As the World Series rolls on, things are relatively quiet on the North Coast (and across most of the country) in the time prior to the FA period and now is the time that most teams get their off-season "lists" filled out, unable to act on their needs until the postseason comes to a finish. This "in-between" time is frustrating for most fans of all teams as they survey the MLB landscape and the frustration sometimes leads to the invention of wild scenarios by which trades are manufactured and why Free Agent X would be so inclined to join their beloved team. While most of the trades are pipe dreams and most Free Agent imaginations lack the perspective of the league in terms of player contracts, I often equate this time to ol' George Costanza walking into The Big Stein's office and touting that, "I think I figured out a way to get Griffey and Bonds, and we wouldn't really have to give up all that much".

Sure, scenarios can be imagined where contracts are swapped or the Dolans inexplicably become major players on the FA market (in what would be an ill-advised attempt), but the truth of the matter is that after the flurry of activity that's happened on the corner of Carnegie and Ontario over the last two seasons as the decks were cleared in an effort to afford the young players acquired in said deck cleaning the opportunity to play and prove themselves in MLB, it's going to be a relatively quiet Winter in Cleveland.

Though I'm not interested in creating stories in an effort to drum up interest or readers (rising above the path that some other outlets have taken in Cleveland sports, as Frownie points out), there are always subplots and subterfuge on The Reservation, and all Winter long, I'll be right here to hit on the high (and low) points as the Indians move forward towards the 2011 season. With that all in mind, let's get off on a Lazy Sunday that doesn't involve Browns' football…but will include some trick-or-treating with Buzz Lightyear and a 9-month-old pumpkin.

Starting off, multiple national sites were enamored with the Antonetti profile in the PD earlier this week , and while the narrative of how the new Indians' GM arrived at his current job is a compelling human interest story at some level, the piece doesn't really shed any light on what lessons have been learned since 2008 or how Antonetti figures to approach his job…that is, other than the talking points that we've heard for some time now. It remains fascinating to me why the question as to where the organizational

deficiencies were that led us to this place (and how they've been "fixed") and the question as to why the Indians' organization remained silent during last year's Game 1 of the World Series, with the obvious opportunity to point out the disparity in MLB, with CC starting against Lee both remain unasked.

Perhaps they're "off-limits" or the Indians want to keep a tight lid on those answers (for some unknown reason), but if you're looking for real insight and actual clues as to what can be expected from Antonetti, the GM (and not Antonetti, the NHS member), I'll take the sit-down with Jay Levin of the LGT (accessible and detailed in my post a few weeks back here) as well as falling back
the piece written in this space way back in February
if you're looking for more than a detailed look at how Antonetti could approach his job.

It remains to be seen what Antonetti's first off-season will produce as the Indians have remained largely off the radar outside of the obvious "we need a defensive 3B" without tipping their hand as to where (or if) they think they can get one or even what other needs for the parent club that they feel they CAN (not want to) address. Certainly, we've seen the "RH bat" talk bandied about and I'm venturing to guess that the "RH bat" is going to come in the form of an OF, if only because the three assumed OF (and the DH) for 2011 are all LH.

To that end, MLBTR had an interesting piece in which they surveyed the landscape for RH OF and, while the impetus of the piece was to find a platoon partner for Phillies' prospect Domonic Brown, the conclusions can certainly be applied to the need that the Indians have to acquire a RH bat and one that can preferably play the OF, and optimally all three OF positions.

The options presented by the piece fall in line with what we've seen (and I still like Matt Diaz, assuming he's non-tendered by the Braves), but Xavier Nady may be worth a look as he's still been recovering from TJ surgery and has compiled an .818 OPS in his career against LHP. Now, it should be noted that Nady posted a .649 OPS against LHP last year as a member of the Cubs (and a .660 OPS overall) as well as mentioning that he'll be 32 next year, but Nady (who has played all three OF positions in his career) could be a player that fits the Indians' needs.

