



The Indians are playing this season five days at a time. Each turn through the rotation brings something different. Justin Masterson and Zack McAllister appear to be the only two pitchers capable of giving the Indians a consistent chance to win, while the injury to Brett Myers now adds another unknown in Corey Kluber. Scott Kazmir will make his second start on Saturday night against the Royals and we'd all be pretty happy if Ubaldo Jimenez never started another game for the Indians.

The news gets worse down on the farm as Carlos Carrasco left Thursday's start with what's being called a "deep bruise", but may wind up being something more when the swelling subsides enough to get an accurate diagnosis. Trevor Bauer has a 4/1 K/BB ratio in three starts so far with Columbus, so that's promising, but the Indians' depth is already being tested with Kluber in the rotation and Carrasco unavailable for the foreseeable future.

How did we get to this point? The Indians got 20 starts from pitchers they drafted in 2012. Those two pitchers combined for a 5.46 ERA. One is recovering from Tommy John surgery and the other is still pitching in Triple-A, but is not on the Indians 40-man roster. Those same two pitchers made 36 starts in 2011 and one more pitcher added three starts. The third pitcher is also recovering from Tommy John surgery. In 2010, the two starters combined for 35 starts and a 5.23 ERA. From 2006-2009, the Indians got 143 more starts from pitchers they drafted. The Indians got one start from a 2003 draft pick.

Six pitchers make up the starters in the paragraph above: Josh Tomlin, David Huff, Alex White, Aaron Laffey, Jeremy Sowers, and Jeremy Guthrie. Those six pitchers are the only Indians draft picks of the last 10 years to start a game for the Indians. Their combined stats while pitching for the Indians are 78-96 with a 4.98 ERA.

Go all the way back to 2000 and add Brian Tallet's five career starts with the Tribe to the list. If you're feeling ambitious enough to go back to the drafts from the last millennium, you can include Jason Davis's 52 career starts as an Indian. If we're going that far back, we can't forget about Kyle Denney's four career starts that included a 9.56 ERA and [a gunshot wound to the leg while dressed as a cheerleader](#).

You have to go all the way back to 1998 when the Indians drafted Carsten Charles Sabathia to find a legitimate starting pitcher drafted by the Indians. That's a span of 15 drafts. I was 11 years old when the Indians last drafted a good starting pitcher.

If there's anything baseball's economic climate teaches us, it's that you have to draft and/or develop good starting pitching. Marginal starters are regularly making more than eight figures per season and being able to afford an ace on the free agent market is a luxury that only a small handful of teams can afford.

The draft is a total crapshoot. I'm not denying that fact. Overall, the Indians have drafted poorly in that span. Of late, things are looking better with players like Jason Kipnis, Vinnie Pestano, and Cody Allen, who are all making a Major League impact and guys like Francisco Lindor, Dillon Howard, and Tyler Naquin in the next round of players to grow up through the organization together.

But, as we all know, the name of the game is pitching. In 2009, the American League ERA was 4.46. In 2012, it was 4.09. Hitter strikeout rates continue to go up while walk rates stay constant. Pitchers struck out 17.1 percent of batters faced in 2008. Last season, that number was up over 19 percent. This season, it's over 20 percent. There were 73 combined shutouts from 2011-12 after 80 combined shutouts from 2008-10.

Since 2002, the Indians have one playoff appearance. That year, 2007, CC Sabathia led all American League starters (min. 50 IP pitched) in WAR at 6.8. Fausto Carmona was 18th at 3.7 and led the league in second half ERA with a 2.26. Those two pitchers were 10.5 wins above replacement starters. In 2003, 2004, 2009, 2010, 2011, and 2012, Indians starters as a group didn't pass that number.

