In a rather stunning about face, it seems that Grady Sizemore will remain an Indian…at least for one more year, as he agreed to a one-year, $5M deal (with about $4M in incentives) to remain with Cleveland. To say that the growing scuttlebutt that a deal was imminent and the actual terms of the deal were surprising is an understatement as most indications were that Sizemore would dip his toe into the FA waters after the Indians declined his $9M club option for 2012 as Grady would attempt to re-establish his market value elsewhere with an eye towards a bigger contract after the 2012 season. After some grandstanding by his agent and after Grady's name was attached to a myriad of other teams – with the word "intriguing" always preceding his name in those reports – Sizemore will return to patrol the OF at the corner of Carnegie and Ontario…at least as much as his body will allow. The deal answers one question of the off-season (how will the Indians attempt to replace Grady…with GRADY!), even if it opens many more in terms of how much this team is realistically counting on contributions from Sizemore (and Hafner, for that matter) as they attempt to make a push in 2012.

But there's plenty of time to get to that as there is certainly some intrigue to get to as to how Sizemore ended up back on the North Coast after most assumed that the declining of his option spelled the end for Grady, the Indian. To start, let's go back to that option, which was a $9M club option that the Indians were told by Grady's agent, Joe Urbon, to either pick up or decline it as the renegotiation looked to be in everyone's best interest never seemed to find traction. With that, the line in the sand was drawn by Urbon, and the Indians responded as one would have thought they would respond – declining the option, asking Urbon to keep them abreast of the demand for Grady, and staying "interested" in having Sizemore return in a deal that was likely similar to what they were offering as part of the renegotiated option.

Apparently convinced that the interest in Sizemore would be enough to find a one-year deal with a higher guaranteed amount than the Indians were offering, Urbon began seeking suitors other

than Cleveland. As the weeks progressed though, it was obvious that Urbon had been overly hopeful about the interest that existed on the open market for Sizemore. Though he was in front of microphones and cameras, touting teams that showed an interest in Sizemore's services for 2012, it became increasingly apparent that most teams' interest fell in line with what the Indians were probably willing to risk on a one-year deal for Grady, a low guaranteed amount with some incentives built in.

Frankly, though speculation came out in various outlets that Sizemore would be able to find a one-year deal close to the $9M option that was declined, I never really understood this idea that Sizemore was going to hit the FA market and find a team willing to give him a deal (even if it was a one-year contract) that was going to be anywhere close to the that $9M, regardless of market size or any particular team's appetite for risk. But that idea existed and continued to exist as **SI.com's Jon Heymann JUST wrote earlier this week that he thought that Sizemore would get a one-year deal with SEVEN MILLION guaranteed "plus a lot of incentives"** , something that Sizemore didn't even sniff.

Maybe the $7M guaranteed deal that Heymann predicted and the $5M guaranteed deal that Sizemore inked don't look all that different, but remember that Sizemore and his agent looked for a better (or even comparable) deal than the Indians presumably offered as a renegotiation of that option and still came back for less that ¾ of the amount that Heymann offered as a "guess" just this week. Instead, Sizemore will get the $5M with about $4M in incentives and those incentives aren't all that easy to trigger when you consider not only Sizemore's recent injury history, but also where the incentives start to kick in. In case you haven't seen Grady gets $250,000 for reaching each of 450 and 475 plate appearances, and $500,000 for reaching each of 500, 525, 550, 575, 600, 625, and 650 with a tied-in $500,000 bonus for winning comeback player of the year.

