Since I've spent most of the week walking around feeling like Ziggy approaching the complaint department, bemoaning that "The New Yorker is stealing my ideas" after the announcement regarding the new Tribe unis, let's just say that I'm pleased that the Indians are finally falling into line with their ideal uniform combination.

Though it is far from complete (just add some trim), I suppose the next drum that I'll bang (other than the trim for the hats…or have I already mentioned that) is a suggestion that UniWatch had (and they agree on the trim, or lack thereof), in terms of shrinking the script "Indians" back down to size that is more line with the mid-1990s and the 1940s.

Regardless, since we can't just sit here and play Mr. Blackwell all off-season, how about getting into more player-related matters by getting some Tomahawks in the air?

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For starters (and relating to the main area of "need" for the team), Castro has a nice little piece on what they're going to do at 3B and it mainly revolves around the ability of one Jayson Nix learning how to play 3B at an acceptable defensive level. Thankfully for us, my TCF colleague Steve Buffum has been

examining this “issue” at 3B and, in his opening salvo, he surveys the Indians’ organizational scene at the hot corner: What are our options at this point? In-house, I mean.

Let’s see:Nix: hate thisMarte: probably going to leave, would hate thisFrine Pan Hodges: hate thisLonnie Chisenhall: very unlikely to be ready, would not hate this, but would not be optimistic, either Cord Phelps: AFL performance making Nix look like Brandon Inge with the glove, would not hate this, but would not be optimisticJason Donald (assuming Phelps/Kipnis at 2B): no clue, would be prepared to hateJared Goedert: chile, please Buff has two more pieces on his odyssey to find an acceptable 3B (or at least one that doesn’t elicit “hate this” and “chile, please”…and justifiably so), and while his journey through the desert is still in progress, I was alerted to an interesting little fact about my personal preference to man 3B (mainly for reasons stated here) for the Indians in 2011 – Mr. Kevin Kouzmanoff.

Since I think that we’re all pretty much on the same page about the need to upgrade 3B primarily at a defensive level, allow me to direct your eyes to something that was noticed by Adam Van Arsdale over at LGT (who has been penning a great series on the minor league arms, with two parts written to date) in regards to Kouzmanoff’s defensive ability.

If you’re here, you know that I’m simply not interested in figuring out these convoluted defensive metrics that are constantly at odds with each other and value different abilities of a player, muddying the waters to the point that I can’t make any sense of it. Nevertheless, pretty much the best compilation of all of these metrics and subjective opinions that exists is John Dewan’s Fielding Bible, which (in its own words), attempts to “stand up and say: ‘Here is the best fielder at this position in Major League Baseball last season’" by utilizing the opinions of ten analysts and compiling those analysts’ votes for the best defensive players at each position.

Truthfully, I’m making it more involved in terms of an explanation than it needs to be, but to get back to the original premise, Kevin Kouzmanoff received the 9th most votes in this poll of ten analysts, asked to rank the 3B in MLB based on their defensive abilities. That sounds like something we could use at the corner of Carnegie and Ontario, no?

Going further, the one constant objection that has been made on adding Kouz to the mix is his

lack of a bat and while that is certainly valid (his cumulative OPS for the last two years is .700, Andy Marte's is .686), take a look at all of the players receiving votes in the aforementioned John Dewan's Fielding Bible for 2011 and their OPS+ for last year.

The players are listed in the order of how they ranked in terms of received votes for the Fielding Bible:1) Evan Longoria – 142 OPS+2) Ryan Zimmerman – 142 OPS+3) Adrian Beltre – 141 OPS+4) Chase Headley – 97 OPS+5) Scott Rolen – 129 OPS+6) Placido Polanco – 95 OPS+7) Jose Lopez – 71 OPS+8) Lacey Cake – 99 OPS+9) Kevin Kouzmanoff – 83 OPS+10) Brandon Inge – 94 OPS+Players receiving votes past that list of ten is Nick Punto (76 OPS+), Ian Stewart (97 OPS+), Omar Vizquel (82 OPS+), Alexis Rodriguez (123 OPS+), David Wright (131 OPS+), and Danny Valencia (116 OPS+) receiving votes (in that order)

Seeing as how the only available players on the FA market on that list heading into the off-season were Inge, Punto, and Vizquel with Inge and Vizquel both re-signing with their former team, that leaves Kouzmanoff (who is not a FA, just a non-tender candidate) and Punto (who is a FA) as the potentially available players to upgrade the defense at 3B. Sure, they could try to work out something to acquire a Jose Lopez…but is that really an avenue that you want to see them take?

