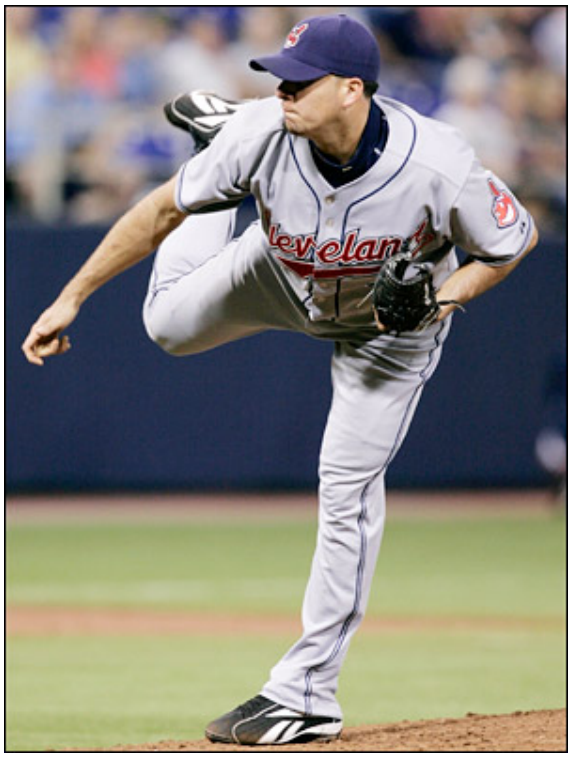
There wasn't exactly a torrent of fan reaction last week when the Tribe dealt Rafael Betancourt to Colorado for Connor Graham. It was a necessary move, financially and logistically, and hardly an earth shattering one. Still, it seems like Raffy might have deserved a better sendoff, when you look at his career stats here since joining the pen in 2003. The deal prompted Andrew Clayman to take a look back at that 2003 Indians bullpen, which was scary bad outside of Raffy Right.



There wasn't exactly a torrent of fan reaction last week when the Tribe dealt Rafael Betancourt to Colorado for BB prone AA arm Connor Graham. It was a necessary move, financially and logistically, and hardly an earth shattering one. Still, it seems like Raffy might have deserved a better sendoff. The fact is, there may be no breed in the Big Leagues as rare as the long-tenured middle reliever. It's a thankless job, requiring considerable guts with little to no glory and even less security. In essence, it's the pitcher's purgatory.

While some middle relievers survive their trials to earn long-term contracts as closers or starters, most get bounced from team to team like waiver wire ping-pong balls. Lefty specialists, wild things, junk-ballers, and inning eaters--they're all hoping to find their niche somewhere. In Betancourt's case, he managed to stick around in Cleveland for seven years, anchoring a couple excellent bullpens and several horrendous ones. He was never a fan favorite, partly due to his injuries and inconsistency, and partly because you could watch a full season of 24 in-between every pitch he threw. Still, there's no questioning his longevity- almost unprecedented in this age of rental bullpens. That's why this special edition of Ghosts of Prospects Past will pay its respects to Betancourt not by profiling the man himself, but by catching up with some of the other young

relief pitchers that made up the Indians not-so-vaunted bullpen from Raffy's rookie season in 2003. As you'll see, a good reliever is like a good woman. When you find one, you should never let them go... unless you owe her $4 million and you're kind of in a transitional period in your life.

Ghosts of the 2003 Indians Bullpen

Danys Baez

Then: At the age of 25, the Indians' own personal Cuban missile was asked to earn his enormous contract by taking over the closer role on a pretty awful team. The results were mixed at best. While Baez saved 25 games in a 68 win season, he also blew a whopping 10 saves and finished with a 2-9 record and 3.81 ERA. It wasn't a convincing enough performance for Cleveland to retain his services. Baez signed as a free agent with Tampa Bay in 2004.

Now: Admittedly, letting Baez go looked like a mistake for a while, especially as he tallied up 71 saves in two years with the D-Rays. Injuries caught up to Danys in recent years, though. He made a few less than memorable stops before landing in Baltimore, where he's currently a middle innings man for the Birds. In 34 games this year, he is 4-3 with a 4.50 ERA. He's averaging 4.9 K's per 9 innings, compared to 7.9 during his last season in Cleveland.

