Make no mistake about it. The 2012 Cleveland Indians season was yet another glaring example of how changes need to be made. The ball started to roll on Thursday afternoon with the immediate dismissal of Manager Manny Acta with just six games remaining in the season. Sandy Alomar Jr. will be the interim manager for the last two series and will get serious consideration for the job during the interview process this winter. The Indians have gone just 28-58 over their last 86 games, sending the team from first to worst, where they are currently tied with the Minnesota Twins.

The firing of Acta comes as no surprise, although many people are going to come to his defense, arguing that he was set up to fail by a front office that failed to address the glaring needs of the team. Nevertheless, Acta has a track record of being a losing manager, posting a 372-518 record during parts of six seasons as a skipper. With the Indians, Acta was just 214-266 over nearly three full seasons.

During the hiring process following the 2009 season, Acta seemed like the natural fit for the Indians. As a native of the Dominican Republic, Acta would have no problem creating a rapport with the team's key Hispanic players, including then number one starter Fausto Carmona, shortshop Asdrubal Cabrera, and top prospect Carlos Santana. Acta's ideologies about sabermetrics (advanced baseball stats) was right in line with that of the front office, who pride

themselves on very detailed statistical analysis of players and their worth. Acta was a young manager, just 41 years old at the start of the 2010 season. Everything fit the profile that the Indians were looking for. Acta suffered through his first season with a below average roster, losing 93 games during a rebuilding year.

It was during the 2011 season that clusters of Indians fans grew to love Acta. The team started 30-15 and Acta couldn't push a wrong button. The Indians won games in dramatic fashion, due in large part to proper management of the bullpen in the late innings and some timely, aggressive calls like squeeze bunts and pinch hitters. The Indians would collapse after the 45-game mark, losing 67 of their final 117 games, but Acta would still get recognized for his efforts, finishing fourth in the American League Manager of the Year voting.

The 2012 season has been an unmitigated disaster for everybody involved. The Indians started out well, clinging to first place through the first 70 games, and falling off the face of the earth from that point forward, culminating in an 11-game losing streak from July 27 to August 7 that took them out of the American League Central Division race, in a year where 86 wins gave you a great shot at the playoffs. As a result, Acta was let go.

Certain groups of baseball fans discredit the importance of a manager, saying that all he does is fill out the lineup card with the best available talent and has little affect on the game. Others will argue the opposite, citing that in-game decisions are the difference between wins and losses and that the best managers put their players in a position to succeed more often than not. What both groups agree on is that Acta never had the necessary talent in Cleveland, or in Washington, to be a winning manager. Is he a scapegoat for this season? Not really, because never in the history of baseball has the entire team been fired before the manager. But, there is a lack of accountability from the Indians front office that does need to be explored.

In any event, the search for a new manager this offseason adds another development to what was already going to be a busy offseason for the Indians organization. Following a second consecutive collapse, changes clearly have to be made, however, the most likely changes entail making the ballclub worse rather than improving it. Shin-Soo Choo, a Scott Boras client entering his final year of arbitration, is almost a lock to be traded, as the Indians don't appear to have any hope of contending in 2013. Chris Perez, the vocal, feather-ruffling closer of the team, will most likely be traded for insulting the front office and speaking out against ownership. Beyond that, an entire overhaul of the Major League roster is necessary to infuse the top levels of the Indians farm system with talent.

Now, on top of that, Indians President Mark Shapiro, General Manager Chris Antonetti, his staff, and the Dolans have to find a manager who is willing to work within strict payroll constraints and endure a rebuilding phase where losses are inevitable. Candidates aren't going to be beating down the doors to snag an interview with the Indians. It's almost like in *Major League* when Charlie Donovan calls Lou Brown at his offseason job working at Tire World and asks if he wants to manage in the big leagues with the Indians. Brown, played brilliantly by James Gammon, doesn't jump at the chance, but rather moans an "I don't know" and has to return to the customer calling about some white-walls. In terms of attractive openings, the Indians managerial position would be near the bottom of the list.

The timing of this announcement is a little surprising. The Houston Astros, who fired Brad Mills back in early August, have already announced their new manager, the Washington Nationals current third base coach, Bo Porter. Because of that, it appears that teams in need of managers may be looking sooner rather than later, so the Indians wanted to get a jump start on their search. With potential firings in Miami, Detroit, and even some rumblings about Anaheim firing Mike Scioscia, there will be some competition for teams who need a manager.

The candidates who are interviewed and hire that the Indians make will tell a lot about the direction of the franchise. By the same token, the level of interest from possible candidates will shed a lot of light on what the Indians and other industry sources think about the team's future. Veteran managers will have a lot less incentive to endure a rebuild than guys like Alomar Jr. or other prospective hires who have never managed in the big leagues. Naturally, the Indians will reach out to as many people as possible, but the small group of individuals who actually get an interview could be a hodge podge of young and old, with varying levels of experience, various philosophies on baseball, and various connections to the organization. Ultimately, they likely have their list down to a couple of candidates. They are big believers in "the process", the company modus operandi that fans are tired of hearing about. Part of the process is to reach out to a broad spectrum of interested candidates.

Anthony Castrovince, the terrific MLB.com writer and former beat writer for the Cleveland Indians, believes that Alomar Jr. is a virtual lock. Speaking on Twitter, Castrovince said, "I'd be shocked if #Indians
don't give Sandy Alomar Jr. the job full-time. Players love him, fans love him. Players had soured on Acta." Castrovince, who still stays around the ballclub as a regional writer for MLB.com, would definitely still have inside knowledge of the situation. So, if that's the case, do the Indians waste time with the process, as I outlined above, or will they keep the process short and sweet and focus on improving the on-field product more than the in-dugout leadership?

Only time will tell. What we know for sure is that no matter who the manager is, the quality of the roster is the biggest issue facing the organization.