



For the first time in at least five years, we're on the doorstep of baseball season with a reason to be interested, beyond the essential fact that it's the start of the season.

For the first time in five years, the Indians might – maybe, possibly – have a decent chance at contending for a postseason berth.

And it's because, for the first time, Larry and Paul Dolan opened their family's wallet and spent real money. Lots of it. Last summer, I penned [this article](#), outlining the many management-level blunders that have occurred on the Dolans' watch, and questioning whether they were competent stewards of the Indians franchise anymore.

I questioned whether anything could save the Dolan regime, other than spending significant dollars on the 25-man roster. Apparently, the Dolans didn't see much of an alternative, either.

They spent \$56 million on Nick Swisher, \$48 million on Michael Bourn, \$7 million on Brett Myers and \$6 million on Mark Reynolds.

Not only that, in an offseason when many of us expected the Tribe to offload multiple core players, they only jettisoned one, and it was a productive trade at that, sending Shin-Soo Choo to Cincinnati as part of a three-way deal with Arizona that netted the Indians outfielder Drew Stubbs from the Reds and elite pitching prospect Trevor Bauer from the Diamondbacks, among others.

Was this offseason an excuse for unbridled elation? Probably not. Was it a much-needed sign of life from a team that has been flatlining since 2009? Most definitely.

No one is trying to pretend that the Indians are poised to take the American League by storm starting next week. No one is trying to pretend that the AL's balance of power shifted in any type of tectonic fashion. The Indians can only hope to have a puncher's chance against league heavyweights like the Tigers, Angels and Rangers.

Given the canyon that exists between the Tigers and the rest of the AL Central, the ground rules pretty much state that the Indians are eyeing, at best, one of the AL wild card berths. But in baseball, all you need are inroads to the postseason. You can take your chances from there.

And let's not pull too much wool over our eyes regarding the Indians organization as a whole. This offseason's spending spree serves as a Band-Aid over the systemic problems that continue to plague the organization. The farm system still has a woeful lack of franchise-caliber talent. The signings of Swisher and Bourn were necessitated by the fact that no cavalry is capable of riding in from Columbus should the big-league lineup falter.

But despite all that, the Indians approach Opening Day 2013 with a positive vibe in tow. Terry Francona is now in the manager's office. There will be new jerseys in the team shop at Progressive Field, bearing the names of known players who aren't limping toward retirement, as were Johnny Damon and Derek Lowe last year.

The buzz is back. The team has an accomplished manager with a leader's personality, new toys to play with, and to top it all off, the Yankees will be the home-opener opponent on April 9. It's all enough to make the turnstiles click, even if the chilly weather continues into April.

Of course, if the Indians start the season 2-10, that feeling could evaporate in a hurry. But for now, on the precipice, we can overlook the patchwork starting rotation, Chris Perez's strained shoulder, Jason Kipnis' injured elbow and unremarkable spring, the threadbare farm system, and focus on the good.

For the first time in quite a while, there's a reason to watch. There is a reason to go to the ballpark and check the team out, if only to satisfy a case of initial curiosity. We'll know soon enough whether this team is going to be worth watching for 162 games. But at the very least, the Indians have the fan base talking baseball in the final weeks of March.

It's progress, and that alone is better than what we've seen out of this team in recent years.