David Riske

Then: The sneaky fast Riske grew some facial hair to help him look a little less like a high school freshman, and it paid off in 2003. As the prime setup man for Baez, he made 68 appearances out of the pen, posting a 2-2 record, 2.29 ERA, and registering 17 holds. He pitched a couple more years for Cleveland until getting shipped to Boston in the trade that delivered Andy Marte and Kelly Shoppach.

Now: Having become the classic middle relief journeyman, Riske has seen his ups and downs, including a very nice 2007 campaign with Kansas City. Since going to Milwaukee, though, it's been bleak. He finished with a 5.31 ERA in 45 games last year, and this year, he threw exactly one inning before requiring season-ending elbow surgery.

Jack Cressend

Then: Coming off a terrible 2002 season with Minnesota, Cressend proved to be a nice waiver wire claim for the Tribe-- a 28 year-old with experience and good command. He appeared in 33 games after his call-up from Buffalo, going 2-1 with a 2.51 ERA. He pitched in only a handful of games the following year and struggled mightily, then signed as a free agent with Boston in 2005.

Now: Out of baseball since 2005.

Jose Santiago

Then: Apparently, this former Royal farmhand threw 31 innings for the Tribe in 2003, finishing 1-3 with a 2.84 ERA and a not so hot K/BB ratio of 1.07. Must admit, he didn't leave an impression on me. Nor on the Indians, I guess, as they let him leave to free agency at season's end.

Now: Out of Majors since 2005, currently pitching in Mexico.

Carl Sadler

Then: At the start of the 2003 season, the 26 year-old Sadler looked like a pretty promising match-up lefty. He posted a 1.86 ERA in 18 appearances, then got hurt in May. He came back to pitch for Buffalo later in the season, and couldn't get anybody out.

Now: Out of baseball since 2005.

Jason Boyd

Then: Another classic journeyman, Boyd was nothing if not extremely mediocre. He pitched for a different team every year of his five-year career. In retrospect, 2003 was really the high point for him, pitching in 44 games for the Indians and finishing 3-1 with a 4.30 ERA and a not so bad 1.22 WHIP. The current Indians would kill for such production. Nonetheless, the 2003 Tribe promptly waived him.

Now: Out of baseball since 2005.

Chad Paronto

Then: After earning some respect in 2002 as a viable candidate for a future setup

role, 27 year-old Paronto completely flopped in '03. He pitched in 6 games out of the pen in April and the Indians lost all of them. With an ERA of 9 and 1/2, he was sent to Buffalo and was never seen in a Tribe uniform again.

Now: Chad essentially came back from the dead to have a solid year with Atlanta in 2006. Then in 2008, he experienced some déjà vu, appearing in only 6 games with Houston before getting the ax. It looked like he'd reached the end of the line, but just last week, the Astros recalled Paronto, who immediately surrendered 4 runs in a 1/3 of an inning in his 2009 debut, giving him a lovely ERA of 108.

Other Names From the '03 Pen

The Indians had some bullpen contributors that became starters in 2003, including Jake Westbrook, Billy Traber (now pitching for the Red Sox AAA team in Pawtucket), and Jason Stanford (now out of baseball). They also got spot starts from Brian Tallet (now in Blue Jays rotation) and Chad Durbin (now in Phillies bullpen). Mostly, though, the team's collection of hopeful relief pitchers was more like a bunch of aimless ships passing in the night, never to be heard from again. Along with those already mentioned, lest we forget...

Terry Mulholland (Retired in 2006)
Dan Miceli (Out of baseball since 2006)
Nick Bierbrodt (Out of baseball since 2004)
David Lee (Out of baseball since 2006)
Alex Herrera (Out of baseball since 2006)
Jason Phillips (Out of baseball since 2005)
Jerrod Riggan (Out of baseball since 2005)
David Cortes (Out of baseball since 2006)
Aaron Myette (Out of baseball since 2004)
Dave Elder (Out of baseball since 2006)

In just six years time, 16 of the Indians relief pitchers from the 2003 season have completely vanished from the game; not even pitching in the minors somewhere, just gonzo. It's kind of an eye opening stat, and it adds a little context to the accomplishments of Rafael Betancourt, who came out of nowhere that first season to go 2-2 with a 2.13 ERA in 33 games. He earned his spot and kept it.

All told, Raffy pitched in 371 games for the Indians (8th most by a pitcher in team history), posting a 23-22 record with a 3.24 ERA, 1.13 WHIP, and 9.0 K's per 9 Innings. He might not be missed, but he should certainly be appreciated.