



With the New York Yankees in town, and their loathsome fan base in tow, it's that time of year to complain about baseball's uncapped financial system and how unfair it is to the majority of the league's teams. Large payrolls spawn large contracts that only a small fraction of teams can afford. Big name Scott Boras clients are restricted a handful of teams who can pony up enough cash to get Boras the commission that he needs. Other, lower profile agents, desperately hope that their client has the kind of season that gets him a nice, fat commission check. The system is irreparably broken and a precedent of apathy has been set from the Commissioner's Office and there's no end in sight.

While the Yankees, Phillies, Rangers, Dodgers, Red Sox, and Angels enjoy the luxury of endless streams of capital and the subsequent success that allows their ownership to borrow money against the franchise without repercussion, many teams in MLB are left to hope that they get lucky with the draft and hope that their second and third-tier free agents pan out better than they could have ever imagined.

One of the luxuries that is rarely talked about with these teams is that they're able to keep good, young, homegrown talent while other teams cannot. The Yankees have always been able to afford Derek Jeter and Robbie Cano. The Phillies have been able to hold onto Jimmy Rollins and Ryan Howard. The Rangers can afford to pay Ian Kinsler and Michael Young. The Dodgers have deep enough pockets to keep Matt Kemp happy. The Red Sox will have Jacoby Ellsbury and Dustin Pedroia for the foreseeable future. When Mike Trout is making \$30M per season, the Angels can afford that.

The Dolan family purchased the Indians on November 5, 1999. Since the start of the 2000 season, the Indians are 1019-1050. The franchise has had just two playoff appearances, has

seen homegrown talent like CC Sabathia, Cliff Lee, Victor Martinez, Jim Thome, Omar Vizquel, and others traded away for various packages of prospects. Some of what they got in return was good, some of it was bad, and some of it we'd rather not talk about ever again.

The drafts, as a whole, have been a disaster. Some of the players that the Indians have brought in from other organizations have been great. What have never been great are the free agents that have been signed since 2000. With a few small exceptions, the chances that the Indians have been able to take have failed miserably. It's hard to hold them entirely accountable because they really have no chance to compete in free agency.

When it comes to free agency, the Indians are like a family that lives in a rundown shack in a rural area when a hurricane is rapidly approaching. By the time they're able to mobilize for a trip to the store, the shelves of bottled water are empty, there's no plywood to be found, the canned goods are gone, and, by the time they navigate through the traffic to get back home, the hurricane has already made landfall.

There are only so many times that you can get lucky in the business of baseball. The Indians have had tremendous luck with some of their international free agents, like Victor Martinez, Fausto Carmona/Roberto Hernandez (for one year anyway), were able to acquire players like Asdrubal Cabrera, Carlos Santana, Chris Perez, Joe Smith, Zach McAllister, and Shin-Soo Choo for peanuts, and pulled out a draftees like Jason Kipnis, Vinnie Pestano, and (hopefully) Lonnie Chisenhall.

So, as a result, you have to have some measure of success with free agents. That hasn't happened at all. For this week's View from the Porch, I thought it would be timely to look at the All-Dolan Free Agency Team. That way, we can sit around and bitch about what the Yankees can afford and commiserate about what's in our price range.

All-Dolan Free Agency Team (2000-2012)

C: Mike Redmond

A real gem here. The Indians had Sandy Alomar and Einar Diaz (signed as free agent in 1990) to start the Dolan years, some guy named Victor Martinez for the majority of the 2000s, and the Carlos Santana/Lou Marson duo of late. I wanted so badly to use Sal Fasano here, but the Indians acquired him via trade from Atlanta in 2008. So, by default, this one goes to Mike Redmond. The Indians could never find a good enough catcher to move Martinez to first base. Redmond played in just 22 games and hit .206 in 2010.

1B: Casey Kotchman

Yeah, yeah, I know. Ryan Garko was drafted, Ben Broussard was part of the 2002 Russell Branyan trade to Cincinnati, Jim Thome was the 1B from 2000 to the middle of 2002, and the Indians traded for Matt LaPorta. That leaves Casey Kotchman by default. Unfortunately, the honor goes to him here. Kotchman hasn't panned out this season, batting just .238.

2B: Ronnie Belliard

In case you forgot, and let's be honest, you probably did, Ronnie Belliard made an All-Star team as a Cleveland Indian. The Indians signed Belliard after the 2003 season and he was actually a decent player for the club. In 390 games, Belliard batted .285/.337/.433/.770 and was an All-Star in 2004. Belliard was traded at the trade deadline in 2006 for Hector Luna.

