As the great (if fictitious) Harry Doyle once said, “In case you haven’t noticed, and judging by the attendance you haven’t, the Indians have managed to win a few here and there, and are threatening to climb out of the cellar.” While those wins “here and there” are ostensibly all against the Pale Hose (38% of the team’s victories are against the South Siders), a win is a win as the Indians attempt to build some momentum despite all signs pointing to them not being able to do so, what with Sizemore officially out for the year and with the Red Sox getting ready for their only visit to the corner of Carnegie and Ontario tomorrow.

Nevertheless, it is Sunday and while I have some clean-up to do around the yard after the nasty storms that tore through the North Coast early this morning, let’s get off on a Lazy Sunday…

Obviously, the biggest news of the week was that Grady Sizemore (unsurprisingly, if you remember the confusing “symptoms” and “bruises” of his injury and the fact that this is the Indians) did undergo microfracture surgery on his knee, ending the 2010 season for the Indians’ CF. Frankly, this wasn’t all that unexpected and the implications of this are that the Indians will rely have to hope that the procedure not only fixes what ails Sizemore, but that he will come back at a level of competition close to where he was back in 2008, something that is far from a given.

Even if Sandy Alomar Jr. blithely played off the surgery saying that “the doctors said I’d be out six months…I made it back in three months” and that “If you get that thing done, you should be OK…I played all the way from 1995 until 2007 and I was catching. The guy Steadman is pretty good. He operated on Carlos Beltran, too, and he's just about ready to come back for the Mets” adding his professional opinion that “It’s flip coin, but once you come back you should be solid…Once it becomes calcified, you should be all right.”

That’s all well and good and it makes for a good quote, but given the events concerning injuries of the past few years, I’ll wait for a quote from someone with a DR. in front of his name and not a JR. after his name before buying into Alomar’s “flip coin” theory.

A week and a half ago, I wrote that , "Perhaps it's the Clevelander in me, but I'm just gripping for the worst, that he's out for the season and that they 'hope' that the surgery solves things so he's ready for 2011. If that were to happen, let's hope that the Sizemore knee doesn't join the Hafner shoulder in body parts that make the early-to-mid-2010s painful for more than just said injured players." To that end, Todd Dery has a good piece over at WFNY on Hafner and Sizemore and how the regressions and injuries to both have played a major role to put the Indians in their current situation. I'd probably add Carmona to that mix, and if you look at how those 3 players are the ones that were signed to contracts that included guaranteed money that went the furthest into the future (albeit in option years in some cases) with the idea that that troika would be the linchpins for the pitching and offense going forward, you can see very quickly how and why things have fallen on such hard times in the past 2+ years.

Regardless, the news on Sizemore means that the Indians' OF situation is full of opportunity for players like Kearns (MLB GM's take note), Crowe (whose next correct read off of the bat will be his first), Shelley Duncan (who I'm oddly intrigued by, which may just be a sign of how desperate this season feels), and eventually Mike Brantley (though that will probably after the All-Star Break to manage his service time and see if he can get into a groove in AAA) to position themselves in the OF mix beyond 2010. Perhaps the idea holds true that one of the spots in the 2011 OF is going to be Brantley's permanent spot (and does anyone else think that maybe Sizemore comes back as a LF?), but there's going to be 2 positions up for grabs for the rest of the season and since Matt MaTola has played a total of 7 games in LF in the first 1/3 of the season, one would imagine that Kearns, Crowe, Duncan, Brantley, and maybe some other minor league players will see some time in the outfield grass of the friendly confines this year.

Other than the Sizemore injury and the fallout, sitting on the eve of the MLB Draft (with the Indians holding the #5 pick, the highest they've picked since 1992), it makes sense to get into some coverage of it, although I do so with an asterisk in place that I have zero knowledge about most (if not all) of these players and the actual MLB Draft system holds my interest more than projecting out 18-year-olds.

That being said, here are a couple of player preview pieces from IPI that break down the available position players and pitchers that might become the Indians' top selection. Also, here are a few mock drafts, with one from Kevin Goldstein at B-Pro that has the Indians taking Ole Miss LHP Drew Pomeranz, as does Keith Law , while MLB Bonus Baby and My MLB Draft have the Indians taking Florida Gulf Coast LHP Chris Sale.

Pomeranz and Sale are just names to me at this point, so again I will say that I have little to no knowledge to impart on these two (or any other draft prospects), though it does strike me that

Pomeranz is 6-5, 231 and Sale is 6-6, 172, meaning that if either is chosen, it would go along the lines of pitcher acquisition that we've seen recently with Justin Masterson (6-6, 250), Nick Hagadone (6-5, 230), Bryan Price (6-4, 210), Carlos Carrasco (6-3, 215), Jason Knapp (6-5, 235), and Alex White (6-3, 200).