While an acquisition of a player like Diaz or Nady isn't going to cause much more than the usual gnashing of teeth and sports-talk radio mindlessness in terms of reaction, the most interesting thing to watch in the pursuit of that RH bat this off-season is that it may tip the Indians' hand on what they expect (or, more accurately, don't expect) from one Grady Sizemore in 2011. As a quick aside, here's a great piece from Andrew Humphries at LGT titled "What Never Was" about Grady that puts the proper perspective as to how far Grady has fallen in terms of expectations…and how fast.

Back to the notion of the search for a RH OF though, if the Indians go out and get an ancillary piece (and I'd put Diaz, Nady, Willie Bloomquist, Reed Johnson or even a Kearns in that category) as the 4th OF/RH bat, then they must feel that Sizemore will be ready to contribute when the team arrives in Goodyear in the Spring. However, if the Indians get more aggressive in their search for an OF and add a player who obviously looks like he could be a starter more than just a complementary piece (and truthfully, I don't even know if that guy is out there on the

FA market in the Indians' "price range"), it means that either the Indians aren't all that confident that Grady's surgically repaired knee is going to allow him to contribute at a meaningful level from the beginning of the season or they are concerned enough that the long-term effects of the surgery are something for which they essentially need insurance.

In fact, "insurance" may be the keyword for the strategy of these potential off-season acquisitions…
"Insurance" that Sizemore's injury and Brantley's adjustments to MLB may require a legitimate option in the outfield (and one not named Trevor Crowe as I did use the word "legitimate")…

"Insurance" that Hafner may be a platoon player who needs RH protection…

"Insurance" that the young RH relievers need some adjustment time that they aren't ready to handle the 7th or 8th innings from the Season Opener…

"Insurance" that Nix is ill-equipped to be a full-time 3B…

"Insurance" that the young starting pitchers are not quite ready to make the transition to MLB and that some time in AAA wouldn't improve their likelihood of success in the future…

The notion that they're going to be leaning too heavily on anyone they acquire this off-season to provide much more than that "insurance" or time for their internal prospects to develop and/or adjust to MLB is short-sighted. Again, the thing to watch this coming season will be the development of the players already around and the Indians don't figure to add that "one big piece" or even a couple of pieces as the wisdom of adding "one big piece" to a team that simply isn't one or two external players away from obviously contending is questionable at best.

That notion of "insurance" essentially buys the team time to learn more about their prospects and while I'm certainly not endorsing a return to the Danny Graves, Oldberto Hernandez, Jose Jimenez pile, some well-placed bets on particular players can buy the Tribe that "insurance" without a huge outlay of cash and without a foolish commitment of years to players who shouldn't be signed for longer than a one (or at the most, two) year deal.

The Indians do have logical internal options for all of their "holes" and the reality is that some of those internal options (Kipnis, The Chiz, the gaggle of bullpen arms in AAA and AA, Alex White, etc.) may not be ready to contribute by mid-2011, as the most optimistic have suggested, or in 2011 at all. That being the case, the Indians should be looking to add some pieces that allow those players to arrive to Cleveland as their clock dictates and not because a pressing need unnecessarily accelerates their arrival.

In terms of other "internal options", "Baseball America" make the declaration a week or so ago that the best draft in 2010 was put forth by the Tribe, with their "Best of" category being passed along here by the ABJ's Stephanie Storm. The most pertinent nugget in the piece that Storm passes along is that BA rated Drew Pomeranz as the 4th closest to MLB (and #1 on the list, Chris Sale, already appeared on the South Side) and while that may be

exciting, the “fast track” that he figures to follow that’s currently being blazed by Alex White would put Pomeranz in the mix at some point in 2012 or 2013.

Realistically, that would be tremendous progress and shouldn’t be seen as any kind of negative, although if you’ve noticed the lack of LHP in the rotational pipeline for the Tribe, you’re not alone and Pomeranz and Matt Packer (who was profiled by Tony Lastoria here) represent the two best options for LHP down the line, excluding the largely-known quantities that are Dave Huff and the likely bullpen-bound Aaron Laffey.

