With the World Series getting under way on Wednesday, the official start to the 2010-2011 offseason draws nearer for Major League Baseball.

The November 20th roster deadline is a little over three weeks away. This is a key date in the offseason where teams set their 40-man rosters for the upcoming season by making decisions on which players to keep, which players to remove, and which young players to add in order to protect them from the Rule 5 Draft in December. Decisions are also made by teams in regard to how many spots to leave open for potential free agents signings.

When it comes to filling out the 40-man roster at this time of the year, it all comes down to a combination of need and talent. Most of the additions to the 40-man roster are who organizations view as their best young talent in the minors that is up for roster protection from the Rule 5 Draft. The rest of the additions come from signings through free agency with a few waiver claims potentially sprinkled in.

Teams conduct several meetings from the final month of the season until the roster deadline date as they work to whittle down the roster and finalize it before the deadline. Many decisions on who to remove and who to add from the roster are obvious, but other decisions are not so

cut and dry.

Whether obvious or not, teams will wait until right around the deadline date to officially make the moves in order to let things play out. Teams rarely make roster decisions on who to add well in advance of the deadline since there is no rush to do so and it could be a decision that results in disaster. What if the player being rostered is playing winter ball then goes out the next day and gets seriously hurt? This is a situation the team wants to avoid, and is why most of these decisions typically always go down to the last minute.

Occasionally, a team will open up a roster spot by trading a player already on the 40-man roster in exchange for a non-roster player that is not required to be protected. Even more rare are trades at this time of the year involving Rule 5 eligible players that teams may not have room on their roster to protect. This is mostly because other teams are in the same boat, and also because teams have little interest to acquire a player that if they are even interested in they can just go out and try to pick them up in the Rule 5 Draft for little cost.

With all this in mind, let's take a look at what decisions the Indians may make in creating room on the 40-man roster prior to the November 20th roster deadline. In the next week or two I will follow this piece up with a look at what players from their farm system the Indians will consider adding to the 40-man roster.

Roster Analysis

The Indians currently have 44 players on the 40-man roster. At the moment they are four players over the 40-man limit because they have four players that are on the 60-day disabled list: catcher Carlos Santana, outfielder Grady Sizemore, and right-handed pitchers Anthony Reyes and Hector Ambriz. Players on the 60-day disabled list do not count toward the 40-man roster.

Since there is no disabled list in the offseason, all players on the 60-day disabled list have to be added back to the 40-man roster (or released) by the November 20th roster deadline. As a result, in the coming days the Indians will have to remove at least four players from the 40-man roster just to create room for these four players on the 40-man roster who are on the 60-day disabled list. If they want to add players from their minor league system and a free agent or

two, they will need to remove more than four players.

Who Stays, Who Goes

Before we get into who stays or goes, it should be noted that players like outfielder Trevor Crowe, left-handed pitcher Aaron Laffey and right-handed pitcher Jensen Lewis are not in danger of being designated for assignment (DFA). Well, at least not until spring training.

While all three are marginal major league talents, Crowe and Laffey still have one option remaining so have some value as at worst depth options in 2011. Lewis may be on his way out of the organization, but he should remain with the club until spring training while the Indians seek a trade partner or his value increases because of injuries to other relievers.

Looking at the rest of the current 40-man roster, the following players appear to have a questionable status on the roster: Hector Ambriz (RHP), Luke Carlin (C), Shelley Duncan (OF/1B), Justin Germano (RHP), Chris Gimenez (C), Wes Hodges (1B), Chad Huffman (OF/1B), Andy Marte (3B/1B), Anthony Reyes (RHP), Carlos Rivero (SS), Drew Sutton (SS/2B), Jess Todd (RHP), and Luis Valbuena (2B).

That's a lot of guys ranging from low to high chances at being removed from the roster. Here is a breakdown on the chances of each player being removed:

Hector Ambriz: The Indians made it through all of 2010 without having to send Ambriz back to the Diamondbacks as a Rule 5 pick, so he is 100% the property of the Indians now as they have the full complement of three options and can pretty much do what they please with him for the next three years. However, since he just underwent Tommy John surgery and won't pitch in the big leagues in 2011, it is very unlikely that if he were designated for assignment that anyone would claim him off waivers. Even with the flexibility he provides respective to the 25-man roster with his three options they do not help in regard to creating room on the 40-man roster as he is still taking up space as a marginal player who is unusable in 2011.

Decision: The Indians DFA him, he clears waivers, and is outrighted to the minors. He would

still be under the Indians control as a first time 40-man roster removal, so unless claimed by another team he remains under their control in 2011 and beyond. This is much like the Adam Miller situation from last offseason.

