



The much-maligned front office of the Cleveland Indians held up their end of the bargain this week. They acquired a pitcher with front of the rotation potential, and six years of control, for a Scott Boras client with one year remaining on his contract. Larry and Paul Dolan, chastised at the drop of every hat in Cleveland, kicked in \$3.5M in cash to allow the Indians and Reds to complete the first part of the trade, in which the Indians acquired Didi Gregorius to send to Arizona.

It was a monumental victory for a front office that needed positive vibes this offseason and has certainly gotten them. With the hiring of Terry Francona as manager, the new budget that seems to be in favor of free agent spending, and the acquisition of Trevor Bauer, things are going in the right direction for a front office that needed something good to happen. Chris Antonetti, save for the ill-advised offer to Shane Victorino, has done great work this offseason, has been far more proactive than we're used to, and has been an integral part of improving the Indians' drafts over the last few years.

In one of the toughest working environments in Major League Baseball, Antonetti has proven himself to be a star. The Ubaldo Jimenez trade has blown up in his face, though the logic was there and the signs that Jimenez would bounce back were statistically evident. Beyond that, Antonetti has not saddled the Indians with any bad contracts, except for the failed Grady Sizemore experiment, and has done everything he can to creatively improve the ballclub in spite of the financial shackles he has to work with.

Antonetti has done his part. Now, it's time for Trevor Bauer to do his.

I don't believe in hyperbole for the sake of getting a rise out of people. That's why what I'm about to say is not hyperbole at all. The success of the Cleveland Indians over the next six years is dependent on Trevor Bauer. You won't find many playoff teams that get to October without an ace on the staff. Frankly, you won't find many teams that contend for a playoff spot without an ace on the staff. In Cleveland, an ace is even more of a requirement because the team cannot just throw around money to fill holes in the starting rotation. At least one guy has to be dominant.

Having a premium number one starter allows everything else to fall into place; much like having a quality closer puts the bullpen hierarchy in place. Every team needs that guy who can stop losing streaks, can be expected to win once every five days, and take pressure off of other guys. Bauer has to be that pitcher. Not for the Indians to "win" the trade, but because they desperately need that guy. Unless you draft and develop an ace, which is harder and harder to do, the guy you trade for with that kind of potential needs to fill it.

Let's be honest, Bauer's potential alone makes the Indians a winner in this deal. If he blows up, is constantly hurt, and never contributes much, it was a necessary and worthwhile gamble. Antonetti and his staff will be endlessly second guessed, since guys like Patrick Corbin and Tyler Skaggs were in the conversation. The Diamondbacks wanted to trade Bauer, who has the most upside, more than those other two. It wasn't because of his lack of potential, talent, or development. It was because he had alienated the front office and ownership. Their loss will hopefully be our gain.

Antonetti and former GM Mark Shapiro have endlessly been scrutinized for what hasn't worked out and haven't been applauded enough for what has worked out. At some point, it's not about those two. It's about the players holding up their end of the bargain. Bauer is no different. He studies pitching mechanics and does what he thinks is in his best interest based on what he has learned. The Indians would be wise to let him do his thing. One of the hardest things for a young player to do is adapt to a new comfort zone. The Diamondbacks wanted to change what has worked for Bauer and what propelled him to being a top prospect according to Baseball America and a third overall draft pick. Considering that the Indians don't have a great track record of developing prospects into good Major Leaguers, that's even more reason to let Bauer be Bauer.

The immediate reaction to anything that the Indians do is immediately focus on the bad. Drew Stubbs is a strikeout machine. There's no denying that. However, he's also a plus defender in center field and a base stealing threat when he does get on. He's two years removed from being nearly a three-win player and three years away from being a four-win player. In this market, that's a gamble that the Indians are ready and willing to take.

Stubbs provides additional versatility to the Indians. He has good career numbers against left handed pitching, bats right handed, and brings an element of speed that the Indians don't have. It remains to be seen what the plan is for Stubbs, or if a left handed platoon partner will be brought in to help ease the burden of using him against right handed pitchers, but he's a good asset to have around. Even with his struggles, batting for a low average and striking out a lot, he's a better option than what we have and that's what the key is.

What fans fail to realize is that Antonetti and his staff aren't making these moves without studying them inside and out. In order to bitch about what doesn't work out, you should at least make an attempt to understand the thought process behind the acquisition. Take Casey Kotchman last season. Even if he was league average with the bat (which he wasn't), his defense would turn him into a valuable player. Unfortunately, he was so bad with the bat that it negated his defensive impact. The logic was sound, the price was right, and the options were limited. Kotchman didn't perform. Antonetti made a very reasonable decision, with research to support his thinking process, and yet he's the scapegoat, not Kotchman.

The Choo/Bauer trade is an easy transaction for people to get behind, because Choo was obviously gone at season's end and no spin was necessary to explain the deal. Had Cabrera been traded, it would have been a much more difficult sell for the front office. Naturally, in spite of getting a pitcher with a ton of potential, the focus drifted to how bad the lineup will be without Choo in it. There's no pleasing this fan base. Most of the time, I feel like the baseball fans in Cleveland are getting exactly what they deserve for not taking the time to understand the front office and their rationale.

This Bauer deal means everything to the organization. Everything. If he blossoms into the pitcher that he is projected to be, we could have some really great seasons over the next six years. Having a constant in place like a number one starter gives the front office so much more creative freedom and one less thing to worry about. It will be a major feather in Antonetti's cap and, possibly, give fans a new perspective about the GM. It will lead to wins and will give the Indians somebody to build around.

More moves will come this offseason, though I doubt any will be as celebrated as this one. It gave faith to a fan base in desperate need of something to believe in.