As much as I hate those incentive bonuses tied to "awards", the fact that Sizemore's incentives don't kick in until his 450th PA is not insignificant…and it actually has less to do with Grady's assumed health than you might think. To provide some context here, three players (Cabrera, Santana, and Brantley) on the Indians last year had more than 450 PA last year and only two (Asdrubal and The Axe Man) had 500 or more. It's true that a total of 84 players in the AL had 450 PA last year (about six players per AL team), but 450 is not a given for a player that spends

ANY amount of time on the DL or experiences sporadic playing time. The fact that the incentives start SO high (in terms of PA) are just another indication that the Indians' offer to Sizemore that brought him to the table (which resulted in him signing) was pretty significant compared what else was out there for him. That may be terrifying for Indians fans or maybe this "unfinished business" thing that Sizemore's touting holds some level of water, but it also makes the stance of Sizemore's agent regarding the option (either pick it up or decline it) all the more puzzling as while it may never be known what the Indians were offering him to renegotiate that option, it's pretty likely that it was close to the deal that he just signed…with one big exception – the fact that Sizemore's new deal contains no club options past the 2012 season, something they almost certainly would have demanded in a renegotiation of that club option.

While that may not seem like a big deal on the surface (particularly among those who think that Grady is finished and that $5M is a waste of money on him…apparently because Tribe fans only like Indians' players who have been away for longer than a decade), the fact that the Indians were not able to include a club option means that Sizemore is very likely to walk away from the corner of Carnegie and Ontario at the end of the 2012 season, particularly if he is able to stay healthy and productive in 2012. For the Indians, the lack of an option of the deal is the only real downside as they figure to be stuck in the same situation next year (needing an OF) regardless of how Grady performs in 2012. If he's truly finished, the Indians need to replace him (probably in June) and if he dons his cape and becomes SuperSizemore again, he moves on to the BIG deal that every ballplayer has dreamed about, having already given the Indians two "hometown discount" deals in his career. If he re-establishes his value, the Indians get to enjoy that re-establishment (and maybe some playoff games) in 2012 then watch him walk away as the bloodthirsty fans are thrown more red meat for the "DOLANZ R CHEEP" refrain that they are so quick to sing.

Ultimately, Sizemore doesn't really get the deal that his agent thought was out there for him and the Indians don't get the option year that they likely wanted to attach to this deal. That's not to say that this is a "lose-lose" for both parties (and I've actually seen it called a "win-win") as Sizemore returns to the medical staff that knows him best, to an organization that is likely to give him a longer rope and a greater opportunity than he might have found elsewhere. Meanwhile, the Indians get to hold onto the hope that Grady v.2005-2008 is coming back in some form in 2012, offering them the dynamic bat that he showed, albeit briefly, in 2011.

Perhaps it could be said that if neither party is completely satisfied with the outcome of a negotiation that it's a fair deal, and **my hope that the Indians and Sizemore could have agreed on a contract that would have had a lower base salary (but more guaranteed money) which included a couple of option years** and a lot of (more easily reached) incentives that would pay him commensurately is all but dashed.

Despite what everyone is going to say, this really isn't the IDEAL outcome that anyone wanted as much as it was two parties that knew each other signing deals that represented the best options available for each. Neither is doing back-flips about this nor is either bemoaning this deal as it represents a chance for Sizemore to re-establish his value with the medical staff that is most familiar with him while the Indians take one last shot that the ol' Grady is somewhere in that battered and scarred body. Sure, the Indians wanted Sizemore back at a lower price, but

they also probably wanted some option years attached to it in case he did return to his old level of production, just as Grady and his agent wanted a higher base salary and probably some incentives that were “easier” to reach.

Regardless, what’s done is done and Sizemore is back in the fray as the Indians are left to wonder (or is it hope) what they can legitimately expect from Grady and that “battered and scarred body” as they are supposedly penciling him in for CF in 2012 for Opening Day with the hope that he’ll be able to play the “vast majority” of the games there. Certainly, that idea sets off the sirens in the head of any Indians’ fan as the continued issues with Sizemore and Hafner over the last few years has the fanbase feeling justifiably skeptical that the stars that those players once were will ever return, much less for an extended period of time.

However, the interesting thing about that is that Sizemore returned in mid-April of last year and (**as I wrote back in May**) despite the fact that he was coming off of microfracture surgery, “Suddenly, he was that Grady that we all like to remember, posting a .974 OPS with 16 XBH in only 18 games…that is until he hurt his ‘other’ knee sliding into 2B on May 10th, landing him back on the DL.” So, is that player that posted a .282 BA / .333 OBP / .641 SLG / .974 OPS when he returned in April still somewhere within that #24 jersey and, much more importantly, can that player stick around for longer than 3 weeks?

