

Offseason Rundown: Meetings End as Tribe Goes after Swisher, Youkilis

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

Saturday, December 08 2012 1:00 PM - Last Updated Saturday, December 08 2012 12:01 PM



I hope you enjoyed this past week of baseball news to sort through. If you have been depressed with the fact that we don't get to discuss it as often in the winter months, you certainly had your fix in a matter of three days.

I certainly enjoy having baseball news to talk about, but if you are not prepared for what the Winter Meetings produce, it can be a tad bit overwhelming.

I was not overwhelmed with the amount of news that was flying out, but I do want to paste something I said last week in preparation for this event.

The Winter Meetings can be uneventful for the Indians. Or it could be really interesting. The only thing you need to know is that the little chat we had on "rumors" a few weeks ago still applies.

In fact, it applies double, triple, quadruple. Rumors are heavy and perhaps with even a little bit more of unrealisticness to them because of the simple fact that many deal ideas are exchanged, but little of them get anywhere of significance.

So stay guarded on what you read. We'll cycle through stuff, but not overanalyze it. Or we will, who knows, I know I like to do that.

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Aside from the fact that I made up a word, the one thing that stands out in what I said is that it could be really interesting. It definitely was. It was also uneventful though. Strange how both statements, although contradictory at the surface, turned out to be true.

And that is why you try and stay guarded on what goes out there. The Indians were probably just as much talked about as Texas and Arizona and that is directly because they were involved with trade talks with those two teams and the big name of Justin Upton, who ahead of Cabrera, seemed to be the Winter Meeting's biggest prize.

If you were not following along with myself and Adam Burke on The Cleveland Fan's live Winter Meetings Blog, then you avoided a lot of hearsay. Was it hearsay? Perhaps.

Did the Cleveland Indians talk to the Arizona Diamondbacks about Asdrubal Cabrera?

You bet they did. The degree of seriousness to those talks, and any other talks that involved some sort of "mega-deal" is really unable to be determined. We can sit here and say that the Mariners were the log jam, or the Indians wanted too much from Arizona in asking for another pitcher, or that the three teams couldn't find a fourth trade partner.

We can analyze and dream of a scenario that did or didn't happen. I like to think that the talk that involved the Indians getting Trevor Bauer and Mike Olt was true and would have loved to get those two guys in trading for Cabrera.

But that's speculation and that's hoping for something.

That is not fact and that is not anything we can discuss past this week.

Will Arizona make a move for Cabrera? The Indians seem to be open to trading him, but the

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one thing that we did learn is that they will most definitely hold onto him if they cannot get what they desire. And what we can assume, based off the fact that trades have not happened, is that the Indians have something specific in mind.

And you have to credit this organization with as much as that. When the Indians want something specific, they will get it or nothing at all. They are not in a position to be trading Cabrera below what they want and that is a good thing. Are they asking too much? I really don't know what they are exactly asking for. We can believe reports that say they want a major league pitcher and at least another top-flight prospect (center-piecing the package), but that doesn't necessarily mean they are true.

[So that's what you got](#) . You got an uneventful, yet intriguing Winter Meetings period for the Indians. They didn't do a damn thing (kind of), but there was never a dull moment.

"It was pretty busy," Antonetti said. "Most days we were meeting throughout the course of the day, whether it was with teams or with agents. And then when we had time, we'd reconnect as a group and strategize. We were pretty busy."

Right. Busy, with not much to show for it other than some people asking when Cabrera is going to get traded and what's to come of Choo. And some huff and puff over Victorino, Youkilis, and Swisher.

[IN PURSUIT OF...]

We already talked enough about Shane Victorino and that whole thing. With that domino falling (thankfully), as well as Jason Bay picking the Mariners, the Indians have now turned the sights on another option, one with a lot more spunk.

If you've consistently read me for, I'd say at least two or so years, or kind of know me, you will know there is one gentleman in the world of baseball that I really do not like, like, at all. Maybe it has a little to do with the team he now plays for, but this was way before he signed with the Yankees.

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I really don't particularly enjoy the antics of Nick Swisher. I think he's a little bit of a goof-head. But I've always heard that he is one of those players that you hate if he isn't on your team, but love if he's on yours. I didn't particularly love Shelley Duncan when he became an Indian, but now, he is one of my favorite guys, ever.

