Nigel Wilson. Bruce Aven. Alex Ramirez. Jason Dubois. Ryan Mulhern. These are just some of the distinguished names that have been immortalized as MVPs of the Cleveland Indians' Triple-A farm club in recent years, be it in Buffalo or Columbus. But now, as he's on the cusp of joining this illustrious company, you suddenly want Matt LaPorta back in Cleveland? Have you no decency, Sir?!

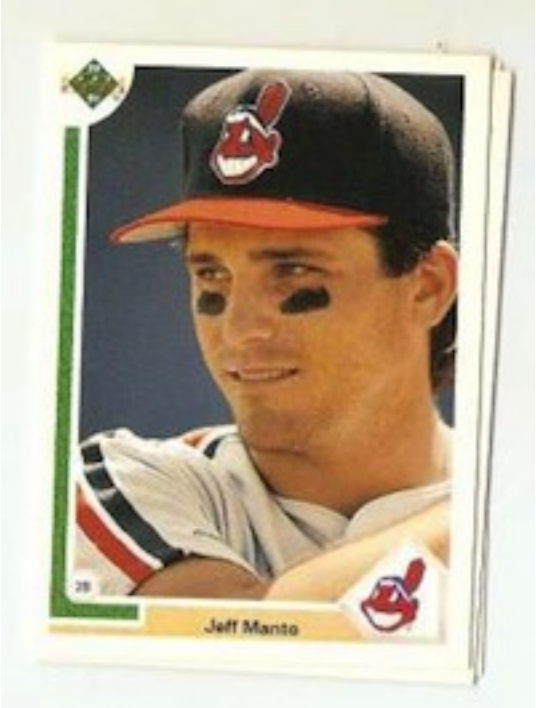
Yes, for the past week or so, the debate over the fate of the 27 year-old LaPorta has started picking up steam again, spurred by the perfect storm of Matt's mash-tastic April in Columbus and Casey Kotchman's craptacular groundout clinic in Cleveland. It's no secret that the 29 year-old Kotchman wasn't exactly the big fish in the first baseman free agent pool this past offseason. But his acquisition was at least—objectively speaking—a short-term upgrade. After two years of incorporating powdered donuts into our weight loss plan, the time had come to switch to a bland, organic granola bar for breakfast. It was the proper, rational move; we just expected the granola bar to hit above .170.

So now, only a month into the 2012 season, some of us are already jonesing for those deceptively enticing powdered donuts again. Even with the Indians in first place and Johnny Damon officially blocking two of LaPorta's possible re-entry points (Matt's split time between LF, DH, and 1B in Columbus), the clamor for a switcheroo has become increasingly audible. Paul Cousineau finds the whole thing so maddening that he's dropped a moratorium on the whole topic . I wish I had his icy, Draper-esque resolve. Instead, Cleveland's renewed love affair with LaPorta has me analyzing that obnoxiously trendy term for Triple-A studs who supposedly can't crack it in the Bigs: "Quad-A."

Interchangeable with the no-less insulting “4-A” or “Jeff Manto,” the Quad-A tag basically suggests that some players are simply not wired to make that final leap from AAA to the Majors, regardless of the gaudy numbers they put up on the farm or the number of chances they get with the Big Club. It’s usually easier to identify these players’ limitations in retrospect, but sometimes the warning signs are there early on—a long swing, a stone glove, a lack of plate discipline, or—for pitchers—wildness, low K rates, and questionable mechanics. Mental deficiencies also come into play a lot with theoretical Quad-A guys, as they can’t seem to make necessary adjustments or overcome adversity like their veteran Major League peers.

Some baseball people claim that the Quad-A concept is a myth—that anyone who excels for an extended period in the Minors can eventually do the same in the Majors, given a fair shot. That’s certainly a reasonable assertion, as there are countless examples of players who just needed a little extra time to flip the switch (David Ortiz, Jose Bautista, and, unfortunately, Brandon Phillips spring to mind). But an argument that supports one potentiality does not automatically dismiss another. Fact is, there are loads of Triple-A legends who slammed into an unscalable wall at the next level, and while the reasons certainly varied, the evidence is hard to ignore: **AAA statistics routinely say very little about what can be expected of you after a call-up—especially if you’re over 25** .

The 4-A Team



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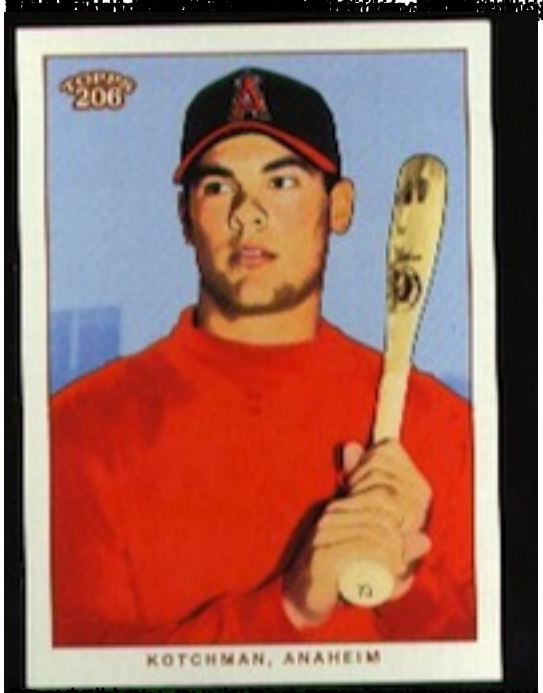

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