



The General Manager meetings are in full swing in Indian Hills, California and there should be no shortage of Indians-related chatter. According to numerous outlets, the Indians are fielding calls and inquiries for Shin-Soo Choo, Asdrubal Cabrera, and Chris Perez, among others. With a ballclub that has lost 90 or more games far too often since the Dolans took ownership, changes would definitely be welcomed, even at the expense of some fan favorites.

The big issue becomes if the Indians are going to get what they consider to be fair value for these players. Choo is a Scott Boras client, entering the final year of club control, and is not a lock to sign a contract extension. Boras enjoys having his clients on the open market and driving up the price with whatever he can. Considering Choo was nominated as a candidate for the Gold Glove Award for right fielders (please stop laughing and continue reading), that's just one more notch in Boras's belt. This will limit the teams interested in Choo and also limit what teams are willing to give up, especially if they can compete for his services in free agency.

Then, there's Asdrubal Cabrera. The guy who has made plenty of highlight reel plays at shortstop, despite the fact that many in the baseball community consider him one of the worst defensive shortstops in baseball. The guy who exploded in 2011 to hit 25 home runs and drive in 92 runs. Oh, yeah, he's also the guy who, in 2011, batted .293/.347/.489/.836 in the first half and .244/.310/.419/.729 in the second half. His 2012 splits look similar, going from .286/.364/.467/.832 to .251/.305/.371/.676. Obviously, that would give Cabrera the label of being a streaky hitter who wears down when it matters most (at least to contenders who would be interested in him).

Let's not forget Chris Perez. The brash, outspoken closer who criticized ownership, the GM, his teammates, the fans, and the city en route to 39 saves and a 3.59 ERA. Closers are one of the

most volatile positions in sport, with tons of turnover from year to year and a lot of injury risk. I'm sure teams are lining up to beg for a malcontent reliever with above average stuff, but probably not above average enough to compensate for his arrogance and short temper.

Other teams are likely inquiring about other players like Justin Masterson, Michael Brantley, and Jason Kipnis, but it remains to be seen if the Indians, who lack depth and have no starting pitching, would entertain dealing some of their quality young talent to start the rebuilding process all over again. The big three will be the aforementioned three of Choo, Cabrera, and Perez. This is where Antonetti needs to earn his keep.

Should the Indians trade all three of those players? It's not a yes or no question. They should explore every opportunity, especially because the Cardinals, who have tons of young pitching, are interested in Cabrera and the Angels could have interest in Choo, according to Buster Olney. Both of those teams have things that we need.

A couple minor debates have come up on TheClevelandFan.com's Indians message board. When Dan Haren was being offered for Carlos Marmol, a struggling closer with an ugly contract and a bad attitude, the question was raised if you would trade Perez for Haren. Then came the obligatory Cabrera for Justin Upton proposal. Haren, prior to the Angels declining his contract option, was only signed for this season. The Indians, sorry to burst your bubble, will not win this season. So, to me, Haren was of no value. There's a vast difference between acquiring Major League talent when you're close to contending and when you're not. The Indians are not close to contending, which makes acquiring a player like Upton a non-factor.

It's unfortunate, because Upton would certainly help, but would he help us enough to be contenders? I say no. Instead, the front office should focus on one of their strengths. They have a pretty good track record, sans the CC Sabathia and Cliff Lee deals, of poaching other teams' prospects and turning them into something. As an example, they turned Esmil Rogers into Mike Aviles just this past week, a sound, under-the-radar type move to add some experienced depth and a guy who hits left handed pitching very well.

The goal for the Indians this offseason should be to get lottery tickets. Trade for prospects and hope one of the scratch-offs uncovers a winner. Without the ability to be players in free agency and with the potential of contending very slim, the Indians can afford to give some prospects time to develop. Unlike the draft, where teams are required to project players well in advance and off of reports from college, high school, or summer leagues, poaching other teams'

prospects gives the Indians two or three years of minor league play to project from. The onus is on the front office and the scouting staff because, as I've already outlined, the main trade chips the Indians have are damaged goods, with evident flaws that other GMs are already aware of.

The Indians may trade all three, they may trade none of the three. Understanding a player's value is a big deal. Between Baseball-Reference and Fangraphs, the two most comprehensive baseball statistic websites, there are differences in their formulas and calculations. They calculate WAR differently. They calculate leverage situations differently. Successes and failures are measured with different metrics. To one team, Asdrubal Cabrera might be worth far less than another team. Positional depth and current situation also factor in. Antonetti may overvalue all three of those players and not be able to trade them for what he feels is market value. He may sell high. He may sell low. Either way, in my humble opinion, he has to sell no matter what.

The only way you get better in baseball is by being proactive. Sitting around on your hands, waiting for your own prospects to develop, is foolish. You have to actively seek out ways to make your team or your farm system better. The Indians feel like they have made the coaching staff better, firing Manny Acta and his staff, bringing in Terry Francona and his staff, and convincing Sandy Alomar Jr. to stick around after being snubbed for the position he most wanted. That's a start. Leadership is key. Different ways of doing things when the previous way didn't work can never be a bad thing.

In past offseasons, the Indians waited, choosing to be reactive rather than proactive. In free agency, this is fine, since they have to scrape the bargain bin for deals. But, in player acquisition via trade or waiver claims, sitting around and waiting can cripple a franchise's offseason plans. One thing that professional sports bettors like to do is get out early and beat the market. If a team comes out as a six-point favorite, and they know that the public is going to bet on that team and turn them into a bigger favorite, the professionals will take a position betting them at minus-six. Even if they don't necessarily agree with that team covering the spread, they want the best number. Having the best number, in theory, means a better chance at winning. Similarly, a team may be dangling a prospect out there in a trade and the Indians may not think he's the best fit, but he's the most talented. Maybe he's not at a position of direct need, but he's a great player and will help somewhere along the line. Seizing the opportunity before somebody else gets to is what being in a management position is all about. Having the best players is what makes a team win.

The GM Meetings basically symbolize the true beginning of the offseason. This one, like most of them, comes at a critical juncture for the Indians. Fresh off the Francona hire, fresh off another very disappointing losing season, and fresh off having the worst starting rotation in Cleveland

since the Cleveland Spiders were still a team. That means that the Indians are chock full of needs. Which also means that it's time for the Indians to take a proactive stance. That starts by seriously evaluating the market for Choo, Cabrera, and Perez.