Whether the Indians are thinking about simply building up the best intramural basketball team or that they're continuing this newfound strategy of getting these big hard-throwers with the idea that they'll be able to fill their rotation and bullpen with some mix of them remains to be seen.

Of course, leave it to the Indians to end up with the 5th pick in a draft that Pete Gammons (in a great piece that deserves a full read) says "is a three-player showcase -- Harper, Machado, Taillon," adding in this wonderful quote from an NL GM, "After that, there's virtually no difference between the fourth and 44th picks. So in many ways, it's really a scouts' Draft. If your scouts are really good, you will be fine, except that it will be expensive."

If there really is "virtually no difference between the fourth and the 44th picks", remember how the Red Sox have 3 of those top 44 picks and the Angels have 5 of those top 44 picks ?

Really, the most interesting bit that I've seen regarding the draft came up in a piece from the print edition of this week's SI , in which Tom Verducci takes some time away from analyzing the potential picks to discuss the merits and flaws of the current system in place:

Despite the rising costs of signing high picks, more and more franchises are realizing that the draft has become the most cost-efficient way to build a contender. That means that larger-market teams are putting more effort—and money—into the draft than ever before. "The media attention is directly tied to the fact that there's a greater understanding of the importance of young players," Indians general manager Mark Shapiro says. "And the draft is clearly the single greatest option to infuse [an organization with] young talent at one time. The big markets began to emphasize young talent. And frankly, the media goes where the Yankees, Red Sox, Dodgers and Mets go."

--snip--

Boston, for instance, embarked on a more aggressive draft strategy beginning in 2006, when it started dangling first-round money at later-round draft picks. (Often those players sank in the draft because they were "signability" risks: low-budget teams with early picks knew they couldn't meet the players' salary demands.) From 2006 to '09, the Red Sox handed out bonuses between $500,000 and $2 million to nine players taken in the third round or later. (The Yankees also signed nine in that price range in that span.) On one Class A team alone this year, Boston has five players who signed for at least half a million dollars.

Looking past the point that the Indians' GM (whose been taken to the woodshed recently for the failure of the team to build through the draft) was the one who went on the record to say that "the draft is clearly the single greatest option to infuse young talent at one time", his follow-up to that gets to the point of the draft that' been bothering me for quite a while.

Verducci hits on it perfectly as he illustrates the way that large-market teams (the ones with the larger margin of error) have taken a new approach to the draft and, by exploiting another open door made wider by the virtue of their revenue streams, have turned the draft on its collective head. Just to keep with Verducci's example, the Red Sox are using every advantage available to them and are by no means skirting the rules in place, but look at those last two sentences again - "From 2006 to '09, the Red Sox handed out bonuses between $500,000 and $2 million to nine players taken in the third round or later...On one Class A team alone this year, Boston has five players who signed for at least half a million dollars."

That's for players from the 3rd round or later that got those big paydays and does not take into consideration Boston giving guys like Casey Kelly (1st Round Pick in 2008) a $3M signing bonus as the 30th pick in the draft, which qualifies as the 7th highest signing bonus in the 2008 draft. It also discounts how much over-slot the Red Sox are paying some of these players, as they paid a $2M signing bonus to Ryan Westmoreland, the 172nd pick of that same 2008 draft. In doing so, Westmoreland netted the 11th biggest signing bonus of the draft (tied with the #7 overall pick, Yadier Alonso) as a 5th Round Pick. Thus, in the 2008 draft, the Red Sox drafted and signed 2 of the top 11 picks (when they had one 1st Round Pick – the 30th in the draft in which they picked Kelly), if you're going to use signing bonuses as a reasonable measuring stick of worth.

That's not to say that this strategy is always going to work in the long run, as Kelly is a 20-year-old who has decided that he's going to become a full-time pitcher (which was the Sox plan all along) and Westmoreland went through a scary brain surgery just this past March, but even if those players don't pan out, the Red Sox have the deep pockets (and more highly-paid draft picks) to fill the void.

