The only real news coming off of The Reservation this week is a couple of largely insignificant veteran signings that potentially fill out the Indians' 2010 bench, as the Tribe inked utility infielder Mark Grudzielanek and catcher Mike Redmond to minor deals. In today's Lazy Sunday piece, Paulie talks about what the Redmond signing means for Carlos Santana and Lou Marason, the Indians current catching situation, the Marlins being forced to spend by MLB, and the free agent activity this offseason from all of the Indians AL Central division rivals.

Since I was probably the only person in the world thinking about market sizes in the NFL games yesterday (Indianapolis is the 33rd largest market in the US, ahead of only Milwaukee among cities with MLB teams and New Orleans is the 46th largest market in the US, smaller than any MLB market...even in 2000 before Katrina) in terms of how the NFL and MLB operate in such different universes, competitively-speaking, and since I'm not in the mood to unleash another 6,000 word opus on what's wrong with baseball
, let's just roll right into a Lazy Sunday on a foggy morning here on the North Coast.

And, away we go...

The only real news coming off of The Reservation this week is a couple of largely insignificant veteran signings that potentially fill out the Indians' 2010 bench, the more "prominent" being that Mike Redmond has been signed (at a cost of $850,000) to serve as the back-up catcher for the 2010 Indians and while this addition makes a lot of sense in terms of adding some experience to the catching corps, the signing confuses me as you get a little further down the line in the catching depth...and I don't mean how it affects Wyatt Toregas or even Chris Gimenez.

I'll get to that in a moment, but on the topic of Redmond as the player, he's a 38-year-old veteran back-up catcher with a respectable .345 OBP over his career, during which he's never compiled 300 plate appearances in a single season. Redmond will get a chance to work with a young pitching staff in the AL Central that he knows intimately (having spent the last 5 years as the backup in the Twin Cities) and will work with Sandy Alomar in breaking in Lou Marson and Carlos Santana in an effort to finish off both young backstops' catching skills. Sure, the Indians could have simply held on to Kelly Shoppach (thereby saving me from ever typing the words "Mitch Talbot") as their back-up catcher, but Shoppach just signed a deal in Tampa that will pay him $5.5M for the next two years (with an option for a third) and if we're talking about a catcher that figures to start probably around 35 to 45 games at the VERY high end (Redmond gets an extra $10K for his 40th, 45th, 50th, 60th, and 70th game started), I'll take paying $850,000 to a guy like Redmond over paying $2.75M to a guy like Shoppach.

All off-season, the Indians had this oft-stated need of "experience" behind the plate and Redmond certainly brings that attribute (along with a high-OBP) to the club. There really isn't an issue with bringing a guy like Redmond, who can provide some guidance to the young backstops and, at the very least, his signing certainly means that Wyatt Toregas is not long for the parent club (or even the 40-man) and likely heads down to Columbus to back-up Carlos Santana. As a catcher who turns 27 this July and has a career MiLB OPS of .739, Toregas moves back down the food chain and his once somewhat clear role as a back-up option to both Marson and eventually Santana certainly just got a lot cloudier.

Toregas' future however isn't the aspect of this signing that perplexes me though. Rather, color me as a little confused then as to how this whole transition from Marson as starter/Redmond as back-up is going to be affected by the imminent arrival of Carl Santana. That is, most people saw Lou Marson starting the season as the Indians' catcher (with Toregas as the back-up), and then moving into more of a back-up role himself (with Toregas going back to Columbus) after Santana was called up sometime in June. Now, with the Redmond signing, if you assume that Redmond is here to spend the year in Cleveland, the role of Lou Marson doesn't exactly make a lot of sense as he'll essentially start for the parent club (with Redmond backing him up) until Santana is ready to become the everyday catcher (with Redmond again, apparently backing HIM up), meaning Marson probably goes back to Columbus when Santana is called up.

Again, that isn't the issue though, as the problem when you're talking about Marson past this year is that if the Indians are going to need that "veteran" back-up catcher to tutor Santana while he adjusts to MLB this year or next year or beyond that, that guy isn't Marson. It wouldn't be Marson this year (particularly now with Redmond in the fold) and it won't be Marson next year as he isn't going to suddenly become that grizzled backup catcher that may serve as the best complement to Santana for the next few years. If Marson then doesn't even figure in as the ideal backup catcher, or more specifically as the ideal backup catcher for Carlos Santana, then why was he included in the Lee deal?

Maybe the Indians are more concerned about Santana's hand injury than they're letting on and see Marson getting everyday AB (with Redmond as Lou's back-up) until Santana is fully healthy and raking for a while in AAA...but wouldn't that almost be the worst-case scenario that we saw play out last year with LaPorta as the club was reticent to call him up and play him regularly until nearly the end of August?

Back to Sweet Lou, there was some thought when he was included in the Lee deal that Marson could simply represent trade bait in the near future for the Indians, given the presence of Santana, but could he become trade bait earlier than we all think?

If not, does Marson (turning 24 this June), with a moderately impressive track record in MiLB really go back to AAA if Santana (a month and a half OLDER than Marson) is called up?