SS: Ricky Gutierrez

Unfortunately for the purposes of this, Jhonny Peralta was signed the April before the Dolans purchased the team. Omar Vizquel was entrenched at shortstop until the Indians let him go. Then, Peralta took over until he was traded in 2010. That's when Asdrubal Cabrera took over as the every day shortstop. So, shortstop was never really a need for the Dolans to address via free agency. Ricky Gutierrez was signed in December 2001 to be the replacement for Roberto Alomar, who was traded just six days before Gutierrez was signed. A shortstop by trade, Gutierrez rarely saw time at the position because of some guy named Vizquel. The Indians paid

Gutierrez \$6M for two seasons to hit .273/.323/.342/.666. He was traded in March 2004 and was out of baseball by 2006.

3B: Casey Blake

The player we all loved to hate while he was here and learned to appreciate when he left was Casey Blake. The Indians signed him in December of 2002 after he was released by the Minnesota Twins. He had been on waivers three times from May 2000 to October 2001. Blake played in 810 games with the Indians over his six seasons in Cleveland. He batted .266/.337/.451/.787 and hit 116 home runs. The Indians sent Blake to the Dodgers in a 2008 trade deadline deal. They got Carlos Santana and Jon Meloan in return.

LF: Marty Cordova

If anyone asks you about the Indians left field situation, refer them to this article. With the only other options being Todd Hollandsworth, David Dellucci, Shelley Duncan, and Austin Kearns, I opted for Cordova. Cordova was the replacement for Richie Sexson, whom the Indians traded in 2000 as part of the Bob Wickman trade. The 31-year-old Cordova signed a one-year, \$500,000 deal and made it completely worth it. He hit 20 HRs and batted .301/.348/.506/.855 that season in 122 games. He signed with Baltimore the following season and was out of baseball a year later.

CF: David Dellucci (read before you criticize!)

This is another tough one. The Indians had some guy named Kenny Lofton in the early 2000s, used Milton Bradley, who they acquired from Montreal in 2001 for Zach Day, and then used Grady Sizemore from 2005-2010. When injuries popped up, Trevor Crowe, an Indians draft pick, was used in CF. Michael Brantley, acquired in the CC Sabathia deal now plays CF. Just because David Dellucci was such an epic fail and deserves to be on this list, we'll pretend he played CF.

RF: Juan Gonzalez

The first time, obviously. Not the second time. Juan Gonzalez was picked up as a free agent in January 2001. The Indians gave him a one-year deal worth \$10M. He produced. Gonzalez was worth 4.4 offensive wins that season, when he batted .325/.370/.590/.960, cranking 35 home runs and driving in 140 runs. He was an All-Star, won the Silver Slugger Award, and finished fifth in the MVP voting. The Indians gave a token effort to keep Juan Gone, but he signed with the Texas Rangers for a two-year, \$24M price tag.

Gonzalez was brought back in 2005 for \$600,000 after an injury-plagued 2004 season. He tore his hamstring off the bone in his first at bat of the season, opening the door for Grady Sizemore.

DH: Ellis Burks

Ellis Burks was one of the first “big” free agent signings done by the Dolans. Burks was available during the offseason of 2000 and signed a three-year, \$19.5M deal with the Indians at age 36. By this point in his career, he was largely a DH, playing just 28 games in the outfield as a member of the Indians. Burks hit .287/.364/.520/.885 in 317 games with Cleveland, including 66 HR.

SP: Chuck Finley

The first big signing of the Dolans’ tenure as owners was Chuck Finley on December 16, 1999. Finley had spent his entire career with the California/Anaheim Angels and was 37 years old when the Tribe scooped him up. Finley was signed to a three-year, \$26M deal. It was not the best signing. Finley went just 28-29 with a 4.59 ERA in 74 starts over those three seasons. He was an All-Star in 2000, but, in 2001, during the team’s best season with Finley, he had a 5.54 ERA. He was traded to St. Louis in July 2002 for Coco Crisp.

SP: Paul Byrd

After a near-miss in 2005, the Indians felt they had to add another pitcher to their rotation. That

pitcher was Paul Byrd. The Indians signed him in December 2005 to a three-year, \$21.5M contract at age 35. The Indians milked every last drop out of Byrd, getting 502.1 regular season innings and 10 postseason innings out of the crafty righty. He went 32-27 in 84 starts with a 4.68 ERA. He was 2-0 during the Tribe's 2007 playoff run with a 3.60 ERA.