That’s what the Indians are counting on, as he remains potentially dynamic as a hitter, but that “potential” comes with a giant asterisk as (outside of those 3 weeks last April and May) he really hasn’t performed at a consistently high level since August of 2009 before he was derailed in September of that year, when he decided to undergo a surgery on his left elbow, which had troubled him all season. And that’s the rub with Sizemore, in that he tries to play through injuries, to the detriment of his performance and the Indians have historically given him a wide berth in terms of allowing him to play hurt as Sizemore at 75% usually represents an upgrade over the obvious alternative. Which brings us back to the last couple of weeks with Grady coming to terms with the Tribe, as if we’re talking purely from a talent standpoint, Grady is probably unrivaled in terms of talent that was available on the FA market as an OF (though I could make the argument for Beltran), but talent isn’t the only factor here…obviously.

Durability is a major one and we’ve been through this too many times to count, but if the Indians are counting on Grady Sizemore to carry some of the offensive burden again in 2012 (and I

mean REALLY counting on it and not just hoping for it), it is misplaced confidence and something that could undermine their 2012 season as a “Plan B” is needed with Sizemore going into the season and the current options in place are…um, a little underwhelming. Essentially, as nice as the re-signing of Sizemore looks to us dreamers out there (that think that THIS is the year that Grady stays healthy and returns), the reality of the situation is that the Indians should still focus on adding two more veteran bats, and one of those bats needs to be an OF…and not a 4th OF type.

Maybe you want to buy into the idea that Shelley Duncan and Jason Donald are decent enough options for OF depth, but I’m not buying the Donald and Duncan as 4th/5th OF idea, much less as the “Plan B” in case Grady were to go down. To put that another way, if Grady does in 2012 what Grady’s done for the last couple of years, the Indians’ OF suddenly becomes Donald and Duncan filling in around Brantley (who I’m not as high on as most…but I’ll get to that) to fill out an OF.

Don’t get me wrong, I like Jason Donald as a player and think that he’s going to play a LOT more than people think he’s going to in 2012 (mainly spelling the IF positions), but these visions of Luis Valbuena in LF are burned in my synapses. Of course that’s not fair as I have yet to see Donald patrol the OF grass, but somebody, somewhere in the Indians’ organization had the idea that Valbuena would be more versatile if he could play in the OF and he played 11 games as a LF for the Clippers. To be clear, Donald has never played a minor league game in the OF and despite the idea that reports may be glowing about his ability to handle the OF, I’m not all that interested in seeing Donald as the 4th OF in 2012, or really ever. As AC so succinctly put in **a piece earlier in the week**, speculation that Donald represents REAL OF depth is “spaghetti-tossing territory”.

As for this idea that Shelley Duncan represents legitimate option, a good amount of that is tied to the idea that Duncan finished the season with an .808 OPS (3rd highest on the Tribe for players with more than 225 PA), but if that’s what is inspires so much confidence, let’s take a look at what Duncan actually put forth last year, in terms of the timeline of his hitting:

Opening Day through September 2nd
.253 BA / .313 OBP / .404 SLG / .717 OPS with 4 HR & 10 2B in 160 PA

September 2nd to End of Season
.273 BA / .345 OBP / .636 SLG / .981 OPS with 7 HR & 7 2B in 87 PA

Again, Duncan had a .717 OPS on September 2nd (for context, Matt MaTola had a .711 OPS on the season) and just because Duncan's numbers getting a HUGE boost in September, I couldn't help but remember another player who looked Ruthian for a couple of North Coast Septembers:

Karim Garcia – September 2001
.311 BA / .360 OBP / .711 SLG / 1.071 OPS with 5 HR & 2 2B in 50 PA

Karim Garcia – September 2002
.278 BA / .295 OBP / .593 SLG / .887 OPS with 10 HR & 4 2B in 112 PA

Just to put a punctuation mark on that, Karim Garcia was 25 and 26 in those two seasons, while Shelley Duncan turned 32 a couple of months ago. Of course, don't take this to mean that Shelley Duncan is not a useful player as he certainly brings a level of energy and leadership to the clubhouse which could be lacking next year and his RH bat is a nice complement to the current Indians' lineup (and Hafner in particular). But if Shelley Duncan is the Indians "Plan B" in case something was to go SPROING with Grady…well, that's not a well-thought-out "Plan B".

