Since Paulie C's Sunday was not "Lazy" in any sense of the word (what with the 1:30 AM delivery of a new baby boy, the ensuing maelstrom of activity, and the subsequent visitors that accompany the birth of a child), we'll roll out slowly into a late Lazy Monday, as Paul put some stuff together while he was still waiting to make the trip to Fairview for the delivery. Paul hits on the dynamic signings of rock stars Austin Kearns and Shelley "don't call me Sandy" Duncan, he talks about Kelly Shoppach's new deal and the Indians catching situation, and continues to express disbelief at the acquisition of Mitch Talbot. Congrads on the new boy Paulie!!!

Since my Sunday was not "Lazy" in any sense of the word (what with the 1:30 AM delivery of a new baby boy, the ensuing maelstrom of activity, and the subsequent visitors that accompany the birth of a child), we'll roll out slowly into a late Lazy Monday, if only because I put some stuff together while we were still waiting to make the trip to Fairview for the delivery and figured I should post it before it became too dated. While that perhaps should have come with a spoiler alert (that the Lazy Sunday is not necessarily all pounded out on a Sunday morning in a reaction to what's in the Sunday paper...mainly because what's in the Sunday paper is rarely the most compelling piece of the week on the Indians), we'll wrap up this sleep-deprived introduction and let it loose.

And...we're off...

The big "news" (term used very loosely) of the week was the signing of Shelley Duncan and Austin Kearns to minor league deals
and before intonations of The Looch or even Dellichaels begin, let's all realize that both of these signings (which again, are to minor league deals) are just insurance against Brantley starting slow in MLB and LaPorta's injury keeping him out of action into the regular season. It's possible that either usurp Marte or Crowe for bench spots with their ability to play 1B or DH (in Duncan's case) and multiple outfield positions (in Kearns' case), but is throwing more options (given that there's no guaranteed MLB roster spot) out there or sending Crowe back down to AAA necessarily a bad thing?

Yes, Duncan is a 30-year-old 4A player (who may or may not REALLY enjoy Baby Ruth bars)

and who has compiled a .701 OPS and 8 MLB HR in his career and Kearns' career has completely fallen off the map, but let's look at this for what it is - an attempt to get some RH bats into the organization to balance out an increasingly LH-heavy lineup. Are these two the ideal candidates to do that? No chance, but if we're looking for RH bats off of the bench who can spell Hafner at DH (like Duncan presumably would) or play some OF for a team that looks to have 3 starting OF, all of whom are LH (as Kearns presumably would), a minor league deal isn't too bad of an idea, particularly in the context that there's no guarantee of a roster spot.

While many are loathe to discuss the idea splits after the train wreck that was Dellichaels, just take a look at what the two newest Columbus Clippers (oops...did I really just write that) have done against LHP in their careers, with Duncan's MiLB totals also listed because he has just 163 MLB plate appearances:

Duncan MLB vs. LHP

.259 BA / .330 OBP / .457 SLG / .786 OPS

Duncan MiLB vs. LHP

.260 BA / .349 OBP / .518 SLG / .857 OPS

Kearns MLB vs. LHP

.262 BA / .389 OBP / .420 SLG / .809 OPS

Certainly nobody's catching the world on fire there and I can make a pretty compelling argument that Marte should be given an opportunity ahead of Duncan (sorry Trevor, the argument for you over Kearns isn't nearly as compelling), but we're talking about minor league deals and the presence of either of these two on the 25-man roster (or in Columbus to start the season) isn't really that big of a nugget of news.

That being said, there exists the very real possibility that the Indians decide that Brantley needs more seasoning in AAA (a point that I'd like to see justified, if only to make a case that a better option exists than just giving Brantley the job and letting him mature into it) or that LaPorta's injury keeps him from starting the season on the 25-man roster. If either of those things were to happen, Duncan or Kearns (or both, as AC asserts) could find themselves breaking camp with the Tribe next Spring. Again, that scenario wouldn't present that much of an issue to me, but if either of them (or, shuddering at the thought, both) are logging significant AB for the parent club into June instead of the obviously better options available (notably LaPorta and Brantley and, to a lesser degree Andy Marte), then we're just running around in circles with this thing and lessons are going unlearned at the corner of Carnegie and Ontario.

