From the majors' only 6-team division to its only 4-teamer, the move to the A.L. West would be 33% easier to write, except that the N.L. Central was so paltry that it doesn't work out that way. At least in terms of third base targets, that is.

In any event, in looking around the A.L. West, we see a variety of ... gunk. Do you realize that the Very Best Starting Third Baseman in the Division was Michael Young ... who is a third baseman in name only? Defensively, Chone Figgins could play third, but his bat was well and truly execrable in 2010. He is back on the ESPN "Depth Chart" as a 2B for 2011. His replacement will be Matt Tuiasosopo, who was converted to 3B from QB. The Angels boast any number of horrifying choices at third (although they're rumored to be a prime suitor for Adrian Beltre), and the A's feature the kind of cast-offs and patch jobs you expect from a team like ... well ... the Oakland A's, I suppose.

And these guys are the STARTERS. Maybe they have some hotshots on the way?

Maybe not.

Angels:

The Depth Chart lists the Angels as having Albert Callaspo, Brandon Wood, Kevin Frandsen, and Freddy Sandoval. Of these, precisely none of them are quality third base choices. Collapse-O posted a .302 OBP and a .109 ISO. Wood is well-known for his Quad-A prowess: a few years ago, I would have jumped at the chance to go after Wood, but after a .169/.198/.260 career line in 450 AB (13 walks, 145 (!!) Ks), I am no longer interested. Sure, he could come around. Heck, he's listed as their SHORTSTOP. He might work. I'm sure he's really, really

available. Did I mention he hit .196/.241/.255 ... in TRIPLE-A? In the PCL? Brandon Wood, at this point, is broken. Frandsen is a schmoe with a .636 career OPS at age 28. Sandoval hit .210/.326/.247 ... in TRIPLE-A. Consider the AAA third basemen of the Caliheimgeles Angels:

Frandsen: .277/.353/.380

Sandoval: .210/.326/.247

Wood: .196/.241/.255

Abel Nieves: .188/.350/.188

Dwayne Bailey: .167/.167/.167

Carlos Colmenares: .302/.337/.349

I'd get excited about Colmenares ... had he not hit .275/.366/.317 in AA before getting a call-up. Three seventeen slugging! His ISO in AA was .042 ... in AAA, .047. In the PCL! What are these guys eating, anti-spinach?

This is the most horrifying collective of foul, ugly excrement that I find myself hoping that the Angels are not reading my blog, as they should poach at least five of my targets to stock their system. (They should really, REALLY sign Adrian Beltre, too.)

Oakland:

Third base depth chart: Kevin Kouzmanoff, Edwin Encarnacion, Steve Tolleson. We've talked at length about Kouzmanoff already. I believe I've found at least three people more interesting that Kevin Kouzmanoff at this point, and he's only a non-tender candidate anyway. Ed Encarnacion is possibly the worst defensive third baseman we'll encounter on our trip, and they just traded to get him. Seriously, we're talking "rookie Jim Thome" or "rookie Ryan Braun" territory here.

Tolleson, now ... he was one of the better prospects in the Twins organization in 2009 (well, I mean, top 15, not top 5) and bounced between Oakland and Sacramento this season. He hit .332/.412/.503 in AAA but .286/.340/.408 in the majors as a 27-year-old. He's listed as a shortstop and is far more the "utility infielder" type, having been listed as 2B/SS at several stops. Whether he'd really hit well enough to man third is an open question, but a .340 OBP in the majors in his first season is not bad at all. He'd probably be a step up from, say, Ed Lucas, but he might actually cost something, as I see Tolleson making the Oakland roster as the backup for several positions.

At AAA, the A's sported the departed Dallas McPherson (now in the White Sox org), who hit 22 homers with only 5 errors in 84 games but only managed an OBP of .339 in the PCL. They also employed Adam Heether, who does not appear to be able to hit.

More interesting, some guy named Jeff Baisley hit .325/.384/.492 in AA with 4 homers and .274/.358/.453 with 6 homers in AAA. He'll be 28 in Dec. He made 2 errors in 49 games in AAA and 3 errors in 51 games in AA, where he apparently played 1B instead. His 2009 was cringeworthy at .248/.308/.389, but he could be a stopgap guy with more upside than Jayson Nix.

At AA, Alex Valdez is such a butcher at third they acquired Edwin Encarnacion to improve his defense.

Seattle:

Matt Tuiasosopo is the starter. His career line in Seattle is .176/.234/.306.

Chone Figgins is moving to 2B.

Josh Wilson is the third 3B. He is the starting SS. So we're not talking depth here.

Where we ARE talking depth is on the farm, where there are TWO interesting guys: Matt Mangini and Alex Liddi.

Now, look: Liddi is by FAR the more interesting candidate. He was protected on the 40-man this week and hit .281/.353/.476 with 15 homers in AA, turning only 22 in August. Yes, he made 31 errors in 134 games and may never be a good defensive third baseman, but he's had a breakout year and performed well in the fall leagues as well. He's Italian (whereby I mean "born in Italy," not "of Italian descent"), which makes him more interesting than your average prospect, but it's likely the Mariners view him as a building block rather than a trade chip. Warning flag (besides the 31 errors): sported 145 Ks in 502 AB.

Which brings us to Mangini. Asking Conor Dowley of Pro Ball NW about Mangini:

I'm a fan of Mangini, probably as big of one as you'll find, but even I have my doubts. I saw a bunch of him this year and thought his defense wasn't THAT bad; several of his errors should have been charged to the first baseman. He's got range at third that's stupidly huge, which helps make up for his fringy (and slightly wild) arm. His instincts are great, but only when he uses them; he doesn't trust himself, and tends to overthink when he was time to sit back and not just have to react. Even if he can trust himself, he'll probably never even quite be an average defender though, and the bat is probably only a little bit above average. He could be a useful bridge guy to a 3B of the future for a team that needs one, but he's not a long-term starter as things stand I think.

Those "errors" Conor mentions? There were 28 of them. In 117 games. I understand that's not good. Did I mention we're replacing Jayson Nix' defense here? Maybe given a context-free shot Mangini could play acceptible defense. Anyway, he hit .313/.352/.521 in Tacoma and turns 25 in December. The one thing to watch out for is that he bats left-handed, which isn't a great fit for the current Tribe roster, but ... did I mention we're replacing Jayson Nix here?

Texas:

Mike Young, Jorge Cantu, Andres Blanco (who is really a middle infielder and hits in such a manner) at the majors: none of these guys is worth pursuing for money, desirability, or availability concerns.

In AAA, Matthew Brown hit .249/.311/.442 with 12 E in 79 G. Meh.

In AA, Renny Osuna hit .293/.340/.389 with 4 E in 119 G. Nice glove! Rotten bat thus far. Not likely to surpass Chisenhall on the development curve.

So to conclude this Division's searching:

Prospect I can't have but covet: Alex Liddi
AAA Players who I think would make fine bridges to Chisenhall, at least even money to beat out Nix: Jeff Baisley, Matt Mangini
Guy with actual major-league experience who I probably can't have either but would actually improve the team: Steve Tolleson
Team whose pool of third baseman is worse than Detroit's or Cleveland's: Angels