All of that circles back to this season's starting rotation. Justin Masterson was acquired in the Victor Martinez trade with Boston. Zack McAllister was an absolute steal from the Yankees for half a season of Austin Kearns, who came back to the Indians to make the Opening Day roster the following season. Corey Kluber was acquired in the three-team Jake Westbrook trade at the trade deadline in 2010. Ubaldo Jimenez was acquired in the infamous Drew Pomeranz/Alex White trade from Colorado. Scott Kazmir is a lottery ticket that the Indians are hoping to scratch off and at least win a couple dollars. Carlos Carrasco was acquired in the Cliff Lee deal from Philadelphia. Trevor Bauer was acquired in the Shin-Soo Choo three-team deal from Arizona. Brett Myers was a free agent signing this past offseason.

A lot of teams have the same issue that the Indians have with drafting and developing starting pitching. The Tigers, for example, drafted and developed Justin Verlander and Rick Porcello. Doug Fister, Max Scherzer, and Anibal Sanchez were acquired via trade. The Royals traded for James Shields and Wade Davis, signed Ervin Santana as a free agent, traded for Jeremy Guthrie way back when and then re-signed him as a free agent, and also traded for Luis Mendoza. The White Sox drafted and developed Chris Sale, traded for Jake Peavy and Gavin Floyd, signed Jose Quintana and Dylan Axelrod as free agents. The Twins picked up Scott Diamond in the Rule 5 Draft, signed Mike Pelfrey and Kevin Correia as free agents, traded for Vance Worley, and traded for Pedro Hernandez.

There's an acronym in the business known as TINSTAAPP, which stands for There's No Such Thing As A Pitching Prospect. The injury and bust rates are so high for pitching prospects that scouts and other baseball people came up with TINSTAAPP to refer to the unreliability of pitching prospects. Many promising young pitchers wind up with arm trouble or can't develop a third pitch and either wind up in the bullpen or are forced out of the game of baseball altogether.

What has exacerbated the problem for the Indians is that they have not been able to throw money at the problem like other teams have. Simply drafting and developing an ace can set everything in place. Once the rotation has that anchor, the rest of the rotation can be cobbled together via trades of expiring contracts or adding middle or back of the rotation guys in free agency. That's exactly what the plan was with CC Sabathia. The Indians signed guys like Kevin Millwood and Paul Byrd. They filled the rotation with guys like Jake Westbrook and gave an extended look to Jeremy Sowers.

As I said numerous times this offseason, the goal for the Indians rotation was to be around league average and hope for the best with the offense and the bullpen. The offense and the

bullpen have both been good, while the rotation has been anything but. Masterson and McAllister have combined to post 57 innings with a 2.53 ERA and 1.1 WAR, but the rest of the rotation has posted a 9.40 ERA and -1.4 WAR.

Ultimately, drafting and developing an ace is hard, but it's nearly impossible for a team to win while expecting the majority of its rotation to come via trade or free agency. Even developing middle of the rotation homegrown arms can go a long way to contention. Perennial contenders like San Francisco, St. Louis, and Tampa Bay keep developing quality pitching, and a lot of it they have drafted themselves. That's the framework that keeps you relevant for a long time, instead of a contender for a couple years here and a couple years there.

The Indians have acquired some guys via trade that could become steady middle of the rotation arms, especially guys like Zach McAllister, Carlos Carrasco, and Corey Kluber. But, they still have to find that ace somewhere. This is why they acquired Trevor Bauer. The hope is that he becomes that pitcher. It would certainly make the rotation look better to eliminate guys like Ubaldo Jimenez and Brett Myers and replace them with guys that have upside.

It's only 20 games in, but nobody in the Central Division looks like they have the ability to run away and hide. The Tigers are still a horrible defensive team and have serious bullpen problems, in spite of their terrific offense and great rotation. The Royals and White Sox aren't built to run and hide because of a lot of inconsistencies. The Twins are overachieving right now with a very bad rotation and an impotent lineup.

For now, the Indians will have to keep living the season five days at a time and hope to have a chance to win three or four times each time through the rotation. If they can get any stability from the back of the rotation, the offense and the bullpen will keep the team relevant.