

Ready or not, Indians break camp

by Andy Call

WINTER HAVEN, Fla. - Months of shaping the 2007 Indians reach a conclusion Friday. The team will play its final spring training game in Florida, then fly to Memphis for Saturday's first Civil Rights Game against St. Louis. An optional workout Sunday will be followed by Monday's Opening Day game against the White Sox in Chicago.

"These guys have done a good job," Manager Eric Wedge said Thursday. "They've worked hard to get through some things we needed to get through."

The Indians needed to get through determining the makeup of their bench and bullpen, as well as deciding how to manage platoons at first base, left field and right field.

Mike Rouse won the utility infield job, and Ryan Garko will break camp as part of a potential four-man first-base rotation. Matt Miller had won the seventh and final spot in the bullpen, but he is injured and will be replaced by right-hander Tom Mastny.

Wedge said Casey Blake will see most of the time at first base against right-handers. Garko will start most nights against left-handers, but catcher Victor Martinez will play there on occasion as well to give his knees a bit of rest while keeping his bat in the lineup.

"Victor is pretty good out there," Wedge said.

Designated hitter Travis Hafner played in only four games at first base last year because of elbow issues. Wedge said Hafner might play there as often as once a week this time around rather than waiting until interleague play to put him out onto the field.

"Haf looked great out there this spring," Wedge said. "You don't want him to not play first base at all after he's been there all spring, then have him be out there the next seven to 10 days (for interleague play) and hurt himself. "Putting him out there allows us to DH someone else. If somebody is banged up, that versatility is huge for us."

Blake will start in right field against left-handers, as will Jason Michaels in left field. When a right-hander is on the mound, center fielder Grady Sizemore likely will be flanked by David Dellucci and Trot Nixon.

"Nixon has really come along," Wedge said of the veteran outfielder, slowed by back surgery after being signed as a free agent during the offseason.

The Indians also needed to test their depth this spring when Miller and starting pitcher Cliff Lee went down with injuries. Lee is expected to be out until at least late April with a strained abdominal muscle, and Miller will miss at least a month with a strained right forearm.

The Tribe also is awaiting final word today on whether left-hander C.C. Sabathia will be able to make his scheduled Opening Day start after suffering a bruised left forearm Wednesday when struck by a line drive.

"We're a little banged up," Wedge said.

Health issues aside, Wedge said the camp generally has been a positive one. "The attitude, the energy, the approach have all been great," Wedge said.

Reach Repository sports writer Andy Call at (330) 580-8346

Batter up

The Indians' projected 2007 batting order against right-handers and left-handers.

vs. RHP

1, Grady Sizemore, CF

2, Trot Nixon, RF

3, Travis Hafner, DH

4, Victor Martinez, C

5, Casey Blake, 1B

6, David Dellucci, LF

7, Jhonny Peralta, SS

8, Josh Barfield, 2B

9, Andy Marte, 3B

vs. LHP

1, Grady Sizemore, CF

2, Jason Michaels, LF

3, Travis Hafner, DH

4, Victor Martinez, C

5, Casey Blake, RF

6, Ryan Garko, 1B

7, Jhonny Peralta, SS

8, Josh Barfield, 2B

9, Andy Marte, 3B

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