With Paulie C's hands cramping from two days of putting together PlayMobil police cars and pirate ships (which apparently requires an advanced degree in engineering) let's roll right into a Lazy Sunday as Baby Watch 2009 continues and as his pleas to induce before the end of the calendar year (for the tax deduction obviously) continue to fall on deaf ears. In this edition, Paul hits on bad free agent signings, the lack of big bats in the AL Central, and other tidbits from the world of Indians baseball.

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And with that...we're off:

With so very little happening on the North Coast recently (well, actually all off-season...but you feel me), I thought I would pass along an interesting piece that never mentions the Indians but is relevant in terms of evaluating the off-season moves (or really the lack of an off-season moves) on the North Coast. It comes from Jeff Pearlman of SI.com and it focuses on the bad signings that bad franchises make on the FA market, ostensibly to give the impression that the organization is attempting to improve, when the net result of the moves is actually that it sets said organization back by perpetuating mediocrity:

Throughout the majors, lowly franchises everywhere are doing their thing -- which means lavishing funds upon men who should be either playing for the Newark Bears, coaching the Newark Bears or watching the Newark Bears from the

stands. Two weeks ago, the Kansas City Royals signed Jason Kendall, a 35-year-old catcher and perhaps the game's worst player, to a two-year, $6 million deal.

--snip--

This is what bad franchises do when they're officially, unambiguously, unanimously pegged as bad franchises: They act stupidly. Some of it stems from sheer desperation, and some from poor decision-making skills. Mostly, however, it's a flimsy effort to fool the fan base; to hope that the illusion of an effort to compete cons enough bored city residents into coming out to the 'ol park and buying a hot dog and a collectable seat cushion. The Royals, whose Kendall signing is a near-replica of the past acquisitions of Doug Mientkiewicz and Reggie Sanders, excel at the trick.

In comparison to what's happening elsewhere on the FA market, a relatively quiet off-season (despite the puzzling addition of Mitch-A-Palooza Talbot to the 25-man roster to take innings away from starting pitchers that are much more likely to factor into the teams' plans past...say, June of 2010), I'll take the Indians' roster as it's currently constructed and use 2010 as the time to answer questions regarding internal options, not the time to see innings or plate appearances taken away from the young players that do figure into the team's future past this year.

While not trying to simply pile on the Royals' organization that Pearlman used to prove his point, let's go off from that thought tangentially to introduce a post put up by Joe Posnanski (who also has his own Cleveland-centric "Christmas Story" that you must read if you haven't) on the Royals and, in particular, their off-season that continues to puzzle. Posnanski posted a story titled "Depressing Royals Story of the Day" in response to the Royals signing former White Sox CF Brian Anderson to a one-year deal (presumably to be their CF) and examines it in the context of the other moves that the Royals have made in the past six months:

This Brian Anderson can be called Brian N. Anderson - the N is for "Nikola" - and he has a career 69 OPS+ in 883 plate appearances. Much of that 69, to be fair, comes from his dreadful 2004 season when he hit .225/.290/.359. Since then, his OPS+ has been a more robust 75. And while he has no power, and has been caught stealing more times than he has been

successful, and has a walk-to-strikeout ratio of 65-208, he does have a reputation as a good outfielder even though those rascally defensive numbers don't show it.

Here's the thing: Last year, there were seven players in baseball who qualified for the batting title with OPS+ of 80 or less. You got that number in mind? Seven.

- Two of those players - Yuniesky Betancourt and Jason Kendall - have been locked up by the Royals.
- Jose Guillen had an OPS+ of 80, but did not get enough at-bats to qualify for the batting title - he and his $13 million contract will be in the everyday lineup as either a DH or (gasp) a right fielder.
- Chris Getz, who had an OPS+ of 74 in 415 plate appearances (not enough to qualify) was acquired by the Royals and figures to be in the everyday lineup at second base.
- And now, Brian N. Anderson, with his career 69 OPS+ is the leading candidate to be the Opening Day centerfielder.
So - there were seven every day players in all of baseball last year with OPS+ of 80 or less. The Royals project to have FIVE IN THEIR OPENING DAY LINEUP. And that is assuming that Josh Fields, with his 68 OPS+ in 268 plate appearances last year, does not win a place in the lineup. And he could. The Royals like his bat.

While those 300 words certainly make me feel a little better about the Indians' off-season, in that they have stood pat instead of foolishly spinning their wheels and prolonging the "rebuild/reload/whatever" from actually producing a contender, it got me to thinking about what the rest of the Central offenses figure to look like as the winter has been relatively quiet in the division.

With that in mind and jumping off from the JoePos piece, what does each AL Central teams' Opening Day lineup (using MLB.com's accumulated "Depth Chart" to project lineups) look like in terms of OPS+ for last year, if the season were to start tomorrow?

Realizing that past performance does not guarantee future results (and please note that the names in bold are those that compiled 350 or more MLB plate appearances last year for any team), it's a pretty fascinating look...and remember an OPS+ 100 simply means that a player's performance was exactly league average, meaning that any sub-100 number represents production below the league average.