If he does and his usefulness for the team is to get two months of everyday at-bats, followed by (possibly) a couple of years as a decent-to-good back-up catcher, what was the purpose of insisting that he be included in the Lee deal? That is, the Indians moved Lee for prospects (all of whom are profiled in a great piece by Al Ciammaichella at IPI) with the idea that 3 of the 4 would be contributors at the MLB level sooner rather than later. The strategy, it seemed, was that Carrasco, Marson, and Donald were high enough on the MiLB ladder that, although some of their warts and shortcomings may have been exposed, their arrival time to the North Coast would be sometime in 2010 at the very latest, with the trio making some contributions (at a fixed rate) for the Indians less than a year after CP Lee headed to Philly.

Now, with arms being added ahead of Carrasco (with some of those arms being out of options), Marson's short and long-term future with the team in question and the Indians already preparing for life BEFORE Jason Donald with guys like Mark Grudzielanek entering the fold, how soon can any of these players reasonably be expected to play regularly for the Indians, much less make an impact?

Since the Grudzielanek signing came up in passing, and because I'm loathe to get too in-depth on the addition of a 40-year-old Utility infielder (to a minor-league deal, which is actually the significant part of the news in that it does not guarantee a roster spot), let's just characterize Grudz joining the fold as not that much different than Austin Kearns and Shell Duncan inking minor-league deals. That is, just as Kearns and Duncan add some depth options for the team in Spring Training (with no guaranteed roster spot) in case Brantley starts out slow or LaPorta's injury does prove to be more serious than it looks right now, Grudz provides the Indians an option ahead of Jason Donald as a RH Utility IF with the idea that Donald will likely need more time to rehabilitate his injuries as the 2010 season dawns.

Don't take that to mean that Grudzielanek makes a LOT of sense as he is soon to be 40 years old and hasn't logged significant innings in the last two years, but he's a serviceable fill-in who can spell Valbuena at 2B (most notably) as well as moving around the diamond until Donald is deemed healthy and ready to take what looks to be same spot on the 25-man roster. I'm not nearly as optimistic on Grudz's ability to significantly contribute as Terry Pluto is, who writes that "I plead guilty to being a Tribe fan who actually can be a little excited about the team signing a 39-year-old second baseman who didn't play in the majors last season" and "Grudzielanek could easily platoon with Luis Valbuena at second base"
if only because Grudzielanek really hasn't played in MLB since the beginning of August in 2008 and has posted an OPS+ over 100 only three times in his 14-year career. All told, if it works out fine...if it doesn't, fine.

However, the Indians seem to be making plans outside of expecting contributions from Carrasco, Donald, and Marson this year after the idea that each would be relatively close to contributing at the MLB level when the Lee deal was made. This whole line of thinking is probably looking too deeply into a couple of minor moves and it shouldn't be taken as moaning that the Indians are "blocking" guys like Marson and Donald. Rather, it calls into question why the Indians decided to acquire guys like Marson and Donald in the Lee deal if they weren't

thought to contribute significantly any time soon. Perhaps patience is needed on the whole venture, to not get too worked up over a couple of veteran signings, but the additions are coming at positions that seemed to be filled (with inexpensive, club-controlled players) in short order when the Lee deal was made.

Moving on (but staying in the same FA vein), I'm not sure if you saw the Florida Marlins essentially getting called out by MLBPA for pocketing the revenue sharing money
in an attempt embarrass the Marlins into spending money on the Free Agent market. Putting aside the absurdity that the small-market teams are the ones that are being put under the bright lights in this Age of Inequality, the very public stance obviously represented a ploy by the players' union to put more cash into the pockets of their members (and the Marlins had a great little response to it by prudently
inking their own homegrown ace Josh Johnson
to a deal that buys out his first two years of Free Agency), but am I alone in the lifeboat in thinking that Free Agency is not always the best way to build a consistent contender?

Sure, adding CC, Burnett, and Teixiera is a nice little coup in FA for an off-season, but why is there this outrage when teams don't spend in FA to add marginal players at absurd contracts, both in terms of committed years and dollars?

Conversely, why is there a belief that FA activity equates to future success or a generation of excitement for a fanbase? To wit, Paul Hoynes' piece on the Redmond signing in Saturday's paper
had this backhanded swipe at the Indians not making waves in FA by putting in the "context" of what the rest of the AL Central teams are doing:

The Indians are taking little risk with such contracts, but they're not doing much to stir ticket sales.

The White Sox, a division rival, have signed free agents Omar Vizquel, JJ Putz, Andruw Jones, Mark Kotsay and Ramon Castro to one-year big league contracts worth a combined $7.36 million since the end of last season. They also took on Juan Pierre's two-year, $8 million contract in a trade with the Dodgers and gave Mark Teahen a three-year, $14 million extension after acquiring him from Kansas City.

In Detroit, the Tigers said goodbye to big-money free agents Placido Polanco, Brandon Lyon and Fernando Rodney. They continued to dump payroll by trading Curtis Granderson and Edwin Jackson, but they still came to terms on a reported two-year, $14 million contract with free agent closer Jose Valverde.

The Royals gave free agent catcher Jason Kendall a two-year, $6 million deal and spent $2.45 million on free agent outfielders Scott Podsednik and Brian Anderson.

