In the midst of looking at all of the "who, what, where" of next year, Paulie C thought it might be interesting to pass along the first 2010 projections that have emerged for Indians' players. The projections, which will be the first of many from various sources, are compiled each year by Bill James among others, for The Bill James Handbook 2010. The results? About what we see with our eyes, in that the projections put forth the idea that the team will have a good and developing offense, shaky starting pitching, and a bullpen full of power arms.

In the midst of looking at all of the "who, what, where" of next year, I thought it might be interesting to pass along the first 2010 projections that have emerged for Indians' players. The projections, which will be the first of many from various sources, are compiled each year by Bill James (who I'm assuming you know by now even if it's just because he works for the Red Sox, but you can watch this "60 Minutes" piece as a nice intro) among others, for The Bill James Handbook 2010
, which is now available from ACTA Sports...no relation to the Tribe skipper, I think.

Regardless, the wonderful folks over at FanGraphs take a number of the player projections that come out prior to each year to put on their marvelous site in an attempt to put all of the information in one place for your easy perusal. Being sick as I am (and not interested in reading about which members of the 2010 Free Agent Class will be donning the pinstripes soon...besides Lackey, of course) , I thought I would take it a step farther and consolidate it into an even easier format to see how the folks at The Bill James Handbook
saw things shaking out in 2010 on the North Coast.

Please keep in mind that these are all projections, courtesy of The Bill James Handbook 2010
and
Fangraphs

, but here's what one source sees happening for our beloved Erie Warriors in the coming season:

Catcher

Lou Marson
.280 BA / .372 OBP / .360 SLG / .732 OPS with 1 HR in 150 AB over 49 games

Kelly Shoppach
.249 BA / .333 OBP / .465 SLG / .798 OPS with 19 HR in 381 AB over 113 games

Carlos Santana
.270 BA / .356 OBP / .419 SLG / .775 OPS with 16 HR in 503 AB over 128 games

I'd like to see if I can find a way to let every other MLB team see this projection for Mr. Show Pack for informational purposes when discussing his imminent trade. Perhaps I could get one to Milwaukee (who could be looking to move Dave Bush as he attempts to get healthy) or to Philadelphia (where perhaps Kyle Kendrick, who seems to have fallen out of favor, might be pried away in a package) or to any other NL team for whom 19 HR from the catching position would start the sounds of trumpets blaring.

The big projection here (and maybe anywhere on the roster) though?

Carlos Santana, who the folks at Bill James see playing in 128 games (which actually sounds about right in that he'd be in Cleveland in mid-May or thereabouts, particularly when you see the 49 games for higher-projected-OBP-than-SLG Lou Marson) and doing more than holding his own, considering the average line for an AL catcher in 2009 was .253 BA / .315 OBP / .406 SLG / .721 OPS and the average line in the NL was even worse.

The Carlos Santana Era is close...get excited.

First Base

Matt LaPorta
.266 BA / .334 OBP / .468 SLG / .802 OPS with 20 HR in 451 AB over 121 games

While an .802 OPS would not exactly punch LaPorta's ticket to the Midsummer Classic, it would represent the highest OPS for anyone on the 2009 Indians' team with more than 400 AB not named SS Choo. Taking a look at this projection (20 HR particularly) and combining it with the projection for Santana, are you starting to see the future here a little bit?

No, neither is going to step in and immediately post an OPS over .900 or even anchor the 2010 lineup, but given their age and their potential, the hope is there for each to develop into mainstays of the lineup, with the foundation being poured in 2010.

Second Base

Luis Valbuena
.257 BA / .323 OBP / .399 SLG / .792 OPS with 9 HR in 366 AB over 103 games

While Jason Donald is not included in the projections, the fact that Valbuena's projected number of games totals 103 would seem to indicate that the folks at The Bill James Handbook believe that Valbuena is going to see some time on the bench against LHP. Who his "platoon" partner would be (if it is, in fact, a straight platoon or just one that sees Valbuena get days off against tougher LHP) remains to be seen, but the projected line from Valbuena, who will just turn 24 at the end of this month, is fine by me.