Royals

Billy Butler - 124
David DeJesus - 106
Alex Gordon - 86
Jose Guillen - 80
Chris Getz - 74
Josh Fields - 68
Brian Anderson - 67
Yuniesky Betancourt - 65
Jason Kendall - 66

Twins

Joe Mauer - 170
Justin Morneau - 129
Jason Kubel - 136
Michael Cuddyer - 124
Denard Span - 114
Delmon Young - 91
Brendan Harris - 77
JJ Hardy - 76
Alexei Casilla - 44

Tigers

Miguel Cabrera - 142
Ryan Rayburn - 128
Magglio Ordonez - 109
Carlos Guillen - 96
Brandon Inge - 86
Gerald Laird - 64
Adam Everett - 59
Scott Sizemore - 0 MLB PA in 2009
Austin Jackson - 0 MLB PA in 2009

Indians

SS Choo - 137

Travis Hafner - 121
Asdrubal Cabrera - 115
Grady Sizemore - 111
Matt LaPorta - 100
Blue Lou Marson - 98
Mike Brantley - 93
Luis Valbuena - 90
Jhonny Peralta - 86

White Sox

Paul Konerko - 115
Gordon Beckham - 107
Juan Pierre - 105
Carlos Quentin - 99
Mark Teahan - 94
AJ Pierzynski - 94
Alexei Ramirez - 87
Mark Kotsay - 85
Alex Rios - 81

Not exactly a collections of Murderers' Rows, eh?

How many players who figure into everyday lineups in 2010 for each team had more than 350 plate appearances AND posted and OPS+ above 100 last year?

Twins - 5 (Mauer, Morneau, Kubel, Cuddyer, Span)
Indians - 4 (Choo, Hafner, Sizemore, Cabrera)
White Sox - 3 (Konerko, Beckham, Pierre)
Tigers - 2 (Cabrera, Ordonez)
Royals - 2 (Butler, DeJesus)

To put that into perspective for someone who follows mainly the Indians, as awful as 2009 was for Jhonny Peralta, there figure to be 17 everyday players between the other 4 teams in the division who had a year that was just as bad or worse than Peralta's nightmarish 2009...including 7 of the 9 likely Royals' starters!

To put those numbers into actual run production, the Indians scored the 8th most runs in the AL last year and the 2nd most in the Central as the Twins finished 4th

in the AL in runs, the Tigers 10th, the White Sox 12th, and the Royals 13th among the 14 AL teams. Looking at the names for each team then, outside of the Twins who are obviously the cream of the Central offensively (and any team with Joe Mauer better be), doesn't the Indians' 2010 lineup look pretty solid, particularly in the context of the teams that they will play 72 times this year? Considering that the players who came in at-or-below league average for the Tribe are either talented youngsters still adjusting to MLB (LaPorta, Brantley, Valbuena, and Marson) who should have a long leash to learn and with more options available to the team in the coming year (Donald and Santana, most notably) or are on the final year of their current deal (Peralta) with a youngster (The Chiz) a step away from waiting in the wings, the Indians offense shouldn't be an issue in 2010, assuming health.

Further than that, maybe I'm missing something but since the middle of 2009, the Central has seen Victor Martinez, Curtis Granderson, Placido Polanco, Jermaine Dye, and Jim Thome leave, with an "influx" of known quantities like JJ Hardy, Andruw Jones, Alex Rios, Juan Pierre, Jason Kendall, Yuniesky Betancourt, Brian Anderson, Mark Kotsay, and Omar Vizquel (as well as many young players) taking their places in the lineups. Add that all up and the offenses in the Central are going to be downright offensive.

I know...I know, it all comes down to pitching (not to mention defense and "Waves of Arms" has an interesting analysis of the defenses in the AL Central) and Grienke and Verlander and Porcello and Buehrle and Peavy and Danks and Floyd and Baker and Blackburn (not to mention Nathan and Soria) all reside in the Central. Throw in the that "Unleash the Fury Mitch" Talbot could go from a likely turn on the waiver wire next Spring (when he would not have broken camp with the Rays) to the Indians' starting rotation and the combination of the whole equation doesn't exactly bode well for the idea that the Indians are going to contend for the AL Central in 2010.

But with the Indians facing the AL Central lineups a WHOPPING 72 amount of times in a 162 game season (that's 45% of their 2010 games against AL Central opponents), perhaps the Indians can ride a steady offense and an settled bullpen (yes, I just went there but only because I'm such a HUGE Saul Rivera fan...I'm kidding) to win some games and create those building blocks for 2011 with the idea that holes will reveal themselves more fully in 2010 so 2011 can be a legitimate year for contention. That is, of course, assuming that the Indians don't

follow the blueprint currently being employed in KC and Washington and that the Talbot "acquisition" (and I use that term loosely) isn't an indication that the Indians are going to continue to add MLB fodder at the 25-man roster to the benefit of...well, no one.

Is that logic reaching for a silver lining among the gray clouds on a day when the snow is falling on the North Coast?

No question, but isn't that what this Holiday Season is all about, when uplifting stories like the news that Luke Holko (the little boy that was hit in the head by a foul ball at a Mahoning Valley Scrappers game this past summer) spoke his first words since the accident warm the heart and have us all looking for the silver linings in life, however inconsequential they may be?