Just to put some hard numbers on this, take a look at the amount of bonus money that's been paid out by the Red Sox and by the Indians since that 2006 date that Verducci uses:

Indians 2006 - $5,349,500
1 player receiving more than $1M and 4 more players receiving more than $500K
Red Sox 2006 - $7,772,000
2 players receiving more than $1M and 5 more players receiving more than $500K

Indians 2007 - $2,271,800
1 player receiving more than $1M
Red Sox 2007 - $3,505,500
0 players receiving more than $1M and 4 players receiving more than $500K

Indians 2008- $3,962,000
2 players receiving more than $1M and 2 more players receiving more than $500K
Red Sox 2008 - $7,999,000
2 players receiving more than $2M and 2 more players receiving more than $500K

Indians 2009 - $3,853,000
1 player receiving more than $1M (Alex White, $2.25M) and 1 more player receiving more than

$500K
Red Sox 2009 - $5,983,400
2 players receiving more than $1M and 3 more players receiving more than $500K

While judging the results of these 4 drafts are still wildly premature to accurately judge (although as Adam Van Arsdale of LGT adroitly asserts , the results of the last 2 Brad Grant-run drafts for the Tribe have been more promising than the John Mirabelli-run drafts prior to that), it brings home the notion that the larger-market teams like the Red Sox are starting to figure out another angle that they can exploit.

While the difference in the total dollar amount spent doesn't look too large, in terms of MLB payrolls, but as an AL GM told Verducci about the draft for the referenced article, "It's the most cost-efficient thing we do in baseball. You hit with one or two picks [a year], and it makes your organization." If you're keeping track at home, the Red Sox have given 6 players signing bonuses of $1M or more in the past 4 drafts (the Indians have 5 players with signing bonuses of $1M in the same timeframe) and have paid 14 players a signing bonus of $500K or more, while the Indians have given 7 players between $500K and $1M in the same timeframe. While the 20 players that the Red Sox have given more than $500K to doesn't look THAT much larger than the Indians' 12 players that have received more than $500K, realize that the draft is a game of attrition and the more players that are given the opportunity to hit increases the likelihood that one (or more) of them do.

Go back to that quote that "you hit with one or two picks [a year], and it makes your organization" and you see the prudence of what teams like the Red Sox are attempting to do, as the intent is to hit on three to four picks a year. That may seem obvious, but the underlying strategy is to ensure that not only their pipeline remain full with young, cheap talent, but that the overflow talent can be used to acquire MLB talent from teams looking to shed payroll and add those young, talented players into the mix. As I wrote nearly a year-and-a-half ago , "the commodity of young, under-contract-for-the-foreseeable future players has become increasingly important in baseball" and there's no greater evidence than that than the Victor Martinez trade of last year.

In netting Justin Masterson ($510,000 as a 2nd Round Pick in 2006), Hagadone($571,500 as a sandwich pick in 2007), and Bryan Price ($849,000 as a 1st Round Pick in 2008) as they basically added 3 arms who had already been paid their signing bonuses and had proven that their high draft position was justified by performing in the Minors. The Red Sox spent nearly $2M to sign those three players and used the 18 club-controlled years (combined for the 3 players) as a sort of currency to add Martinez to their lineup.

The practice is likely to become more commonplace as the mid-to-small-market teams begin their rebuilds with an eye on young, cost-controlled talent who may have been high draft picks with large signing boneses. When a team like Arizona is ready to tear-down (and the linked piece that relays that they are is extremely interesting to compare what's happened on the North Coast and in the desert since 2007 in terms of injuries, regressions, and young players not developing as it was once thought that they would), teams like the Red Sox have the most sought-after currency in MLB – young, cheap talent whose signing bonuses have already been

paid to them.

Now, teams like the Red Sox truly sit in the catbird's seat, where they can pull the players that they truly want to keep off of the table (as they did with Buchholz last year) and give other teams a list of intriguing talents (even if they're the second-tier of Red Sox prospects) for the team to choose from. Teams like the Indians remain beholden to the teams that have spent more money in the draft (though they do still need to pick the right players) as the only place to make up for a dry pipeline is to pick through the farm systems of teams that have young talent, but aren't necessarily harvesting that talent for their own parent club.

Thus, the Indians have had to make up for their drafting deficiencies (although here's a fascinating piece from Baseball Prospectus
that works out how each team in MLB would be performing if they were working with only the players they drafted and signed as amateurs...and it has the "No Turnover" Indians compiling an average record of 88-74 from 2007 to 2009, atop the AL Central just 1 game behind both the Red Sox and Yankees in the greater AL landscape), is to pick through other organizations' farm systems in an attempt to augment their own drafted or internationally signed players to create that "window of contention".

That's where the 2010 season is, watching the products of other farm systems combine with the Indians' own products as the Tribe is now squarely coming to terms with the fact that many of their 1st Round Picks (who did get those big signing bonuses) are nothing more than marginal MLB players, something referenced in the SI piece when Yankees' vice president of scouting Damon Oppenheimer says, "But has there been longevity and impact? You can say guys touched the big leagues, but is that all that you're looking for from a first-round pick?"

On the eve of the MLB Draft and the 5th Round pick…let's hope not.