So if the Indians do maintain their pursuit of Nick Swisher and he ends up becoming an Indian, I'll give him an honest chance. But I'm not happy about this. Make no mistake about that.

However Swisher does make baseball sense. He's a switch hitter who can play first, he can play the corners, he gives you that flexibility that really helps. If there is one thing Swisher has that others do not bring, it's a sense of confidence and swagger, which instantly can inject some enthusiasm into the clubhouse.

Let's not also forget he is coming off a year in which he hit more than 20 home runs and close to 100 RBI. Granted that is in New York and with a much more potent lineup. But he can get on base (.361 career OBP) and in every full season he has played, which has been all of his seasons (other than 20 games when he debuted in 2003), he has hit at least 20 home runs. He has always played 130 games, at least 148 since 2006, and he's never knocked in less than 69 runs, and that was in his weird White Sox year.

And [Buster Olney says](#) the the Indians are in the "best position" to sign him. What the hell does that mean? I don't have a stinkin' clue, other than to say Swisher needs a team (and a starting spot) and some money, and the Indians are in the position to give him both. So are some other teams, but Olney must believe the Indians have the best shot out of all of them.

Maybe the offer is the best, I don't know, but I can't see other reasons for why he would want to come to Cleveland. I'm sorry, I believe that sometimes, other factors have a play into decisions, but Nick Swisher is not from Cleveland, nor does Cleveland [symbolize a homecoming](#) or a big reason to sign with the Indians. Swisher went to Ohio State. That's in Columbus, not Cleveland.

If he signs with the Indians, it's because they've presented the best offer. Simple as that. And right now, it appears, [according to Jim Bowden of ESPN](#), that the Indians have an offer

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somewhere around \$50 million over 4 years. Which is a little more than what they offered Victorino. Swisher may be able to pull in more though, especially if he waits for the bidding on Hamilton to subside and becomes the next attractive target.

If you are asking me, I'm not sure I give that contract to Nick Swisher. It seems a little crazy. He'll be 33 for next season, which means he'll be 36 and making a little more or a little less than 12 million dollars. But it is a little less crazy than Victorino because I think he has a little more staying power and a little bit better fit. That is still not to say that I would do it.

A little more complicated is what is at play in the other outstanding offer the Indians have extended to a free agent. The worst kept secret since the season ended and his contract was not picked up is that Kevin Youkilis is a target for the Indians.

It makes much sense because of the manager and that is one factor that I'm willing to buy into. That will say a lot and after spending his entire career playing for a team's rival, he may not be a slam dunk to take the more rich offer and go to the Yankees.

That doesn't mean I think the Indians will be Youkilis' choice, but I think it makes for a tough decision. But this to, will be a choice about the better offer. [What Youkilis decides](#) is better though is anybody's guess, but his decision. He can take the one year deal worth \$12 million and feel really good about his salary, perhaps contend for another title.

Or he can take the deal that pays him slightly less more money, but over the course of two years and gives him a little bit of job security, not to mention playing for a manager who, is really [the only manager he's ever known](#) , a guy he trusts.

"I don't know anything other than playing for Tito," Youkilis said. "He's great, he's doing good. Talked to him. He's doing great. He seems happy. I know he wasn't happy a year ago at this point. So that's good. He's back, seems happy, seems excited taking over in Cleveland."

Youkilis would play first with the Indians, presumably full-time. With the Yankees he'd be taking over for Alex Rodriguez until he's healthy at third (and perhaps beyond that as they'll probably

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just DH Rodriguez). Either position he's familiar with.

This decision will be one that is really about weighing the situation. Again, ignore the fact that he went to Cincinnati (it's four hours away people...), Francona does play into it, but it's about the situation he'll feel more sound with.

The Indians would present quite the intriguing lineup set if they were to net both guys. It would certainly put on hold any thoughts of not contending in 2013 as a team that has Youkilis at first and Swisher in left now is presenting, provided that Choo and Cabrera stay, a lineup that looks rather formidable.

But we'll talk about that, if it ever happens.

For now, we have two free agents that have decisions to make. The Indians already showed they intend on adding, they don't really mind about spending some money. They really are in the same position with Youkilis that they were with Victorino. He took a shorter deal with more money in Boston for a longer deal with Cleveland. Youkilis could make the same choice.

