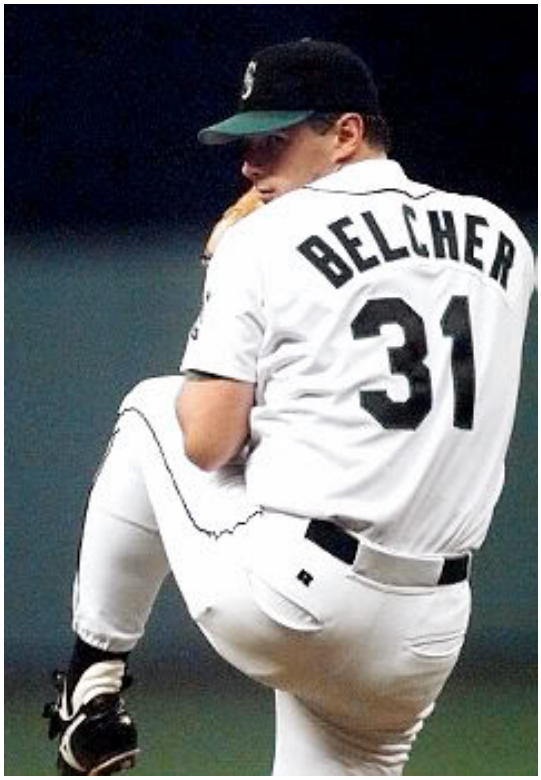
On Friday the Cleveland Indians announced the hiring of Tim Belcher as major league pitching coach, and the first official member of new Indians manager Manny Acta's major league coaching staff. The hiring came out of nowhere as Belcher was an internal candidate few people thought would get the nod, with most of the focus was on Triple-A pitching coach Scott Radinsky and Minor League Pitching Coordinator Dave Miller. In Tony's latest, he gives us his thoughts on the hire as well as a wealth of quotes from Belcher, Mark Shapiro, and Manny Acta on the hiring.



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Belcher, 48, has spent the last eight seasons in the Indians organization as a Special Assistant to Baseball Operations. It was a part time role where he worked extensively within the Indians Player Development System, providing instruction and evaluation at each level of the organization. He also spent a considerable amount of time scouting players from outside of the organization and for the last several years provided advance scouting reports to the major league staff. He also assisted the major league pitching coach during each of his spring training camps during his tenure, assisted in Instructional League, and at various points served as interim pitching coach at each level of the Indians system from Single-A

up to Triple-A.

Belcher is a native of Sparta, Ohio and in his major league pitching record compiled a record of 146-140 with a 4.16 ERA over a 14-year career from 1987-2000 with seven major league teams and 373 starts (394 G, 2442.2 IP, 2423 H, 1130 ER, 1519 K). He won 10 or more games in 9 of his 14 seasons at the big league level, topped the 200.0 innings pitched mark seven times and finished in the top 10 in his respective league's ERA on three different occasions. His 2442.2 big league innings are the most of any active pitching coaching in the Major Leagues at present.

Belcher was an All-American pitcher at Nazarene University in Mount Vernon, Ohio before winning The Sporting News National League Rookie Pitcher of the Year honors in 1988 with the World Champion Los Angeles Dodgers (won Game 4 of the WS for LA). The following season with LA he led the National League in complete games (10) and shutouts (8). He was the first overall pick in both the 1983 June amateur draft (Minnesota) and the 1984 January secondary phase amateur draft (NY Yankees).

After the hiring was announced Friday morning, the Indians held a conference call with new Indians manager Manny Acta, GM Mark Shapiro, and Belcher, and here is a complete, uneditted recap of the 25-minute conference with all that was said:

Mark Shapiro

On the hiring of Belcher: "Obviously he is a guy I have known for quite awhile and has made an impact in the organization in the role he has been in. He is another one of those guys in the line of special assistants like Bud Black and Terry Francona who I think the job has been a good transitional job for this. We have always been hopeful because of his unique skill set with his intelligence, his toughness, his presence, his strength, and his preparation that he would consider a full time position on the field. It is something we have talked about with him at different junctures and other clubs have called him on at different junctures. It just so happens that he felt and his family felt that now was the right time. This is a hire that we are extremely excited about and one that we think can be an impact addition to us."

