We're officially halfway through the season and the Indians own the second worst pitching staff in the AL as their opponents have outscored them by 27 runs. Given that information, the projections say this team should be anywhere from 5 to 12 games below .500, but they're three games above (42-39) and remarkably just two games back in the division. Given the amount (and significance) of the injuries they've had, it's hard to believe that this is the case; and, as a direct result, it's even harder to handicap this team's MVP race...you know, if it were cool to discuss and debate the MVP candidates of individual teams. That's what I'm here to do, rank this teams players from least to most valuable. To configure the list, I asked the only qualifiable question that one should ever ask when sorting through a list of value candidates: **If this player went down for the season due to health complications, to what degree would the Indians be screwed.**

(21) Jeanmar Gomez: Back in May, I wrote a Indians Quarter Report similar to this and said that Jeanmar was the ace of this staff. He's been a liability ever since. Let's just move on...

(20) Aaron Cunningham

(19) Johnny Damon

(18) Shelly Duncan

The sabermetric baseball community holds claim to a stat called WAR, which stands for Wins Above Replacement. Using a complicated formula, WAR mashes a players statistics together and spits out a number which quantifiably represent how much value a player has; it's slowly becoming one of the more popular stats in the game. It basically looks at a guy and asks, “If this player got injured and the team had to replace them with someone from their bench, how much value (or wins) would the team be losing?” Combined, Shelly Duncan, Aaron Cunningham and Johnny Damon have a WAR of "aproximately" -3.8. That means they aren’t even playing above what is considered replacement level; they are the replacement level, which is why I was forced to say "approximately." To put this number into motion, let's say Matt Holiday, who has a WAR of 3.3—very good but not off the charts—played left field for the Indians this year. They’d project to have a record somewere around the area of 48-33. That’s a pretty big difference, and while it's a imperfect projection, it does illustrate the Indians offense in a nutshell. When healthy, they're really just one significant addition away from being a offensive juggernaut and the class of the AL Central. It's hard to believe this seeing as how this team has habitually struggled to put up runs at times, but it will make more sense when you get down to the gritty part of this list.

(17) Matt LaPorta: The most annoying, head-scratching part of this entire season has been the Indians handling of Matt LaPorta. Needless to say, if he were to get hurt, it wouldn’t matter because he’s not on the team. He’s higher than Damon, Duncan, and Cunningham on this MVP ranking for the simple fact that he’s not Damon, Duncan, or Cunningham. It’s sad, I know. To give credit where it is due, over the last week the left field trio has stepped it up; so much so that I feel a bit guilty right now trashing them.

(16) Josh Tomlin: He's become the miniature version of Ubaldo Jimenez. He's a hit or miss nearly every start. The "hit" part of that (as opposed to the "miss") is the only reason he's ahead of Gomez on here. It's disappointing because, stats aside, Tomlin's one of the more likable guys on this roster. Am I regretting a friendly wager I made prior to the year predicting that Tomlin would throw a no-hitter? Yes, yes I am. I've never seen a pitcher who was more prone to giving up the long ball; the guy is 'pitching-to-contact' at a rate that is unheard of.

(15) Lou Marson: When Santana went down with a concussion, Marson finally began hitting and has raised his sub .070 batting average all the way up to .295. It seems when Marson gets consistent, every-day at-bats—like he has been—he hits. That's usually how it works for everyone in baseball though. The security of playing time leads to confidence, confidence leads to production, and production leads to more confidence. There have been two stretches where Marson has played in at least four consecutive games. In those 2 stretches of 9 games Marson has a .437 (14 for 32) batting average, 5 RBI, 3 doubles, 4 triples 4BB, and nearly hit for the cycle in one of those games. His recent play prompted me to ask—with a serious look on my face— "If this guy can play catcher, easily the toughest position in baseball, couldn't he at least be a viable everyday left fielder?" As the season long adage goes, *he can't be any worse than what we already got,* right?

(14) Derek Lowe: Lowe began the season 6-2 and took a AL lead in the ERA department. It was short stayed. He's 8-6 overall which isn't bad when you remember that he's 39 years old, but he's mostly been terrible since his surprising start to open the year. His season ERA has ballooned to 4.34 and more and more groundballs are finding holes. A lot of this, though, has to do with the injury to Jack Hanahan and the constant turnover of the team since Hafner's injury. When Kotchman and Hanahan are both on the field, they make a huge difference for Derek Lowe. That's why I have them ranked ahead of Lowe.

(13) Casey Kotchman: During Wednesday's rubber match against the Angels, Kotchman hit a rare 3-run home run off of a left handed pitcher to give the Indians a 9-1 lead. That's kind of how it's been all season for him, he's baseballs version of a garbage time player. There aren't many instances of clutch hitting by Kotchman this year, so his numbers (7HR and 31RBI) are a bit misleading. But he does make up for this with his defense at first where he has a fielding percentage of .996.

(12) Lonnie Chisenhall: (Ineligible)

(11) Jack Hanahan: the best thing that could have happened to Hanahan was Lonnie Chisenhall's injury. Like Marson, Hanahan has been at his best when he's getting everyday at-bats and coming to the park knowing he's going to be in the starting lineup. Already in July he has more hits than he did all of June, where he split duty with Chisenhall and only played nine games (mostly because of injury).

(10) Ubaldo Jimenez: In his last six starts, he has a ERA of 2.96. If you go back in the last two years and take any form of 6 straight starts by Jimenez, you won't find a string of 6 starts where his ERA was lower than that 2.96 number. Right now, he's the Indians second best starter behind Masterson. Let's forego the part where I elaborate on the topic of how good he's been of late. With Ubaldo, you want to avoid any and all hints of hexes at all possible costs.

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