If we're strictly using that list, I don't see how K2 isn't the best option that would be available and the best fit for what the Indians are looking for heading into 2011. Of course, Kouzmanoff is not a Free Agent, so the question becomes whether the Indians would have to work something out with the Athletics or if should they wait to see if K2 would be non-tendered. Maybe I'm attempting to take step number five or six in this whole ordeal when the Indians are simply going to load up on minor league FA to compete with Jayson Nix and Robert Phelps (also known as "Cord") and this whole "the time has arrived to upgrade our 3B defense" is all a charade…but I'd like to think that the feelings on those internal options are pretty much in line with the reactions that Buffum had above.If they are going to go that route of the "3B Derby" that was employed prior to the 2003 season, the list of minor-league FA with the 3B on this list who are at AAA or above consists of Wes Timmons, Andy Marte (!), Travis Metcalf, D'Angelo Jimenez, Matt Macri, Mike Cervenak, Adam Heether, Dallas McPherson, Cody Ransom, Ruben Gotay, Craig Stansberry, Jesus Guzman, Angel Chavez, Matt Brown, Esteban German, and Pete Orr.Everybody ready for the battle royale between Nix and guys named Wes Timmons and Cody Ransom and Craig Stansberry and Pete Orr to become the "new Casey Blake"?

Yeah, I think I'll take the Kouzmanoff option...

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If the Indians need to work out a trade with Oakland to secure Kouzmanoff, could there be more players coming to the North Coast in such a deal? This is brought up because Athletics "won" the right to negotiate with Japanese RHP Hisashi Ikawuma and while that may seem like it has nothing to do with the off-season for the Indians, consider what Michael Urban of ComCast Bay Area wrote a couple of days ago about how adding Ikawuma perhaps is the first domino to fall for a couple of moves for Oakland:

Getting Iwakuma is far more about Oakland's obvious weakness -- offense. --snip--At present, the A's offense is underwhelming, and that's putting it kindly. They need at least two significant additions; impact, middle-of-the-order guys. They aren't going to get them via free agency, though, because those types of players simply don't want to play in Oakland, for a variety of reasons ranging from the pitcher-friendly Coliseum to the tiny crowds to the perception -- fair or not, it's out there -- that playing for manager Bob Geren isn't exactly baseball Nirvana.Here's where Iwakuma comes in. Say he signs and is indeed a legit No. 3 man, maybe even a No. 2. Add him to a stable of quality young arms that includes starters Trevor Cahill, Brett Anderson, Gio Gonzalez, Vin Mazzaro, Dallas Braden and Josh Outman, and late relievers Andrew Bailey and Joey Devine. What's the most desirable trade chip in baseball? Quality young arms. You see where this is going, right? The A's could start wheeling and dealing, because that's the only way they'll get the types of hitters they need; trades don't give the player a choice.

That logic is pretty sound...is it not?

So sound, in fact, that the A's have already moved Mazzaro to Kansas City for David DeJesus (and I LOVE that deal for Kansas City because they just got a 24-year-old sinkerballing starter that will be in their rotation from Day 1 in 2011 and a projectable 22-year-old LHP…all for 1 year of Dave DeJesus), but the question becomes whether Oakland would still be willing to move any of those other arms in an attempt to upgrade their offense, past the band-aid that DeJesus (FA after 2011) represents.See where I'm going here in terms of what I'd like to see the Indians do this off-season?

Rather than simply loading up and loading up on players with similar skill sets or who play similar positions, how about moving a player like Weglarz or Donald or Phelps (whose short-and-long-term future with the organization isn't that clear) to the Athletics or another team

for some young pitching?