Even the frugal Twins, no doubt saving money to try to keep AL MVP Joe Mauer, have spent more this winter than the Tribe. Carl Pavano, who accepted arbitration from Minnesota, will probably make between $5 million and $7 million. They also signed reliever Clay Condrey to a one-year, big-league deal.

Wait a minute...which team am I supposed to be impressed by in their Free Agent activity or point to as what the Indians should be doing?

Let's take a look at what each AL Central rival added (as mentioned by Hoynes and we won't delve into the additions of Hardy or Scherzer since he didn't) by putting some ages (for the 2010 season), 2009 performance, and committed dollars for some proper context:

White Sox - $29.36M committed

Omar Vizquel - 43 years old in 2010
.266 BA / .316 OBP / .345 SLG / .660 OPS in 195 plate appearances in 2009

JJ Putz - 33 years old in 2010
5.22 ERA, 1.64 WHIP with 19 K and 19 BB in 29 1/3 IP in 2009

Andruw Jones - 33 years old in 2010
.214 BA / .323 OBP / .459 SLG / .782 OPS in 331 plate appearances in 2009

Mark Kotsay - 34 years old in 2010
.278 BA / .327 OBP / .390 SLG / .717 OPS in 206 plate appearances in 2009

Ramon Castro - 34 years old in 2010
.219 BA / .292 OBP / .406 SLG / .699 OPS in 171 plate appearances in 2009

Juan Pierre - 32 years old in 2010
.308 BA / .365 OBP / .392 SLG / .757 OPS in 425 plate appearances in 2009

Mark Teahen - 28 years old in 2010
.271 BA / .325 OBP / .498 SLG / .734 OPS in 571 plate appearances in 2009

Tigers - $14M committed

Jose Valverde - 30 years old in 2010
2.33 ERA, 1.13 WHIP with 56 K and 21 BB in 54 IP in 2009

Royals - $8.45M committed

Jason Kendall - 36 years old in 2010
.241 BA / .331 OBP / .305 SLG / .636 OPS in 526 plate appearances in 2009

Scott Podsednik - 34 years old in 2010
.304 BA / .354 OBP / .412 SLG / .764 OPS in 587 plate appearances in 2009

Brian Anderson - 28 years old in 2010
.243 BA / .328 OBP / .347 SLG / .674 OPS in 231 plate appearances in 2009

Twins - between $6M and $8M committed

Carl Pavano - 34 years old in 2010
5.10 ERA, 1.38 WHIP with 147 K and 39 BB in 199 1/3 IP in 2009

Clay Condrey - 34 years old in 2010
3.00 ERA, 1.21 WHIP with 25 K and 14 BB in 42 IP in 2009

So...where's that team that is "stirring up ticket sales" or even making good decisions with their FA dollars?

Is it the White Sox, who committed nearly $30M this off-season to a mixed bag of flotsam and jetsam (with only one or two of them looking like everyday players) and who also assumed the nearly $60M remaining on the contract of Alex Rios (he of the .691 OPS last year) contract last summer, or maybe the Tigers who traded the young, talented, and affordable Granderson and Jackson for cost concerns, then signed Valverde (giving up their #1 draft pick for next year in the

process) for a dollar amount next year ($7M) that's on par with what Granderson and Jackson figure to earn ($7.7M) in 2010.

Maybe he means the Royals, who have been roundly ridiculed for their handling of their catching situation, among just about every other move they've made this off-season. No, it must be the team that made the "big splash" in that the Twins are likely to pay Hot Carl Pavano "between $5M and $7M" after he proved to be a competent innings-eater that can sit at the back of the rotation and added a middle reliever in his mid-30s.

That's what the complaint is - that the Indians are being outspent this off-season in FA in the Central?

If the attempt is to put the inactivity of the Indians this off-season into context, can we at least put more thought into it than just putting dollar signs on every team and intimating that money spent in Free Agency (about as inefficient as it gets in terms of player acquisition) leads to success in the following year?

The Indians made the "big splash" last off-season in the Central with the Wood signing.

How does that deal look in hindsight?

There's plenty to complain about with the Indians' performance over the past two years, but their inactivity in Free Agency this off-season falls so far down the list that it doesn't even merit a second thought. Maybe their inactivity ranks a little higher than the irrationally fanned outrage over Luis Isaac's dismissal, but it's pretty far down the list of organizations issues since the end of 2007.

Additionally, somebody please make the argument to me that there was that one (or even two) player available in Free Agency that was going to make the difference in the Indians' 2010 season. If you really thought that the team was going to make significant additions via FA this off-season after the die for the 2010 season was cast when Lee and Martinez were traded and the rebuild/reload/whatever began in earnest, then you just haven't been paying attention.

How long that rebuild/reload/whatever takes to bear fruit is the only pertinent

question on the North Coast these days (not complaining about a lack of FA activity or moaning about minor-league deals given out to retreads) and the only items of interest coming from the corner of Carnegie and Ontario are these clues that the young players acquired in the deals of the last two years may not be ready to contribute at the MLB level (much less excel) as quickly as previously thought.