On whether he had to talk Belcher into taking the job: "I called him just to

gauge his interest. We had an extensive list with a lot of due diligence that we conducted the same kind of search with Manny, Chris and I all reaching out to people in the industry that we have good relationships with and trust to determine who we thought could be difference making pitching coaches. As we started to define what we were looking for with the attributes and characteristics and put Tim's name up on the board and talked about him Manny said 'why are we going any further, this is the guy'. So we called Tim and asked him if he would come over and if he would even consider it and he thought about it, then he and Manny got together just to talk theoretically, and it kind of went from there."

On whether the hire was geared more toward fixing Fausto Carmona and other pitchers who have under-performed recently: "No. The problem is there is not just one thing wrong with our staff. It would be a lot easier to find a pitching coach to fix one flaw. There are different things with every guy, so I think it takes a good pitching coach to help develop and maximize the potential of our pitchers. I do know that Tim is going to help manage the pitching staff and their development and ensure that he gives Manny pitchers that put us in a position to succeed. One thing about Tim is he will be on top of it and I think that he will be very much aware with what each guy is doing developmentally and as far as his plan of attacking hitters. If you know him he is a guy who is extremely thorough, organized and prepared."

On his pitching coach experience: "He was a pitching coach at I want to say at almost every level in the minors. He filled in at Triple-A, Double-A and A-ball, but throughout the eight years being here he has been a pitching coach both at Instructional League and spring training and filled in at almost every level throughout the farm system."

On whether they will target another pitcher as a bullpen coach: "I think we need the person that can have the biggest impact on the pitching staff. Someone that Tim and Manny feel will complement them and continue to ensure the best possible opportunities to develop our pitchers. I think it most likely will be a pitcher. Someone that can identify with the guys down there and help ensure not only that they are developing but also that they are in a position to succeed when they come in the game and that they are mentally prepared. I think not only a pitcher, but someone who has pitched out of the pen would be helpful."

Tim Belcher

On his hiring as the Cleveland Indians new pitching coach: "I view it as a good professional opportunity and challenge. I have had some other opportunities in the recent past that I have passed on for various reasons mostly for personal reasons but some having to do with professional reasons as well. With regard to the personal side of it with my family, I have always wanted to at some point do this and there is never going to be a more convenient place or time for me and my family as I am only an hour and a half down the road. It is inconceivable that I could do the job at home of course, but certainly during homestands I will be able to pop in at home as needed."

On how knowledgeable he is of the pitching staff and how he can help: "I am familiar with this staff. I have been involved heavily in spring training with the big league side each of the last eight years. In varying degrees I have a relationship with really every pitcher in our organization from Kinston up, and some significant relationships. That would certainly include the major league roster with the obvious exception to the new guys we got in the trades late last year. There are some issues that need to be worked out. Obviously Fausto has to get better and more consistent, we'd like Kerry Wood and Rafael Perez to do the same. The same kind of things 29 other clubs are talking about."

On his impressions of Acta: "Very good. I had a chance to sit down with Manny for two and a half hours about ten days ago, and I was very impressed with him. Not unlike you guys or anybody for that matter when they are thinking about changing jobs you do your homework and you ask around, and I trust the opinion of other people that have worked with Manny in the past and have got nothing but rave reviews from everybody that I talked to. I have no doubt that he will be a good choice for the Cleveland Indians going forward."

On his inheriting a staff with the second highest ERA in franchise history: "Obviously there are some factors involved there that will eventually settle themselves down. One certainly would be getting Jake Westbrook back healthy, and another we will be getting a little bit further removed from the recent trades of Cliff Lee and C.C. Sabathia who were the anchors of the staff and we hope other guys will be more ready to step in and take over the roles. Like I mentioned, Fausto is going to have to get better, and David Huff is going to have to survive a sophomore season and do as well in his rookie season. There are a lot of factors, but am I challenged by it? Yes. But I wouldn't view it as a daunting task."

On whether he would do anything substantially different from other pitching coaches: "I am not a guru. I think one of the things that too many people make the mistake about is I think that coaches at all levels in all sports get way too much credit when things go well and way too much blame when things don't. It is essentially the players on the field that have to perform and to have success in order for your team to be successful. Coaches in all sports in my mind are there to facilitate. If there are changes that need to be made you facilitate by providing the right information, enough information, and timely information for a particular player to get better. I know that is not as sexy as the term "guru', but I have never claimed to be one, and I think it is more a media concoction and maybe some of the coaches around the sports world. I just think that you provide good and timely information and try to motivate players to use the information and see if it works. Always in that relationship the largest component is the player. I have a lot of work to do obviously in building trust and relationships with some of the new guys, and adding to the trust and the relationships that I have with some of the guys that have been around me and share some of my ideas and motivate them to use them if in fact they work."