SP: Kevin Millwood

Kevin Millwood signed a one-year, \$7M deal with the Tribe on January 8, 2005. He was coming off a down year in Philadelphia when he posted a then career-high 4.85 ERA. So, the Indians took a gamble on him and his questionable health and it paid off handsomely. Though Millwood only went 9-11, he led the league in ERA with a 2.86 and finished sixth in the Cy Young voting. After that season, Millwood signed a four-year deal with the always strapped for pitching Texas Rangers and was paid \$40M to hang a 4.57 ERA.

SP: Fausto Carmona/Roberto Hernandez

In December 2000, the Indians signed a lanky right hander out of the Dominican Republic whose teeth were so bad, the Indians thought that he had trouble eating and that's why he was so wiry. Six years later, that power arm with a heavy sinker was a complete and utter failure as a reliever. So, to start 2007, the Indians put him into the rotation. What happened then was nothing short of miraculous. Carmona went 19-8, finishing fourth in the Cy Young voting and 23rd

in the MVP vote. He, along with CC Sabathia, formed one of the best 1-2 pitching combinations in all of baseball. Since then, Carmona has struggled, been forced into using his real name, and has been paid a lot of money to be mediocre.

SP: Scott Elarton

One day after the Colorado Rockies released Scott Elarton in 2004, the Indians scooped him up. Elarton was a lanky right hander who had once been a very promising prospect. It never worked out for him, but he wasn't terrible for the Indians. He made 52 starts from mid-2004 through 2005 and went 14-14. He pitched in eight games with the Indians in 2008 before calling it quits. For his career, Elarton had a 4.52 ERA with the Tribe.

RP: Joe Borowski

This is one of those “by default” kinds of things. The closers during the Dolan tenure have been Bob Wickman (trade), Danys Baez (mentioned later), Kerry Wood (only other option), Jensen Lewis (draft), and Chris Perez (trade). Needless to say, between Wood and Borowski, the novelty of 2007 makes me give this to Joe-Bo. Borowski cemented the baseball pundits’ opinions of the save stat by racking up 45 saves in 2007, despite a 5.07 ERA. He gutted his way through save after save and somehow got the job done more often than not. As is a recurring theme on this list, the Indians signed Borowski in his mid-30s to a two-year, \$8M deal. He was out of professional baseball following his July 2008 release.

RP: Rafael Betancourt

Rafael Betancourt had an incredibly long road to the Majors. He was signed as an international free agent by the Boston Red Sox in 1993 at the age of 18. He pitched in the Red Sox system until the end of the 2000 season before becoming a free agent. The Indians gave him a shot in January of 2003. He made his Major League debut that following July. In seven seasons with the Tribe, Betancourt appeared in 371 games and had a 23-22 record with 17 saves and an ERA of 3.25. He excelled as an eighth inning setup man and was an integral part of the team’s 2007 run.

RP: Rafael Perez

The Tribe got lucky on this one, signing Rafael Perez as an international free agent in January of 2002. Perez made his Major League debut on April 20, 2006, and appeared in 18 games that season. For his career, Perez has made 338 appearances with a 21-12 record, three saves, and a 3.64 ERA. He and Betancourt formed the shutdown relief tandem that helped the Indians to the ALCS in 2007.

RP: Bob Howry

The Indians plucked Bob Howry out the free agent pool in January of 2004. He made 37 appearances for the Indians in 2004, posting a 2.74 ERA. But, in 2005, Howry was dominant. He pitched in 79 games and had the best season of his career, posting a 2.47 ERA, bridging the gap to then Indians closer Bob Wickman. He was a key part of that 2005 team that really overachieved and kicked off the Indians three-year window from 2005-2007. Howry became too expensive for the Indians after the 2005 season. He made \$900,000 in 2005. He signed a three-year, \$12M contract with the Cubs that offseason.

RP: Danys Baez

I guess I'll attribute this one to the Dolans. Danys Baez signed the same day that the purchase of the Indians by Larry Dolan was announced. Baez was a highly-sought after Cuban import with a powerful arm. He made his Major League debut in 2001 and pitched in 155 games for the Indians with a 3.92 ERA. He worked as a middle reliever, starter, and closer in his short tenure, making 26 starts in 2002 and saving 25 games in 2003. The Indians let Baez walk after the 2003 season, after he made \$5.125M in 2003.

So, as you can see, the Indians have never been able to plug the holes in their boat with the right free agents. That's part of the reason why success has evaded the Indians. It's impossible to fill a team with drafted players and players acquired via trade. Sometimes, you absolutely have to spend money to win. The Dolans, whether unable due to escalating salaries or via their own financial handcuffs, have simply not been able to do what it takes to help the team.

When you see a report that says that the future looks bleak, this is part of the reason.