As the weather has now unquestionably turned to Fall on the North Coast as most eyes turn (once again) to the seemingly (once again) moribund Browns and I attempt to discern which craft brewery puts out the best Oktoberfest beer (GLBC is in the lead, over Thirsty Dog and Brooklyn Brewery, with Bell's in the queue) as the seasons are made for adapting your drinking, the Indians' season marches on, if largely ignored. While the Oktoberfest tastings may be done with some sort of numbing effect in mind, given that the Tigers have now not only won the division, but are a mere 3 GB behind the Yankees for the best record in the AL as the Indians' slide down the W-L record seems to be greased, it doesn't mean that there aren't things to be watching as the Tribe plays out the string here as they are hanging on in 2nd place (who had that in the pool) and are threatening to finish the season with a record over .500.

Those "things to be watching" don't involve making major decisions for 2012 on the basis of a couple of weeks in September (Karim Garcia is somewhere with fond memories of his time as an Indian), but rather to see how the Indians can balance protecting some of the principal pieces, while giving those pieces some confidence going into next year and watching some of their young players down the stretch. Certainly, there seems to be some logic in just shutting some of these "veterans" down as there is absolutely no reason to risk further injury (ahem…The BLC) or watch inning counts mount unnecessarily (for Masterson for example as Clecago Joe suggested in the comments) in games that aren't that important in the grand scheme of things. Of course, **news broke late this week** that the Indians do, in fact, plan on bringing Josh Tomlin back to likely start one of the games in an upcoming doubleheader. Maybe there is some level of credence to this whole "prove to oneself that they can be healthy going into the off-season", but have we learned nothing this season?

If something can go wrong, health-wise, for this team, it will…then it will again. Do the Indians REALLY have to bring Josh Tomlin back, even just for a couple of innings, after what we saw time after time this season, with players being cleared to play because they passed all of the "tests" in place, only to see them struggle and eventually end up on the DL again?

Given the rotational depth (or lack thereof), I'm all for shutting Tomlin down, giving Masterson maybe one more start and resting Cabrera and Santana A LOT more than they're being rested right now. Maybe that means that we're watching a baseball team that looks more like the Clippers than the Indians for the final two weeks, but isn't that how it's been for a while? Give the guys that need continued reps in MLB (Chisenhall, Kipnis, Marson, Huff, Gomez, McAllister) the opportunity to play these final two weeks and stop worrying about giving a guy like Tomlin a chance to feel like he CAN come back to play again in 2011. As we found out with The BLC, the wishes of these guys to finish the season "on the field, not on the DL" are potentially counterproductive.

That being said, and with that as just the appetizer, let's get off into a Lazy Sunday as we take a look at some of the young players that significantly figure into 2012. For some of those players, answers have presented themselves in 2011 and some that may be coming in 2012.. Seeing as how the 1B "issue" figures to evolve – with **Jayson Stark identifying the Marlins as one of the probably "surprise" spenders this off-season**
…and
where have I heard that before
– throughout the off-season (so don't just go ordering that Indians' Gaby Sanchez jersey yet), and with plenty of time to talk about the options of Sizemore and Carmona that exist, 2011 saw a number of young players attempt to assert themselves in MLB. While the health of the walking wounded Wahoos may be more important for success in 2012, forget attempting to answer the questions of health (Brantley, Choo, Sizemore, Hafner) as I'm not going to attempt to wade into that muck of MRI's and put-off surgeries. Rather, let's get into the young players that saw their first major action in 2011 and what can be gleaned (if anything) from their performances as we get off on a Lazy One…

Starting off, remember that idea a few months ago, that **there were a number of players in the lineup that entered 2011 with very few MLB plate appearances**
?
In case you forgot, as the team attempted to keep pace in the AL Central, they were doing so with a cast of characters full of guys still cutting their teeth in MLB:
Cabrera – 1,610 MLB plate appearances entering 2011 season
Brantley – 446 MLB plate appearances entering 2011 season
Hafner – 3,852 MLB plate appearances entering 2011 season
Santana – 192 MLB plate appearances entering 2011 season
LaPorta – 623 MLB plate appearances entering 2011 season
Chisenhall – 0 MLB plate appearances entering 2011 season
Carrera – 0 MLB plate appearances entering 2011 season
Kearns – 3,799 MLB plate appearances entering 2011 season
Kipnis – 0 MLB plate appearances entering 2011 season
Marson – 400 MLB plate appearances entering 2011 season

There are six guys on that list that had fewer than 450 MLB PA going into the season (Brantley, Santana, Chisenhall, Carrerra, Kipnis, and Marson) and since Carrerra and Marson figure to

serve on the bench next year and since Brantley logged nearly 500 PA this year and has almost reached 1,000 career plate appearances (with a career OBP of .316…but that's a topic for another day), let's focus on the presumed starters going into next season that had fewer than 200 MLB PA coming into 2011 – The Axe Man, Kipnis, and The Chiz.

Despite a slow start (a couple of weeks, at least) and some defensive…um, transgressions, Santana has shown himself to be the potentially impactful bat that he was purported to be as he rose through the ranks of the Indians' farm system. With his 25th HR yesterday, Santana tied the Indians' record for HR by a switch-hitter (held by Victor) in his first full season in MLB. From April 28th through Friday night, Santana has a .836 OPS with 22 HR in 121 games, which projects out to a 30 HR season. While projections are just that, Santana is 4th in BB rate in the AL and while his K rate is concerning (in that it represents a stark departure from his MiLB numbers), there are **12 players in the AL with a K/BB rate better than that of Santana with an OPS over .800** . They are Miggy Cabrera, Joey Bats, Ian Kinsler, Dustin PEDroia, David Ortiz, Paul Konerko, Victor Martinez, Nick Swisher, Casey Kotchman, and Evan Longoria.

