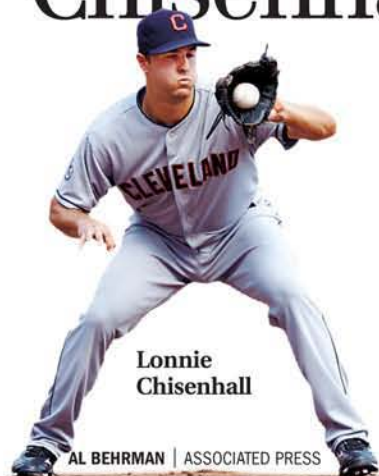


Chisenhall hopes to be a hit at third



Lonnie Chisenhall

AL BEHRMAN | ASSOCIATED PRESS

Indians have lacked offense at the position

By AJ Mazzolini
THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Lonnie Chisenhall sat at home with his wife, Meredith, in late June after a Clippers game, trying to forget a costly ninth-inning error he'd committed in a loss just hours before.

A rerun of *Lost* was playing on the television as the couple lounged on their couch around midnight.

Then Chisenhall got the call

► Mets to get Reyes back | C4

from Clippers manager Mike Sarbaugh.

The 22-year-old third baseman was headed to the major leagues, Sarbaugh told him, after a promotion to the Cleveland Indians. He needed to be on a plane the next morning for Phoenix, where the Indians were playing the Arizona Diamondbacks.

He forgot all about the error.

"It was a big panic to try to get my bags all packed and make sure I had everything I needed," Chisenhall said. "I didn't sleep at all that night. I rolled around and waited for about 5 a.m. so I could just get up and get to the airport."

Chisenhall's promotion represents the latest attempt to jumpstart an Indians lineup devoid of offense at third base. Before Chisenhall's arrival on June 27, a jumble of infielders manned the position, combining for a .225 average

See **CHISENHALL** Page C5

CHISENHALL

FROM PAGE C1

and an on-base percentage hovering near .300. Both numbers are well below major-league averages for third base.

"We felt that he's ready to contribute offensively," Indians manager Manny Acta said, "especially if we don't put that much responsibility on the young man, because we know he's still a work in progress."

But a stray pitch nearly put Chisenhall's fresh season in jeopardy on July 7. A fastball from Toronto starter Carlos Villanueva struck Chisenhall in the face, causing a sinus fracture in his right cheekbone.

Chisenhall avoided a more serious injury thanks in part to the earflap of his helmet. After missing three games, he has played in every game since the All-Star break heading into last night's game at Minnesota.

That's a bullet dodged for both Chisenhall and the Indians, who have been



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Indians trainer Lonnie Soloff tends to third baseman Lonnie Chisenhall after he was hit in the face with a pitch by Toronto's Carlos Villanueva on July 7.

searching for consistency at third base for the past 15 years. Since Matt Williams manned the hot corner in 1997 — the Indians' last World Series team — 21 players have manned the position, none performing well enough to lock down

the spot for very long.

This season, Adam Everett and Jack Hannahan took most of the groundballs at third base. Hannahan is batting .221 and has been relegated to a late-game defensive replacement. Everett batted .217 and was

released in June.

Acta even experimented with middle infielder Orlando Cabrera at third for four games — his first taste at the position in his 15 seasons in the majors.

Though Chisenhall's defense can be suspect at times — 17 errors last season in 96 game at double-A Akron and already three errors in the majors — Acta said he believes the rookie's work with the bat will keep him afloat while the glove continues to develop.

During his 65-game stay with the Clippers, Chisenhall — Cleveland's top-rated prospect and a 2008 first-round draft pick — showed the kind of skill at the plate that Acta hopes can boost his team's offense. The Indians were batting .251 as a team entering yesterday's games.

After a slow start, Chisenhall rebounded with an excellent May before a concussion caused him to miss nine games in mid-June. The earlier head injury was a concern after the beaning incident against Toronto, but

no concussion symptoms have appeared.

After the original injury, Chisenhall went on a tear, going 9 for 21 in his next five games and knocking in 14 runs. That's when the Indians decided to call up the left-hander's hot bat.

"When I was on the (disabled list), I had time to be in the batting cage tinkering a little bit, watching some video and going through it all with my hitting coach," Chisenhall said. "When I came off the DL, everything was right. I felt comfortable and confident, and I'm going to try to continue with that."

The native North Carolinian has made an impact on the Tribe already, collecting hits in seven of his first eight games, including his first big-league home run on July 6 against the New York Yankees. He has cooled off in recent days and entered last night's game batting .213

"He's very even-keeled, and I think it really helped that he got everything out of the way there in Arizona," Acta said, referring to Chisenhall's first hit and RBI.

"We played well out there with him, so I don't think he feels like he's disrupting anything."

Said Chisenhall: "I was told not to come up and try to do too much. Manny told me to just come up and get my hits."

Cincinnati Reds third baseman Scott Rolen, a 15-year veteran, said Chisenhall's composed approach will likely take him far as a professional. Respecting the game, Rolen said, is a huge step for a young player.

"You've got to stay real mindful of where you are and the opportunity that you have," said the 36-year-old Rolen, a seven-time All-Star. "You don't ever let down with your effort, because that's the only thing you can control. We're not talking about hits or double or home runs. We're talking about how you play the game."

"He's pretty level-headed and has a pretty good idea about what's going on out there. It looks to me like he might be ahead of the game already."

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