Realizing that Oakland and other teams are looking for guys like DeJesus, who can help them right away, now might be the time to scan the horizon and see if the team can make a deal for a young arm, preferably one with a higher ceiling than that of Tomlin/Gomez/Huff/etc. If you really want to get nuts, you could entertain shopping a guy like Jason Kipnis for a legitimate starting pitcher. Before anyone goes too nuts, let's all realize that the Indians of the past few years have never been able to "sell high" on these guys and while the warts came out, their usefulness to the team (and their trade value) diminished. Kipnis is used simply as an example of a player that is certainly very highly-thought of right now, and if the Indians are CONVINCED that he is the long-term answer at 2B, then they should probably hold onto him. However, if the Indians think that they can survive with Cord Phelps and Jason Donald and Jayson Nix at 2B and turn a Jason Kipnis into a legitimate starting pitcher that would be under club control for the next 4 to 5 years…then yes, I think that the team should explore the trade market for a guy like Kipnis or for a guy like Nick Weglarz.Again, I'm the first one to understand that the lifeblood of the Indians' organization is going to be young, cost-controlled players, but if you're looking for a creative way to improve the roster while departing from the status quo, pulling off a trade with a team like the A's – giving up young players for young players in the process – would add an interesting wrinkle to what looks to be a pretty mundane off-season.

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On the topic of trading a guy like Weglarz, while injuries have derailed the last few seasons for him to some degree, it will be interesting to watch where he plays the field in Columbus this year as the options of LF, 1B, and DH (though he's mainly played LF) all would seem to have impediments at the big league level, whether it be another prospect attempting to establish themselves in LaPorta and Brantley, a giant contract that isn't going away in Hafner, or hope that a player can return to form from a few years ago in Sizemore. Additionally, I don't care what the Indians are saying, Sizemore is your LF by the middle of the 2011 season at the latest...assuming he's healthy enough to be out there at that point.Speaking of Sizemore (and no, I really don't care about the hacker who stole those pictures, so look up that link on your own time), I received an e-mail over the weekend from my friend Tyler who had some insightful and terrifying thoughts on St. Grady. They pertain to his injury, what the Indians knew/know, and what can be truly expected going forward...and it goes a little something like this:

The Indians have acknowledged, through multiple channels, that the mechanics of Grady Sizemore's swing were deleterious to his joint health. The implication being, we should temper our expectations for Sizemore's return to form, because some kinesiological component of his

former productivity was simultaneously the cause of his injuries.

Two things: First, and I won't dwell on this, but our erstwhile superstar was ruined by the swing that made him good, poisoned by his own secret sauce. C'mon, that's a morale T.K.O. Second, though it would be simple to accuse the Indians of ignorance of Grady's condition -- or worse -- let's give them the benefit of the doubt and stipulate that they'd wrapped their heads around the calculus, in part because I don't want to ponder the less-charitable alternative.

Read: they've almost certainly known for years, maybe longer, that Sizemore's "sell by" date was coming sooner than they'd originally hoped. They had Grady under contract at least through 2011, and they gambled that what they knew to be an inevitable health-related decline in his skills could be defrayed until he was off the payroll.

The math was wrong, perhaps foreseeably so. Grady's injuries have forced the issue. He's been more or less AWOL for two years, and the team remains on the hook for further significant outlays of roster time and money. His game was power and speed. There's sparse cause for optimism that he'll ever again be powerful or fast.

*And the truth was so frustratingly mundane, so unpalatable. Our headfirst-diving, swing-for-the-fences poster boy, not torpedoed by catastrophe but bled out by repetitive use. We lose the cover model, and we don't even get catharsis – just the wearisome and unsettling realization of Grady's fragility and by extension our own. I'll grant you that I could yet be proven wrong. Grady may fully recover with contractual time to spare; he may then sign an extension at a significant discount. But there's little sense in our hoping for that outcome, much less expecting it. We are plenty conversant with disappointment these days. It's time we cozy up to pragmatism.*Boom…

"Cozy Up to Pragmatism"…I can see the banners going up on the corner of Carnegie and Ontario now.