Shortstop

Asdrubal Cabrera
.294 BA / .358 OBP / .421 SLG / .779 OPS with 9 HR in 582 AB over 157 games

The first disappointment among the projections comes for Asdrubal, who the folks at Bill James see as ripe for a slight regression, with lower numbers nearly across the board, even if they're only slightly lower than his 2009 totals. The reason that this projection comes as a disappointment is that it presents the case that Cabrera is what he is as a hitter and that he's not at the precipice of taking that next step into becoming an elite offensive threat at SS. Don't get me wrong, the projections are far from abysmal, particularly for a SS (where the MLB average OPS in 2009 was .714), but for a player who turns 24 this week and has shown flashes that he

can turn into a dynamic top-of-the-order hitter, these projections are a splash of cold water on expectations.

Third Base

Jhonny Peralta
.269 BA / .336 OBP / .424 SLG / .760 OPS with 16 HR in 531 AB over 146 games

Andy Marte
.258 BA / .320 OBP / .452 SLG / .772 OPB with 6 HR in 155 AB over 65 games

Again, these are just projections...but while the good people at Bill James see a slight uptick for Peralta from his 2009 season, they certainly don't hold out much hope that he's close to returning to his pre-2009 form and assert that better power numbers will be put up by Andy Marte, whose HR number projected out over the same amount of AB projected for Peralta comes to 20. It might be a good time to mention that the difference, in terms of salary, between these two players in 2010 figures to be about $4M.

Will Peralta improve with a full off-season of knowing he's playing 3B under his belt and out from under the eye of The Atomic Wedgie and will Marte put up decent numbers, again out from under the eye of The Atomic Wedgie? Out of all of the players that figure to have a new lease on life on a team not managed by Eric Wedge, these two stand to benefit the most from a new voice in the dugout. Whether both remain to hear that new voice in the dugout...well, that's a whole different story.

Outfield

Grady Sizemore
.272 BA / .369 OBP / .484 SLG / .853 OPS with 25 HR in 574 AB over 144 games

Shin-Soo Choo
.293 BA / .383 OBP / .467 SLG / .850 OPS with 19 HR in 583 AB over 156 games

Mike Brantley

.268 BA / .342 OBP / .335 SLG / .677 OPS with 4 HR in 526 AB over 130 games

Trevor Crowe
.260 BA / .335 OBP / .360 SLG / .695 OPS with 3 HR in 311 AB over 93 games

A couple of positive projections here, with the idea that Grady Sizemore will return to being Grady Sizemore in 2010, with numbers that resemble his 2007 season and with the assertion that The BLC is certainly the real McCoy. While Sizemore's numbers tend to go along with the idea that a "next step" for him as a hitter may not ever be attained, a 25 HR-21 SB while playing stellar defense is a nice first step back from his lost 2009 season. As for Choo, the projections (29 players in the AL had an OPS of .850 or better last year, including Choo) are pretty much in line with what his 2009 looked like, if slightly lower, cementing his validity as a middle-of-the-order-presence.

Brantley's numbers look like those of a young player still adjusting to a new league (and certainly not one who is ready to assume a lead-off spot), but not far off what he did in his stint with the parent club in 2009. The projection calls for Brantley to swipe 48 bases in those 130 games, walk more than he strikes, and to notch 21 doubles, so the "low-at-first-glance" number shouldn't prevent excitement as Brantley won't turn 23 until next May. Trevor Crowe on the other hand, with a similar projection, turns 26 next week and no longer elicits much more than cursory consideration as a 4th outfielder.

Designated Hitter

Travis Hafner
.275 BA / .385 OBP / .495 SLG / .880 OPS with 16 HR in 309 AB over 98 games

At what point does that projection stop looking good?

All of those numbers look great...until you see the AB and the games played. I'm not going to pretend to know how Bill James and his crew come up with these projections or what role injuries play in that equation, but this unfortunately may be what we're looking at from Hafner for the next couple of years - solid production, provided on an inconsistent basis.