Now, you may be saying that it's unfair to dismiss Duncan's success over a three week period while looking at what Sizemore did over a different three week period to project that Sizemore could find success again, but let's be clear about what's being compared. For Grady, the track record for elite production at the MLB level is/was there, and with Sizemore still 3 years younger than Duncan (who had 422 career MLB PA going into the 2011 season), you're talking about a potentially elite player returning to what he's been and a player who has likely reached his ceiling hanging around at the level of production that he's attained which, to date, has not earned him an extended shot in MLB at the age of 32.

When it's all said and done with the Sizemore signing, another bat in the OF is necessary and what the Indians should be targeting is a player that legitimately projects as a starter on his own, not as a 4th or 5th OF who represents little more than what Duncan or Zeke Carrera has to offer. While I still think that Marlon Byrd is a nice option to have that can be moved around LF and CF as well as subbing in at DH, a player of Byrd's ilk (if not specifically Byrd) is essentially what I'm looking at here. If it means that the "other" OF starts the season in LF and pushes Brantley to the bench/4th OF status, so be it…on one hand for the sake of depth and on the other hand because I'm not all that sure that Brantley tops out as much more than a nice 4th OF on a good team right now. Perhaps that's overly harsh for a 24-year-old, but if the Indians are

truly looking to contend in 2012, I'd like to see them put the best team on the field every day and have the flexibility and quality on the bench to allow players like Sizemore and Hafner (and others) to get the days off that they're likely to need, to say nothing of the inevitable injuries that figure to befall the Indians. It's been written here before, but the position player cupboard is essentially empty (unless Nick Weglarz miraculously stays healthy) at the upper levels so what you saw in the 2nd half of last year in terms of OF depth is pretty much it.

With that said, if the Indians can creatively add that LF via a trade (and they have yet to move any of their trade chips though they've added Lowe and Grady), I'd push Brantley into a quasi-4th OF role as this pervasive fear that he's a poor man's Coco Crisp is something I can't shake, not helped by the fact that **Bill James has a projected .690 OPS for Brantley in 2012**. Realistically, there are too many injury risks on this team (Hafner and Sizemore, not to mention that Asdrubal, Choo, and Santana have all missed SIGNIFICANT time to injuries in the last two years) to figure that adding a LF would bury Brantley in any sense. With Sizemore and Hafner, the Indians need to find players that they can count on for depth that aren't named Zeke, Shelley, or (heaven forbid) Trevor.

If they do go into the season with a "renewed" confidence that everyone will stay healthy, it will be a mistake and, perhaps this is just reading into the moves that Antonetti has made since he's been handed the GM reins, I don't think that the moves are done for the Tribe. To this point in the off-season, they've been aggressive, adding a starting pitcher and (hopefully) a CF before Thanksgiving and without committing any money to either past 2012 and without giving up any trade chips of any real significance. How much can really be expected from Lowe and (more pointedly) Sizemore can only reveal themselves once the team gets to Goodyear and after they leave the Arizona sun, but the Indians have significant needs that remain.

Despite the "addition" of Sizemore, the Indians still need an OF, not to mention a 1B that represents a measurable upgrade over LaPorta. Though most thought that the Indians would let the market shake out at the top, then come up with a game plan, the Tribe has added pieces for what they hope will be a 2012 run at contention. For the sake of that presumed "run at contention", let's hope that the Sizemore signing isn't the end of the game plan that's been drawn up.