Luke Carlin: The Indians two catchers at the big league level next year will be Carlos Santana and Lou Marson, but if Santana needs more time to recover from his knee surgery or if they want to start Marson in Columbus to play everyday and get more seasoning, the Indians will need a third catcher on the roster. If the Indians go this route, they could always find that third catcher on the free agent market like they did with Mike Redmond last offseason, or go with Carlin or even Chris Gimenez. Carlin is a likeable guy who has some value as organizational depth at catcher, but not worthy of a 40-man spot.

Decision: The Indians DFA Carlin, he clears waivers, and he becomes a free agent. There is a good chance the Indians try and resign him to a minor league deal with an invite to major league camp this spring. If resigned, he likely would be the regular catcher at Triple-A Columbus.

Shelley Duncan: Duncan provided some much needed leadership for a very young team and also a powerful bat from the right side of the plate hitting .231 with 11 HR, 36 RBI and a .736 OPS in 85 games last year. If he remains on the team he would serve as a right-handed complement to Travis Hafner at DH and also provide a right-handed bat off the bench to play left field and first base. He’s 31 years old though and the very definition of a 4A player, which are the kind of players you don’t protect and instead look to sign (or resign) to minor league deals.

Decision: The Indians DFA Duncan, he clears waivers, and they try to resign him as a minor league free agent.

Justin Germano: Germano was a bright spot in the Indians bullpen in the second half of the season posting an 0-3 record, 3.31 ERA, .205 BAA, and 0.99 WHIP in 23 appearances. Maybe the Indians found a diamond in the rough, or maybe it just took awhile for things to catch up with him. Bottom line, he's a dime a dozen pitcher and at best a long man or 6th inning guy, and with a team so deep with internal bullpen options they need to protect, it would be surprising if they kept him around.

Decision: The Indians DFA Germano, he clears waivers, and they look to resign him as a minor league free agent with an invite to major league spring training.

Chris Gimenez: Gimenez has very good leadership skills and works well with a pitching staff. He is also versatile as in addition to catching he can play third base, first base, and left field. Unfortunately, with the Indians likely to be pretty versatile on the bench, his versatility is no longer as valued. On top of that, even though the sample size is small, in the limited amount of at bats he has had in the big leagues he has performed poorly.

Decision: The Indians DFA Gimenez, he clears waivers, and the Indians try to resign him as a free agent. As a second time outright he can chose to sign with any club as a free agent, so it will be interesting if he seeks greener pastures elsewhere.

Wes Hodges: This one should be the most obvious as the Indians already tried to remove Hodges from the roster back on July 27th when they DFAed him only to have the Colorado Rockies claim him off waivers. The Rockies then DFAed him shortly after that and tried to sneak him through waivers, but the Indians reclaimed him back on August 5th. It was one of the more bizarre series of transactions for one player seen in awhile, and showed the lack of value he has to a big league 25-man roster not only in Cleveland but all the other 29 teams.

Decision: The Indians will once again DFA Hodges, and this time no one claims him. Remember, he was never outrighted by the Indians or Rockies as in both cases he was claimed and remained on the 40-man roster, so he will have no choice but to accept an outright assignment to the minors with the Indians.

Chad Huffman: Huffman was an interesting late season pickup by the Indians. The Indians claimed him off waivers from the Yankees on September 17th, so it would appear they made the transaction for a reason seeing as he would not be able to play or do anything for them until this coming spring. He is a right-handed power bat the organization really needs to balance out a very left-handed laden outfield in Cleveland, and more importantly he has two option years remaining. While there appears to be little chance for impact, he could fill the role Duncan had in 2010 as a guy who opens the season in Triple-A but is one of the first promoted when a need arises.

Decision: Huffman has a good chance at sticking, especially since he was a pickup so late in the season. He's not in the clear though as while he likely remains on the 40-man as of the November deadline, he will be one of the first candidates up for removal when a free agent is signed to a guaranteed major league deal later in the offseason.

Andy Marte: A year ago Marte was kept around because he was considered the best option defensively at third base and first base for the major league team. Sadly, this still appears true, even with Marte's defense these days decaying to maybe a tick above average. He still has yet to ever show he can hit in the big leagues as he hit .229 with 5 HR, 19 RBI and a .680 OPS in 80 games last year, and in five seasons from 2006-2010 he has hit .218 with 20 HR, 96 RBI and a .635 OPS.