Outside of that deplorable scenario (the one where Duncan and Kearns take AB away from Brantley or a healthy Laporta...or even Marte into June) occurring, let's keep the cracks to Shelley Duncan's resemblance to the mutant biker from "Weird Science" or marveling at the fact that

the Nationals are paying $1M to Austin Kearns this season
by declining his $10M club option.

On the topic of team's not wanting to foot the bill to keep a player around and dumping them for peanuts, Kelly Shoppach signed a 2-year, $5.55M deal with the Rays with a club option for a third year (for $3.2M with a $300K buyout) as the Rays not only put set values to his two remaining arbitration years, but also gave themselves the opportunity to keep Show Pack around in 2012 if he's able to recapture some semblance of that second half of 2008.

With Carl Santana probably coming to Cleveland in the middle of this season, moving Shoppach made sense particularly with the idea that he wasn't going to be worth the dollars associated with retaining his services. That being said, it certainly doesn't remove the festering idea that the Indians sold low (and late) on Shoppach and that the Rays could have really stolen Shoppach from the Indians, whether he was useful to the 2010 and 2011 Indians or not.

On the topic of the player who came to Cleveland in exchange for ShopVac, Harry Pavlidis at THT has a piece titled "Pitching Prospects who could be Keepers"
looking for arms that don't immediately jump off of the page as stud prospects, but instead who are "strike-throwing, bat-missing, groundball pitchers who don't give-up home runs". After a brief explanation of how he fine-tuned the criteria, he came up with 29 pitchers who exceeded the minimums that he was looking for and among them was a name that may just "Unleash the Fury"
:

Mitch Talbot

K100 114
BH100 128
GB 118
HRFL 139

Talbot had a cup of coffee with the Rays in 2008, and was sent to Cleveland to complete the Kelly Shoppach deal over the winter. Talbot projects fairly well and has one of the best lines of this group of 29. We'll see how that translates, but Indians fans should pay attention to Talbot this March.

I still hold my irrational contempt for Talbot, mainly because of his status as being out of options and his lack of MLB experience (which are wildly related), but it's an interesting counterpoint to those (ahem...me) who were so quick to dismiss Talbot. My irrational contempt for all things related to Mitch Talbot has less to do however, with Talbot and more to do with something I hope to explain once I ever get around to posting the third part of the "Forward Thinking" series (remember that...oh, 2 months ago) on the rotation. As a little appetizer, trust me that part of it has to do with the players who show up as the Indians 7th and 8th best prospects (as determined by Baseball America this week
) in Hector Rondon and Carlos Carrasco and how I'd prefer to see innings go to them over the

likes of Talbot and even Sowers and Ambriz, all three of whom are out of options and figure to be on a long MLB leash, or even in the rotation coming out of Goodyear, as Castrovince imagines
.

On the BA list , there were not too many surprises among the Top 10 when you realize that BA has always been higher on upside (read Alex White at #9 without having thrown a pitch as a professional) and what "could be" than what really is. The most exciting news, by far, is that the BA folks are VERY high on both Santana (#1) and Chisenhall (#2), with author Ben Badler saying later in the subsequent chat that he sees Santana as the second best catching prospect in MLB (behind only the Giants' Buster Posey, the 5th overall pick in the 2008 draft), and sees The Chiz as the second best 3B prospect in MLB (behind only the Pirates' Pedro Alvarez, the 2nd overall pick in the 2008 draft). Seeing as how the team is just waiting to promote Santana to the parent club (probably sometime in June) and figure to have a void at 3B after 2010, when Peralta's option isn't picked up, they're some nice prospects to dream on.

Past those two exceptional positional prospects, BA ranks the two power arms netted this summer (Nick Hagadone and Jason Knapp) as #3 and #4, injury-history considered, which is likely more of an indication of these two players having high ceilings as much as anything else. There's a lot of good stuff in the list, but beyond those top 4, I'm not going to look too deeply into the rankings as that's not generally my area of expertise and because, frankly, much of the ranking and the information on the Tribe top prospects comes as nothing too new as it is covered so extensively by Tony Lastoria on a nearly everyday basis
.

Finally, a big thank you goes out to eagle-eyed reader Andy Francis, who caught some math errors on the previous MLB column , which despite not gaining too much traction, I have hope for in changing the MLB landscape FOREVER.

OK, those delusions of grandeur represent a pretty good sign that sleep is needed and that it's time to put the new baby boy's mitt under my bed as I attempt to break it in for him so it's ready to go when he and The DiaBride get home from the hospital.