Maybe the great surprise comes in 2010 with Hafner, further removed from surgery and ready to play everyday; but I've been holding my breath for that day

one for too long now already.

Starters

Justin Masterson
4.00 ERA, 1.37 WHIP, 151 K, 74 BB in 171 IP

Jeremy Sowers
4.44 ERA, 1.43 WHIP, 81 K, 48 BB in 150 IP

Dave Huff
4.47 ERA, 1.36 WHIP, 106 K, 45 BB in 143 IP

Fausto Carmona
4.56 ERA, 1.45 WHIP, 96 K, 59 BB in 152 IP

Aaron Laffey
4.99 ERA, 1.55 WHIP, 92 K, 60 BB in 157 IP

Carlos Carrasco
5.20 ERA, 1.49 WHIP, 40 K, 19 BB in 45 IP

Since Jake Westbrook did not qualify for the projections in The Bill James Handbook, that's what we're looking at for the starting rotation, listed in descending order of projected ERA. The projections for Masterson, Sowers (surprise!), and even Huff are mildly encouraging, particularly when Masterson's K numbers look so high and Huff's WHIP and K/BB look so solid. Certainly I would think that most people would take three pitchers with ERA's under 4.50 in next year's rotation. Problem is, those may be the ERA's at the top of the rotation and not from the middle to the back of the rotation.

Obviously, the projections are not sparkling for Carmona or Laffey, with both looking at K/BB rates that...well, frankly look like the worst-case scenario for each and Carlos Carrasco's projection looking like he is not ready for MLB. Maybe Westbrook comes back and fronts the top of the rotation as a healthy and effective innings-eater, but that's just another "maybe" in a rotation that looks to be full of them, based on these projections or otherwise.

Bullpen

Kerry Wood
3.54 ERA, 1.27 WHIP, 62 K, 24 BB in 56 IP

Chris Perez
3.57 ERA, 1.32 WHIP, 76 K, 37 BB in 63 IP

Tony Sipp
3.34 ERA, 1.31 WHIP, 44 K, 17 BB in 35 IP

Joe Smith
3.94 ERA, 1.41 WHIP, 28 K, 15 BB in 32 IP

Rafael Perez
3.72 ERA, 1.34 WHIP, 51 K, 20 BB in 58 IP

Jensen Lewis
3.89 ERA, 1.34 WHIP, 75 K, 31 BB in 74 IP

Jesse Ray Todd
3.86 ERA, 1.24 WHIP, 38 K, 12 BB in 42 IP

Jose Veras
4.09 ERA, 1.36 WHIP, 44 K, 21 BB in 44 IP

I'm not going to say...no, don't jinx it...I swear, I'm not going to be the one to say it.

OK, that bullpen looks pretty good for 2010 based on those projections. Cue the frogs, the name of Tommy John, the lice, pulley ligaments, the flies, shoulder issues, the livestock death, TINSTAPP, the boils, evoke the ghost of Brodzoski (The Close), the hail, the locusts and so on and so on. At some point, a bullpen that looks halfway decent entering a season has to actually perform to some semblance of that promise (and not just two to three guys pitching out of their minds, as was the case in 2007)...doesn't it?

All told, what are we looking at from the projections in The Bill James Handbook 2010, courtesy of Fangraphs, for the Erie Warriors? About what we see with our eyes, in that the projections put

forth the idea that the team will have a good and developing offense, shaky starting pitching, and a (knocking on anything that resembles wood) bullpen full of power arms.

How those factors figure to change before the start of Spring Training next year, in terms of trades, potential adds via the Rule 5 draft or perhaps even via Free Agency, may change; but if the Indians are essentially going with their current roster into 2010 (and most indications lean this way) the projections shown above ring true with about the team that most people see on paper today - a team with a burgeoning young offense that is likely to be held back by the limitations and questions in the starting rotation.