Decision: Because the Indians have such a need at third base, it looks like Marte will survive another roster purge in the short term and go into spring training in competition for the third base job or as the right-handed bat off the bench. The man has more lives than a cat, though like Huffman could be one of the first options to DFA later in the offseason if the Indians acquire a player via free agency or trade.

Anthony Reyes: Reyes is still recovering from Tommy John surgery and has shown some progress of late in his recovery where the Indians may consider him as a fifth starter candidate next year or as a swing man in the bullpen. It is also possible they could have him open the season on the disabled list to continue his rehab and sort of serve as a "reserve" pitching option until a need arises. The problem is he offers very little flexibility as he needs to be pitching in the big leagues or be on the disabled list since he cannot be sent to the minors and remain in the organization unless he is on a 30-day rehab assignment. The Indians have several pitchers who may have higher priority for the final two spots in the rotation, and while the need for a veteran starter seems to be a big target they want to acquire this offseason, Reyes probably doesn't fit the kind of player they are looking for.

Decision: The Indians DFA Reyes, he clears waivers, and they resign him to a minor league deal with an invite to major league camp in spring training.

Carlos Rivero: Every year Rivero is held in such high regard by the Indians, but every year he falls short of expectations. Even with the absence of really any good minor league season under his resume or outstanding defensive skills, he continues to be held in that regard. The Indians surprised many by rostering him last offseason, a move that at the time was questioned

and in hindsight looks unnecessary as he is not held in nearly as high regard by those outside the wigwam. After a very sub par return trip to Double-A Akron last year, the Indians may have finally wised up on him.

Decision: The Indians DFA Rivero, he clears waivers, and is outrighted to the Indians minors as a first time 40-man roster removal.

Drew Sutton: Sutton would appear to be a player the Indians will very much consider for a big league opportunity as their utility man to start the season next year. With the absence of any real utility player options on the roster other than Luis Valbuena, both Valbuena and Sutton will probably stick around to at least compete for the job in spring training next year. He could also be Jason Donald's left handed handcuff at second base. He does offer some flexibility as he has one option remaining, but he also would likely create little interest on the waiver wire if he were DFAed.

Decision: Sutton is likely DFAed, and as a first time outright - if he clears waivers - he has no choice but to accept the Indians decision to outright him to the minors for 2011. He battles for the big league utility gig as a non-rostered player.

Jess Todd: At first glance it would appear that Todd is safe on the 40-man for now considering the Indians picked him up as part of the Mark DeRosa trade in July 2009; however, it did not go unnoticed that the Indians chose not to call him up in September. Even when Triple-A Columbus' season was complete, the Indians instead opted to purchase the contract of right-handed pitcher Vinnie Pestano and add him to the roster to give him a few looks rather than just callup Todd who was already on the roster. This seems to show he is of lower priority now to the club, and one of the bullpen options likely to be discarded first.

Decision: Todd will very likely stick around for awhile longer, but could be one of the first bullpen options discarded next season unless his usage and role increases.

Luis Valbuena: In 2010 Valbuena had one of the worst offensive seasons seen by an Indians player in some time. For most organizations he probably would have already been shown the 40-man door, but the Indians often tend to be very patient with players on the 40-man roster, especially when the player was part of a significant trade like the one consummated in

December 2008 with Seattle for Franklin Gutierrez. Valbuena did show promise in 2009 with a good year at the plate, so there could be a sense that 2010 was just an extreme hiccup and that he will rebound to normal levels in 2011. He does provide some versatility at third base, second base and even shortstop, and because of that could be one of the main candidates for the utility infielder role next season. He also has one option remaining, so he provides some roster versatility next season.

Decision: The Indians aren't ready to pull the plug yet, and will give him at least half a season next year before considering giving him the axe.

Final Tally

Remember, guys like Chris Gimenez, Wyatt Toregas, and Andy Marte survived the November 20th roster cuts last year, so there are certain to be a couple of guys kept on the roster that will leave people scratching their heads. As we saw though, a few "sacrificial lambs" are kept on the 40-man in the event roster room needs to be made to add a free agent or trade acquisition. Teams keep a few of these players on the roster instead of loading up with straight prospects so as to not have to DFA a prospect they might otherwise not want to.

In the end, at this point it looks like Huffman, Marte, Todd, and Valbuena may be safe, but Ambriz, Carlin, Duncan, Germano, Gimenez, Hodges, Reyes, Rivero, and Sutton look to be on the outs. That would leave five spots open on the 40-man roster to add players from within prior to the roster deadline

So what internal options will the Indians look to fill those open spots? We'll take a look at all the options in the upcoming followup piece in about two weeks.

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