On his favorite pitching coach when he was a player: "I have a had a lot of really good ones. It would be unfair to name a favorite one,

but I had some terrific pitching coaches in the minor leagues. Chuck Estrada comes to mind and then with the Dodgers Ron Perranoski certainly was a successful pitching coach and helped me a great deal. Probably more recently and in the middle of my career who I had a three year stint with Bruce Kison. We got along really well, and in fact I have rang his phone several times in the last week as I deliberated whether or not to take this job and we remain good friends today. My last pitching coach was Buddy Black and I have a great relationship with him as well. In fact, he more than anybody was probably responsible for me heading to Cleveland and taking this job after my pitching days were over in 2001."

On the staff's problem with walks and how he plans to correct that: "That is something that all teams deal with. You have to be able to throw strikes and command the baseball there is no question about that. I am a big believer that 'firsts' are so important in the game. First pitch strikes, successful first inning, and first hitter of each inning. If we can accomplish some of those things and set those as goals to try and lead the league in those categories a lot of the stuff really takes care of itself after that. If you can have an overwhelming majority of the hitters you face start out with a strike or at least 1-1 and then you record the leadoff out with great regularity you are going to have a chance to be very successful. If you can get through the first inning when the opposing team has the lineup setup exactly how they want it 1-2-3 with the big bopper in the four spot, if you can survive that first inning you have a great chance of going on and having a successful game. There are obviously mechanical and psychological things involved with throwing strikes. In a lot of ways it might be a little bit more reflective of the youth with our pitching staff more than anything. You get a bunch of guys that are maybe in the big leagues maybe a tick earlier than they should be and they are not comfortable pounding the strike zone and going after some of these hitters in the American League, so they shy away from that. As they gain experience and confidence then they will move more in the middle of the plate."

Manny Acta

On the process of hiring the pitching coach and making a decision: "We did research on a lot of guys, and we felt like this was the right fit for us. I think the whole baseball world kind of knew that it was just about Tim Belcher to commit to the field full time and to put his family through what he is going to put it through right now."

On whether Belcher contacted the Indians or they contacted him for the position: "It was mutual, though I believe that Mark spoke to Tim before. As I mentioned, I think it was just a matter of him making the commitment to be on the field. It was not just the Cleveland Indians, but the whole baseball industry waiting for the moment to have a guy like him because we think he is a special guy."

On what he looks for in a pitching coach: "He must lead because he is going to be leading 12 guys on an everyday basis, and that could go up to 30 pitchers as guys get hurt and come up and down. He should have the presence and intelligence that Tim has. He needs to be organized which takes a lot starting in the offseason and throughout spring training and the regular season, and Tim is a very well organized man. And to have experience which he has on and off the field, so I think he is the ideal choice for us."

On whether Acta knew Belcher prior to interviewing him for the position: "No, just as a player. We met in Cleveland when I was there and I was very impressed. I think that the research that we did didn't let us down. One of his ex-teammates flat out just told me that he was too smart to be a pitching coach and that he should be higher up there looking down on all of us, so that was a very good endorsement."

On whether familiarity to the organization was important especially since Acta is so new to it: "It is. That was our biggest weakness last year was the pitching, so we really needed to zero in and bring in a

guy who could really right this ship. I think that having the familiarity that he has with these guys, by helping those eight years in spring training and also having the advance scouting he did in the American League, I think that really helps to complement me. I know these guys from the outside looking in, but don't know them as well as he does, so I think that helps."

On how close he is to naming the rest of his staff: "We are closer than a lot of you guys can imagine. It is not done yet. We are still conducting interviews over the phone and meeting people, but I think in the near future it will be done. I don't think they will be announced all at once. We are closer to one than the other ones, and I know how people feel when they get a job that you might as well get it out of the way and let the whole world know than just wait for four more guys to get wrapped up."

On the biggest project Belcher will assume with the pitching staff: "I think his biggest project - which is something he did as a player - will be preparing these guys and teaching them how to attack hitters. I think as an advance scout that is something he did for the Indians a lot and that is something he did as a player. He was well prepared as a player. Right now looking at what went wrong last year these guys need to go back and learn to attack the zone and learn to attack hitters. He brings a lot of that not only as a player but as an advance scout."

