You remember how we found a bunch of minors league third basemen in the Eastern Divisions?

Yeah, that's not gonna happen here.

There are a variety of reasons for this: some guys that started in the minors already arrived. Some guys are pretty much untouchable. Some systems are laughably void. But the fact is, if you want to find a third baseman from another team in the A.L. Central, you're better off just opening up the major-league rosters.

Chicago:

Consider the White Sox. They have not one, not two, but THREE young candidates. One of them is Gord Beckham, who played 2B in 2009 then 3B in 2010. The other two spent a significant amount of time in the minors because ... well ... if you have a chance to let Mark Teahen inspire this graphic , you have to do that, right? More seriously, Brent Morel started at AA before holding his own in Chicago by the end of the year, and Dayan Viciedo hit .308 and slugged .521 in 104 AB, but still posted a subpar .321 OBP because he walked TWICE. Yes, two times. (He struck out 25 times.)

(By the way, when I say Morel "held his own" I mean "he hit like Jayson Nix, but that's impressive for a guy who started the year in AA.")

Now, I've read any number of blurblets around the Interwebs that suggest that friends of neighbors of dentists of third cousins of Kenny Williams have heard that Gord Beckham is available. I asked Jim of the Sox Machine (see the Teahen graphic) about this:

Well, I think the phrase was, "believe the White Sox will listen to offers," which is just about meaningless in his world. Kenny has said many a time that he'll listen to offers for any player, and nobody is untouchable. But I think Beckham is still locked in as the future of the offense.

For Cleveland, it would take a guy like Santana. Not saying that'd be a smart trade for you guys, but but he'd have to be bowled over to make it happen, like Kenny was when Texas offered Danks for McCarthy. I don't think anybody's going to be able to serve as a pawn shop for him.

Frankly, this makes a lot of sense to me. For the record, I originally asked Jim about trading Chris Perez for Gord Beckham, because the ChiSox need a closer and I think an awful lot of Beckham. Jim figuratively laughed in my face. So he thinks even more of Beckham than I do, which probably jibes with how Kenny Williams feels, too.

If anything, I think Viciedo is the odd man out: he has Mad Panda Disease in that he is both roly *and* poly, and the little amount I've seen of his defense at third is ... well, t'isn't good. He might get a shot at 1B with Tyler Flowers, who is nominally a catcher of some sort, but the point is, Beckham is pretty much the guy you actually want, and he's probably not available. Viciedo would make a good DH option. Morel probably isn't much of an upgrade on Nix for 2011: he might blossom, but by then, Chisenhall should be ready.

Detroit:

Okay, here's the state of the Detroit right side of the infield: they re-signed BOTH Brandon Inge AND Jhonny Peralta ... because they want Peralta to play *shortstop*. Why did they do this? Because the backup is Don Kelly, a 30-year-old left fielder, and the minor-leagues feature ... nothing. Go look up the Toledo Mud Hens stat sheet on MILB.com. They have ONE third baseman listed. He got THREE AB. Obviously there's something else going on there, like one of the guys listed at 2B is really a 3B or something, but you are probably not going to find a gem on the 2010 Toledo Mud Hens roster is my point. Also, Brandon Inge and Jhonny Peralta were re-signed. Oh, my.

In AA, they have a guy named Brian Pounds who hit .281/.359/.438 with 9 errors in 53 games. Believe it or not, my excitement is contained.

Minnesota:

I put them out of (alphabetical) order because it's short. Danny Valencia is the gem, and he got called up, and he'll be playing 3B in Minnesota for the foreseeable future. Nick Punto will not. Many twins fans consider this a net plus, but only if they have cortical wrinkles. At AAA, the Twins sported Brendan Harris and D'Angelo Jimenez. Remember D'Angelo Jimienez? With the Reds and such? Yeah, same guy. Still not good. Matt Macri hit .251/.322/.405 in AAA. Every third baseman in AA is roughly as desirable as a brussels sprout merengue pie.

Kansas City:

So now we have plenty of room to talk about the Royals. The king of all third base prospects is Mike Moustakas, just today ranked the #1 overall prospect in the #1 farm system by Baseball Prospectus' Kevin Goldstein. You are not going to get Mike Moustakas, who got the bulk of the plate appearances in the minors.

However ...

Wilson Betemit played a bunch of third last season, and hit surprisingly well. Is he "really" a .297/.378/.511 hitter? Probably not. But he probably earned the Opening Day job with his 2010 performance (and, really, Betemit has always had talent: maybe not .900 OPS talent, but talent nonetheless). His backup was discouraging enough with the glove as to be moved to left field, where he is no sure thing.

Alex Gordon.

Now, I may be a sucker at this point. Alex Gordon might be Nebraskan for "Andy Marte," a guy who punishes AAA pitching (.315/.442/.577 this season) but has exploitable holes against major-league pitching (.215/.315/.355 this season). I get that. Also, he's not a particularly good third baseman, or at least not the last couple of seasons. And he's starting to get into that arbitration/expensive area. But I really like the idea of getting Alex Gordon for less than he's worth and having him bloom away from the hometown pressure (he grew up a Royals fan). Would it be guaranteed to work, or even LIKELY to work? I'll have to stop short of "likely." I'd consider it a better bet than Jayson Nix, though. Problem: Gordon is left-handed with a pretty pronounced platoon split, so plunking him into a lineup with Sizemore, Brantley, Choo, and Hafner might be awkward.

My original idea a while back was to offer Dayton Moore, who seems to like veterans very much until he knows the yoot is really ready, Grady Sizemore for Gordon and Kila Ka'aihue. (I would find a place for Ka'aihue ... trading Sizemore could put LaPorta back in LF if it came to that.) However, I doubt you could REALLY trade Grady Sizemore at this point. In the past it was:

Cleveland Fans*: You CAN'T trade Grady Sizemore!*

Now it is:

Opposing GMs*: Um ... you CAN'T trade Grady Sizemore (until he shows he can play).*

But it doesn't have to be THAT deal. Maybe a couple of arms. Depends on how sour the Royals really are on Gordon.

Interestingly enough, though, there might be another guy in the system work a look: Ed Lucas has been passed by at this point (Moose will block him forever now). He is 28 (29 in May), but hit .307/.398/.480 this past season, with 13 homers and 12 errors in 99 games (352 AB). He also sported a nice 52:68 BB:K ratio, suggesting good strike zone control. In 2009, he hit .290/.388/.448 with 10 homers in 355 AB in AA and .304/.372/.415 in AA the year before, so the strike zone judgement appears real. Now, every system needs SOMEONE to play and to have "just in case" (of injury or bombing out or what have you), so Lucas may not be exactly a throwaway. But according to the artificial standards I set out last week, the plate discipline numbers to me make him a very reasonable bet to be better than Nix in 2011.

KC also has a guy in AA named Jamie Romak who hit .278/.389/.459, but that's in 45 games: he spent the first 82 in single-A. Not as advanced as Chisenhall, in other words.

Summing up:

Major-league guy you probably can't get: ***Gord Beckham***
Major-league guy who is worth inquiring about: ***Alex Gordon***
Major-league guys with warts probably not a real upgrade: ***Brent Morel, Dayan Viciedo***
Minor-league guy who is probably inexpensive and reasonably likely to outperform Nix: ***Ed Lucas***
Major-league franchise that deserves your pity with respect to third basemen: ***Detroit***