The BB rate may not be all that impressive to some, but that list should be, particularly if you remember (again) that Santana is in his first full MLB season and that he's likely to finish the season with the highest OPS on the team. Yes…I know Jason Kipnis has a higher OPS as does Shelley Duncan's (in 1/3 of the plate appearances) but it could be argued (pretty easily) that The Axe Man was the Indians' best hitter this year. Yes, his BA has been low, but **as Joe Posnanski points out** , the likely MVP of the AL has a BA of .264 and nobody's made a peep about that, so maybe this antiquated idea that BA is even worth mentioning in the worth of a hitter is passing. Someday that notion will make its way to the pages of the PD, but even if you want to give some weight to BA, given that Santana has the 7th lowest BABIP in the AL, doesn't it stand to reason that the still-25-year-old Santana has arrived as a hitting machine for the Tribe?

The Indians have had a lot go wrong this season and have a lot of questions that remain in their lineup, but Santana's placement in the middle of that lineup (and it being justified by his 2011 performance) is not one of them as Santana is ready to anchor a lineup, something he's really been doing since the beginning of May.

Heading down the 3B line from where The Axe Man dons his tools of ignorance (and will continue to), the question becomes whether another highly-touted Tribe prospect, Lonnie Chisenhall, is ready to consistently contribute in 2012. That answer is a little murkier as The Chiz has looked overwhelmed at times as he's actually walking LESS than Orlando Cabrera did as an Indian…and that's no small feat. In fact **his BB/PA is the 2nd lowest in the AL** , with only the notoriously free-swinging Vlad Guerrero "besting" The Chiz in that department. The reason that his low BB rate is a cause for concern is that Chisenhall had a respectable BB rate in MiLB and has struggled to have that translate to MLB.

It is worth noting that Chisenhall had a .779 OPS when he got in the face on July 8th, and had a sub-.600 OPS in the 40 games after he took a fastball off his cheekbone. After his recent hot streak (he has 5 XBH, 4 of which have been HR in his last 9 games), his OPS has crept back over the .700 mark. Certainly, more may have been expected from Chisenhall, given all of the hype that surrounded his Spring Training in particular, but The Chiz has looked like a 22-year-old who struggled to make the transition to MLB pitching, as so many young, talented players have done before him. What is interesting for Chisenhall is that there was some (deserved) concern over whether he would be able to handle LHP in MLB, as he had struggled against LHP in the Minors. Oddly enough, The Chiz has crushed LHP this year (.910 OPS vs. LHP) while struggling against RHP (.623 OPS vs. RHP) when the opposite was true throughout his MiLB career as Lonnie always struggled against LHP and thrived against RHP before arriving to the parent club.

Whether anything can truly be gleaned from that is unlikely as the small sample siren blares, but it would seem that Chisenhall could benefit from more "seasoning" at AAA at some point, perhaps to begin 2012. Whether he would start the season in Columbus next year remains to be seen, but the performance of Jack Hannahan (**whose career and year is looked at in great detail by the always-terrific Ryan Richards here**) in 2011 gives some comfort that the Indians may have a serviceable bridge in place to allow Chisenhall to develop at his own pace. The Chiz may not be completely ready to contribute at a high level to the Indians, but the signs (18 XBH in 182 PA) are there to allow the optimism to remain regarding Chisenhall's impact, even if that impact is not in the immediate future.

Unlike Chisenhall, the one rookie who made an immediate impact on the Tribe was Lonnie's

infield-mate, Jason Kipnis, whose ranks in the AL (**rookie** or **not**) provide some perspective as to the level at which Kipnis performed once he was promoted. Now, it should be noted that Kipnis will be 25 years old next April, so he is a much older "young" player than Chisenhall, but unlike at 3B, the Indians do not have a veteran player (any more) that would prevent the team from giving Kipnis the 2B job from here on out. Yes, Donald and Phelps still exist in the 2B mix, but those two seem to be competing to become a Utility IF for this team going forward as Kipnis asserted himself in a manner in which it's not hard to picture him at the top of the order for the foreseeable future.

Kipnis' skill at the plate, his hustle, and his talent were obvious from the time that he arrived in Cleveland and, much like the performance of Santana, his 2011 seasonprovides a glimpse of what should be a productive career for Kipnis as an Indian. With the revolving door that 2B has been spinning since Robbie Alomar made his way to the Big Apple, Kipnis may actually finally settle the position for the Indians and provide some production from 2B that Indians' fans haven't been accustomed to in quite some time. Kipnis, like Santana, is likely to sit at the top-to-middle-of-the-lineup from the next few years and figures to be a major cog in the offense going forward, which is more than most would have wished for when the season started.

Speaking of expectations when the season started, how many people would have assumed that Josh Tomlin would have a guaranteed spot in the 2012 rotation, with another spot likely to be filled by Huff, Gomez, or McAllister?

With White and Pomz in the system when the 2011 season started, it was assumed that those arms would have been leapfrogged with perhaps ONE of the Tomlin/Huff/Gomez/ McAllister pile factoring in past 2011, but with the Ubaldo deal, it would seem that the rotation figures to be filled by two of the aforementioned names. Maybe Mitch Talbot reappears at some point, but if Tomlin figures to have one rotation spot locked down (assuming nothing goes SPROING in his elbow…and this is me knocking on wood) with the hope that the April and May Tomlin is going to eventually win over the July and August Tomlin, the Indians will have one spot to fill in their rotation internally, with the likely candidates of Gomez, Huff, and McAllister all making their cases down the stretch in 2011.

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