Either way, it shouldn't be too long before the chips fall. Swisher is a target of the Mariners, who already signed one Indians target in Bay, but they're also in on Josh Hamilton. So the decision for Swisher may hold until Hamilton decides where he is going.

Youkilis could make his choice rather soon though. There really is no one else in his market. His 12 million dollar deal from the Yankees won't get any better. Of course if there's another target for them, they'll go after that, but right now, he isn't in any real need to wait much longer.

[RANDOM RUNDOWN]

The other name that is getting batted around is Mark Reynolds, who the Indians would probably go to if Youkilis says no. Jordan Bastian [says the two sides have met](#) and surprise surprise,

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the Yankees are asking too, because they need to fill that third base hole with Rodriguez out.

You know the book on Reynolds. Strikes out a lot (more than anyone else, ever, fact, proven), hits some crazy home runs, walks enough to make his horrific batting average bearable (career .332 OBP).

One thing that I did not really touch up on earlier in the week when recapping the hecticness, but was being talked about, is Terry Francona. He's been schmoozing it up in Nashville and is simply someone who not only has a lot of good connections, but makes a lot of them as well. He's been personally courting the Indians targets, talking to the likes of Victorino, Swisher, and former players he has managed in Youkilis and Bay.

Jerry Crasnick of ESPN [has a good story on him](#) and mentions that he is off to see Carlos Santana and Ubaldo Jimenez in the Dominican Republic and other winter ball participants. Then he will be going off to Tampa to meet with Chris Perez, which further tells me that the guy isn't going anywhere, but more on that in a second.

I don't want to start getting on that "LET'S SHOCK THE WORLD!" bandwagon, but there's something to be said for fresh enthusiasm from a proven winner.

"Who here thought Oakland was going to win last year?" Francona said. "Nobody. Baltimore competed all year from day one, but people didn't see that during the winter. It can happen. Once you get good and start developing confidence and play the game the right way, things happen, and it snowballs. I don't spend a ton of time worrying about what could be or what should be. I kind of get energized over, 'How are we going to make whoever we have better?' That's what I get a kick out of."

He makes a great point. Look what Buck Showalter did in Baltimore. Perhaps a little bit of that was guided by respect players had for someone of his stature and success. Francona brings a few rings with him and some zeal. If he can talk Kevin Youkilis into playing for him in Cleveland? Maybe he can talk Ubaldo Jimenez into throwing strikes, or at least guide a team in spite of him. Either way.

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If the Indians do trade Asdrubal Cabrera, they've discussed replacements. It appears they would have tried to kick the tires on Stephen Drew and Jon Paul Morosi of FOX Sports [says they talked to the Dodgers](#) about Dee Gordon. The only thing I'll say about that is that they have to trade Cabrera first, duh.

Hopefully you [caught up with the Rule V results](#) as I broke down the three guys involved in the Indians transactions. The Cubs are excited to have Hector Rondon in the fold.

[They said the elbow is a risk](#), but that he can help their team if he is healthy.

The Cubs have had a good look at Rondon though, with one of their coaches being on the staff of Rondon's team, Leones.

"He was a really good prospect with the Indians," Cubs general manager Jed Hoyer said. "We've been watching him in Venezuela this winter, and he's been throwing really, really well. He's got a great arm, and we feel we can capitalize on that he's healthy now and throwing the ball well."

No word on how they plan to use him right now, but I have to imagine it will be as a reliever.

I could be real funny about this because of the name, but why do what everyone else will do? The Indians have signed a Japanese pitcher by the name of **Kota Kobayashi** to [a minor league deal](#)

This was reported back at the end of November by a few sites, including JapanBall.com, but really how am I to know? It's probably official, but who knows.

Yes he shares the name with Masahide Kobayashi, but seriously now, let's not joke about that failed experiment. This dude is 21-years-old and according to this site is a "reject" to his old team. That's pretty funny and I think a good way to end this edition of the Rundown.

Expect another Piece by Piece coming up rather soon, because pretty soon, there will be nothing at all to talk about.

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Nino can be found with glue and scissors and pictures of Vinnie Pestano and himself on The Tribe Daily, his own Indians blog. Hearts may or may not be involved.

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