



With Wednesday's trade deadline rapidly approaching, the Indians have not been brought up a whole lot in the media coverage. There are clearly needs on the ballclub that can be filled without using a Francisco Lindor or Danny Salazar to do it. Chris Antonetti and Mike Chernoff have done an excellent job keeping their cards close to the vest since the media certainly dig as hard as they can to find any rumor to get hits, which is commendable, and partially frustrating. Without a doubt, they have explored every possible way to improve the ballclub, but as Wednesday's trade deadline moves closer and closer, we aren't exactly sure what the Indians are going to do, if they do anything at all.

Not only does the trade deadline serve as a way to improve the talent level on the team, but it can also serve as a real morale boost. Teams caught in between buying and selling can get a vote of confidence from their GM or acquiring a premium player can really give a team a spark. Unfortunately for the Indians, who are clearly buyers sitting just three games back in the AL Central race, there will not be a premium player coming to provide a major impact. Those players just don't exist on the market right now. A lot of what's available is supplementary, specialized, and not going to dramatically change the face of any team.

But, that may be exactly what the Indians need. They are a team that has fought to achieve some level of consistency this season, both from the pitching staff and the offense. I don't believe they need some sort of overhaul or high-priced trade acquisition. They need to plug holes in a boat that's otherwise sufficient. Every time the Indians have taken on water, they have bounced back and sailed into calmer waters.

Fans and media can point to several places where the Indians could use upgrades. My list would include designated hitter, right field, and the bullpen as a whole. Others would include

third base and the starting rotation. Ultimately, every GM has to work with what is available on the market and what makes sense for their situation. The Indians will not be trading Francisco Lindor to get an impact starting pitcher or a big bat for the middle of the lineup. Financially, that makes no sense, to give up a budding superstar controlled until around 2020 for a two-month or 14-month rental. Logically, it makes no sense because Lindor is a top ten prospect at a position of need.

I always watch the trade deadline closely, whether the Indians are in the hunt or not. It's a fascinating time of the year. A lot of things fascinate me this season about the Indians situation and there are some upgrades I would like to see the team make. As I said, my list would include DH, RF, and the bullpen, so that's what I'll focus on for this week's View from the Porch.

DESIGNATED HITTER

The Indians could really use some help from the DH spot. Entering play on Friday night, Indians DHs have put up a .233/.328/.408/.736 slash line. That's right around league average. League average for DHs this season is .246/.325/.413/.737. Operating with below average production from third base and right field, as well as very slightly above average production from left field and center field, the Indians could really use a better bat in that spot.

Nothing against Jason Giambi, who is a coach who plays occasionally, and Mark Reynolds who is locked in an epically-bad couple of months, but the Indians are going to struggle to get production out of that position the rest of the way.

SOLUTION:

Aramis Ramirez (MIL): The Indians would have to pony up a decent chunk of money to get Aramis Ramirez from Milwaukee, a player who is signed through next season for \$16M with a mutual option for 2015 that includes a 4M buyout. Ramirez made \$6M in the first year and \$10M in the second year of the contract to help the Brewers, who were up against their financial limits. While Ramirez was going to get paid either way, it's still a nice gesture that shows he's a team player.

As for his performance, it's been a down year for Ramirez, who has battled injuries. He hinted that he [may retire after the 2014 season](#), which would get the Indians off the hook for both the mutual option and the buyout. Ramirez likely won't play until right around the trade deadline or after, so the Indians would really have to take a leap of faith to acquire him. If Ramirez does come back, the Indians could always acquire him via the waiver trade deadline, which runs through August 31.

This season, Ramirez has batted .271/.359/.414/.773, but has had just 209 plate appearances. The Indians could afford to use him primarily as a designated hitter, using Lonnie Chisenhall and Mark Reynolds at third base. He has a career .290/.350/.537/.887 slash line against left handed pitching. Since Chisenhall struggles mightily with lefties, this could be a beneficial situation.

His medicals are a major concern. But, outside of the 2014 salary, the cost in terms of prospects would be pretty low, almost like the Alfonso Soriano deal that was just completed, where the Yankees are covering a small percentage of Soriano's contract and likely gave up a Single-A pitcher.