So how fast would Pomeranz move?
That’s hard to say, but I couldn’t imagine the Indians being THAT aggressive with him unless he absolutely destroys the competition as soon as he arrives on the scene next Spring. Pomeranz (and White and Carrasco and…well, the list goes on and on) have loads of potential, but it remains just that – potential, until we see it arrive in Cleveland and (hopefully) thrive on the North Coast.

Speaking of that potential of the young pitching, many were surprised to see that John Farrell, who declined to even interview with the Indians about their managerial vacancy last Winter despite his ties to the organization, accepted the skipper’s wheel in Toronto. While I’m not one to attempt to get into anybody’s head, consider this write-up from Baseball Analysts as to why Farrell is a great fit for the Blue Jays
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I think Farrell’s the perfect choice for the Jays, a team whose future hinges on its young pitching staff’s continued improvement. Shaun Marcum, Ricky Romero, Brett Cecil, Brandon Morrow and Marc Rzepczynski will average 26 years old for the 2011 season. Kyle Drabek, Zach Stewart and Brad Mills aren't far behind. Farrell will be able to lean on all of his professional skills - his MLB player experience, player development expertise and pitching coach track record - to help strengthen Toronto’s biggest asset, its young pitching.

Certainly you can make the argument that the Indians’ “future hinges on its young pitching staff’s continued improvement” just as much as the Blue Jays’ future does, but if you don’t look at the situation in a vacuum (that is, take both “opportunities” into consideration), you can absolutely see why Farrell was reticent to take over a largely unproven pitching staff in Cleveland and much more open-minded about taking on the challenge in Toronto.

Those young pitchers in Toronto mentioned in the piece are all established in MLB to some degree and if you think about where they are in their development versus where the Indians were last Winter in terms of a pitching staff (Carmona was an absolute mess, Carrasco had just been shelled in his cup of coffee, Masterson looked overwhelmed), the question of why Farrell finds himself in Toronto and not Clevelan isn’t so mysterious at all. If you’d like to buy all of the “I wasn’t ready then...and I’m ready now” rationale, that’s fine, but when you think about the two situations as they exist in Toronto and as they existed last year in Cleveland, the decision as to which opportunity represented a team closer to contention (even considering the fact that the Blue Jays are in the AL East), the promise of what could be in Toronto this off-season is wildly more attractive than the job that Farrell didn’t interview for last Winter.

Speaking of former Tribe pitchers with ties to player development and coaching in the organization, the Diamondbacks announced that Chuck Nagy will be heading out to the desert to be their new pitching coach. Certainly, as Tribe fans, we all wish the Chuckwagon the best and even if the Clippers' pitching staff had some disappointments this year in terms of development, if 2010 in AAA is looked back upon as the turning point in the career of Carlos Carrasco and when he finally put it all together (and did so under the tutelage of Nagy), we will all be eternally grateful.

Interestingly, with Nagy now in Arizona and Joel Skinner heading to Oakland to be their bench coach , the scattering of former Tribe coaches continues. While Sandy Alomar, Jr. didn't end up getting the Toronto job that he was a finalist for, is anyone else fascinated how the Indians' system continues to be a bit of a feeder system in MLB?

Perhaps the Nagy and Skinner examples aren't the best segue to illustrate this, but lest you forget, Bud Black and Terry Francona were once members of the Indians front-office, meaning that (with Wedge and Farrell), four current MLB managers were prominent members of the Indians' Front Office or Coaching Staff in the past decade. When given the proper perspective, four out of 30 teams (five if you count Acta) is actually a pretty stunning amount.

Finally, if we're talking about former members of the Indians' Front Office, it was announced in New York that former A's GM Sandy Alderson has been handed the reins in Queens , beating out former D-Backs' GM (and former Indians' Front Office member) Josh Byrnes.

While Jon Heymann seems to think that Byrnes is destined for San Diego because of his relationship with Jeff Moorad , if the Indians are looking to add a "Free Agent" that could make an impact this on the organization, I'll bang the drum once again to bring Byrnes back to the North Coast to present a fresh set of eyes and ideas to an organization that may be more interested in "insurance" rates than the going rates on Free Agents this off-season.