On whether or not any internal options are still being considered for other staff positions: "Yes there are. We have a lot of qualified people in our system, and there are still guys in the system in the mix."

On if he consulted any of the pitchers on who they would like as pitching coach: "Not really with many of them because with his familiarity with all of those guys I think they will be fine. We were looking for the best guy regardless of what those guys thought. Tim's

personality blends well with all the guys in there, and we have done that with the other coaches we are trying to hire because at the end of the day these guys do need to feel comfortable with the people we are bringing in and the people that are going to help them be better. But it's not like I called everyone on our 40-man roster that gets on the mound and asked about Tim.

On any thoughts Belcher provided in getting Fausto back on track: "His thoughts are the one that I like with everybody and that is pound the strike zone whether your name is Fausto or Zausto with a 'Z'. That's the main thing here. Regardless of who you are we need you to throw strikes and attack hitters better. If we're not going to miss people's bats, we need to throw more strikes and stop walking people."

On where he goes from here: "I am going to spend a couple of days here at home and will interview some more people and then I will fly up to Cleveland and spend about a week over there. Then I have to fly to some other places. I will probably go see some of our players in Venezuela, probably go see Jake Westbrook in Puerto Rico, and some of our players in the Dominican, so it is non-stop until Goodyear."

Quick Thoughts

Here are some quick thoughts on the hiring of Belcher and where the Indians may go from here:

- When assessing the pitching coach possibilities, I think it was a foregone conclusion that that job was going to be filled

from within. As a result, a lot of the focus was on Triple-A Columbus pitching coach **Scott Radinsky** and minor league pitching coordinator
Dave Miller
as the top candidates to fill the job. In hindsight this was very narrow thinking, and I like many others in the media completely forgot about Tim Belcher and
Jason Bere
and their roles as special assistants to the Indians Baseball Operations Department.

- Like Radinsky and Miller, Belcher fit the mold of someone who was very familiar with all the young talent up and down the Indians system having observed and also worked with them all many times over his eight years in the organization. He was a teacher and helped facilitate the development of the young players like Radinsky and Miller, but what set Belcher apart from Radinsky and Miller is his experience working in the big league environment. Having done a lot of advanced scouting and player evaluation at the big league level recently he was probably more in touch with the demands at that level.

- Bere and Belcher shared a lot of the same duties as special assistants to baseball operations, with Bere a little more ingrained with the minor league guys and development whereas Belcher was used a little more in player decisions at the minor/major league level and also evaluation of players in the minors/majors inside and outside the organization.

- From what I understand a lot of times Belcher was GM

Mark Shapiro's "eyes" in evaluating and observing the pitching in the system, particularly in the upper levels of the system at Double-A Akron and Triple-A Columbus.

- It looks like with this move that Miller likely remains as the minor league pitching coordinator, but it is still unclear where Radinsky will fit. There is a strong possibility he could be the bullpen coach, or very well return to Columbus and assume his pitching coach duties again. There is also the possibility that Radinsky could leave the organization for a big league job or minor league coaching job elsewhere. Given Shapiro's comments yesterday about the bullpen coach likely being a pitcher with bullpen experience, my money is on Radinsky for the job at the moment.

- The hiring of Belcher may bring to light who they may be looking at as their hitting coach. I still believe they will go outside the organization and fill the role, but if they do happen to fill the role from within it seems very possible that **Ellis Burks** could be named to the position. Like Belcher, Burks was a special assistant to the Baseball Operations Department and had the same responsibilities as he assisted in the facilitation of instruction and development at the major league and minor league level. Just like Belcher, Burks assisted Shapiro in player decisions and his primary duty was to evaluate position players, particularly the outfielders. If he does not end up the hitting coach, he could still end up on Acta's staff as an outfield coach.

- Acta hinted in the press conference that they are close to

naming the next coach, though the other four are still a ways away from being decided. There is a good chance that the next coach will be named in the next day or so, and it very likely could be the infield coach. Torey Lovullo anyone?

- In the end I like many Indians fans was surprised by the announcement this morning that Belcher was named the big league pitching coach. But while I was surprised, I was not shocked as given a few minutes to take it in the hiring certainly makes a lot of sense. He brings with him a lot of success and experience as a big league pitcher, and more importantly he also has experience with instruction, evaluation, and developing young talent. I still may have preferred Radinsky, but I understand that they probably wanted a guy with more experience recently working at the big league level.