiple positions without invoking the memory of Mike Rouse. After the line of Utility IF the Indians have paraded through the field in the past few years, that's enough of a respite to actually value a player like Carroll.

How much other teams would value Carroll remains to be seen as it would seem

that there are a number of similar players who can be had for nothing or very little, which is basically the probable return for a player like Carroll. It's feasible that the Indians can move him for "cash" as they did with Paul Byrd last year or it's possible that the Jack Hannahan trade from Oakland to Seattle serves notice that an arm can be had for a Futility IF ...even if it's not a very exciting one that doesn't figure to be much more than organizational filler.

Whether Carroll gets moved or not is ultimately of little consequence as his playing time is minimal and the fact that he won't be an Indian next year means that if the Indians can get something for him - great...if not, maybe they can get some salary relief in the equation. A trade involving Jamey Carroll won't make or break this year or next and it shouldn't be seen as anything more than that, if it comes to pass.

Beyond those four position players, a guy like a Ben Francisco could be moved but the appeal of the players above (that is, an extended period of MLB success) does not necessarily apply to Frisco, nor does the arbitration/salary issues that apply to Garko and Shoppach. Francisco could probably be moved to be a 4th OF for some other team who would part with a low-A arm, but at this point in his career, filling the role of 4th OF is exactly what he should be doing in Cleveland.

With The Ben Francisco Treat, his inclusion on the roster is not what frustrates as he can play all 3 OF positions and provide a PH option off the bench with some speed; rather his everyday usage is what frustrates and the frustration of his usage shouldn't diminish Frisco's value to the team (an affordable 4th OF) or force the team to simply move him because he's not an everyday OF.

When it's all said and done, without devolving into the George Costanza philosophy that "I figured out a way to get Bonds and Griffey...and we wouldn't have to give up that much" or that a bunch of mediocre players equals one impact player, the Indians do have some pieces and parts among position players that could be moved to infuse the organization with much-needed arms. While they probably won't net an impact arm on their own, the time is now for the Indians to recognize which players are a part of their future and which are not and deal accordingly.

The time for the status quo has come and gone and come and gone again, at this point it's time to start turning the page on some of these players with the idea of building a stronger organization for 2010 and beyond.