As the Indians come out of the All-Star Break, staring firmly at a vital part of their schedule (though that could really be said at any point from here on out), the focus has turned to the Rumor Mill that keeps spinning away on every TV broadcast and every radio sound wave this time of year. By now, you've seen all the names of "available" players and the lists of "buyers" and "sellers" as the national analysts ready their "winners" and "losers" of the Trade Deadline piece that come flying out at us every August 1st. With the Indians allegedly being one of the teams picking up the phone to make calls instead of simply fielding calls on players (as has been the case in years past), there is a level of excitement on the North Coast as people sell themselves on Jeff Francoeur or Ryan Ludwick or Josh Willingham as a potential difference-maker down the stretch for the Indians.

However, lost amidst all of this talk that the Indians "need" to add a RH bat for the final two months, preferably of the "impact" variety, is that this "need" for a RH bat is not one that is unique to the second half of this season. Yes, a RH bat would balance out this lineup quite a bit, but what the Indians really need to add is a RH bat that can help this year…and beyond. Perhaps that is why Jeff Francoeur and Ryan Ludwick and Josh Willingham are less than desirable to me in that I get that they would help this year, but then they're gone and the Indians are left this off-season looking for a RH bat once again.

Obviously everyone knows that Hafner, Sizemore, Choo, and Brantley are all LH, but did anyone notice that the "3B of the Future" who just ascended to the North Coast (and took a pitch off of his face) is also LH? Want to guess what Jason Kipnis is?
Yep, he's LH and the only two other top-level prospects that figure to offer any real help in the coming years, Nick Weglarz and Zeke Carrera (even as a 4th OF), are both LH as well. So, if the current team stays in place around the diamond and The Chiz and Kipnis take over 3B and 2B on a full-time basis next year, here's what you're looking at:

Left-Handed

Hafner
Choo
Sizemore
Brantley
Chisenhall
Kipnis

Switch-Hitter
Santana
Cabrera

Right-Handed
LaPorta

As my friend Tyler recently wrote me, "No wonder they were so hot for LaPorta" in terms of what they targeted in the CC deal. What he means by that (and I'm pretty sure that there was a quote from Shapiro at the time that foretold of this) is that RH bats, particularly power RH bats are a suddenly dying breed in MLB. There are 76 qualified RH hitters in MLB right now, 14 of which have an OPS over .850
…and one of them is Jhonny Peralta, who currently has the 8th highest OPS in MLB among RH hitters. In 2007 (just to pick a year in which the Indians were also contending), there were 23 RH hitters with an OPS over .850 when the season ended and the numbers only get bigger the further back you go. Some of this is a function of more stringent PED testing, but 14 RH hitters this year have SLG over .500 as well (and Peralta is 7 on that list) and given that there are 30 teams in MLB, that means about ½ of the teams in MLB have a RH bat that has a SLG over .500 and ½ the teams have a RH bat with an OPS over .850. Interestingly, the Tigers and the White Sox are the only two teams with two RH hitters on either of those lists, but that's neither here nor there…

Regardless, while the obvious and lazy "they need to make moves NOW to improve this team for the stretch run and a RH bat would be a good start" pieces (without offering much by way of suggestions other than the oft-discussed, overexposed, unattractive options) have flown all around these Interwebs and continue to take up space on people's front stoops, the starker reality is that the Indians – as an organization – need a RH bat for the second half and for the next couple of years as, if LaPorta happens to flame out, you're looking at an awfully LH-heavy lineup going forward with the likely replacements for what you would figure to be the July 2012 lineup (Wegz and Zeke) also being LH hitters.

What does that mean for right now?
For starters, it means that the Indians should be targeting RH bats that are under club control for at least a couple of years, that are versatile to play multiple positions as it looks like a majority of positions are "spoken for" or at least reserved for certain players or top prospects, and they should use some level of boldness to perhaps find a potential impact bat that could be available for a team that finds themselves with greater (or different needs) than a RH bat.

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