Kendrys Morales (SEA): We don't know what approach the Mariners will take to the trade deadline, but Kendrys Morales is certainly an interesting name. The 30-year-old is a free agent after the season, so he's clearly just a rental. Morales has a .279/.339/.463/.802 slash line and is a switch hitter. He can play first base, but is largely a designated hitter. That's a very good slugging percentage for playing at Safeco Field and having Oakland and Anaheim, with their pitcher-friendly parks, in the division. In fact, most of his damage has come at home. On the road, Morales is batting just .249/.751.

RIGHT FIELD

Nate Schierholtz (CHC): This almost makes too much sense not to do it. Drew Stubbs has been losing at bats against right handed pitching to Ryan Raburn, who has a career slash line against RHP of .257/.305/.409/.714. Schierholtz hits lefties well, with a career slash of .270/.323/.442/.765. This season is no different with a .289/.340/.562(!)/.902 slash. Schierholtz is in his third-year of arbitration eligibility this offseason, so he would not be just a two-month rental.

He would probably cost a mid-level prospect or two, a guy or two in the top 10-20 of the organization. The allure of Schierholtz is that he doesn't cost nearly as much to acquire as the next guy.

Alex Rios (CWS): The White Sox are a disaster and they have no pitching in their minor league system. Alex Rios is one of the team's top trade chips. Rios is putting together his second straight solid season after a horrendous 2011 that, at the time, made him one of the worst contracts in baseball. Rios is batting .276/.330/.437/.767 this season, with a nice spike in his walk rate. Despite batting .304 in 2012, his OBP was just six points higher than this season's mark.

He's signed through next season at \$13M, with a \$14M option for 2015. Rios does have a six-team no-trade clause, but the Indians are not on it.

BULLPEN

This is clearly the biggest need for the Indians. I'll separate righties from lefties and I think the Indians could use one of each.

RIGHT-HANDED RELIEVERS

Matt Lindstrom (CWS): While it's hard to expect consistent results year-to-year from some relievers, Matt Lindstrom has put together three straight solid seasons. This season, in 49 games, Lindstrom has a 2.68 ERA and a 3.07 FIP, which means that he's not really due for a whole lot of regression. His strikeout rate has dropped from the previous two seasons and his walk rate has increased, but he is inducing 54.7 percent of balls in play. A velo drop and a command drop may signal an underlying injury. Lindstrom has allowed 38 percent of inherited runners to score, well above the 31 percent league average.

Lindstrom has a club option at \$4M next season, which is a little bit high, but the buyout is only \$500,000 if the Indians chose not to keep him.

With the Indians likely losing Joe Smith to a multi-year free agent deal during the winter, Lindstrom would be a nice insurance policy.

Luke Gregerson (SD): Gregerson is my favorite right-handed reliever on the market. In 46 appearances, he has a 2.98 ERA and a 3.00 FIP. His best asset is a sparkling 4.11 K/BB ratio. Another aspect I like about Gregerson is that very few American League hitters have seen him, so the unknown factor would also help him during the stretch run. He doesn't throw particularly hard, sitting in the 89-91 range, but throws three different slider variations that make him tough to hit.

He is deadly on right-handed hitters. For his career, righties are batting .186/.241/.293/.534. Lefties have more success, but still a respectable .249/.332/.369/.701 slash line against. On a team with a lot of righty relievers who struggle with lefties, Gregerson would be one of the better options. Gregerson has allowed 33 percent of inherited runners to score, but has only inherited 15 runners.

Gregerson will be in his final year of arbitration after the season after making \$3.2M this season, so he would likely be around the \$4M for Lindstrom.

Jesse Crain's injury was a big blow to teams looking for right-handed relief help. The market is not nearly as loaded for RHP as it is for LHP.

LEFT-HANDED RELIEVERS

The biggest need for the Indians is a LOOGY, which stands for "Lefty One-Out Guy", a term coined by John Sickels of Baseball Prospectus. Rich Hill has an ugly ERA, which is the byproduct of being a LOOGY and starting the season poorly, but he has pitched better of late. In any event, Hill is the kind of guy that you want as a second lefty in the pen. A guy you can use in the 6th, as opposed to the 7th or 8th. Luckily for the Indians, the deepest part of the trade market is probably this position.

Oliver Perez (SEA): The career path of Oliver Perez is interesting, going from a starter with tremendous potential and horrible control to a premier LOOGY. Perez has a 2.41 ERA and a 2.99 FIP in 40 appearances this season. He has struck out 32.9 percent of the batters he has faced, including 30.9 percent of lefties. Jeff Sullivan at Fangraphs wrote an [excellent piece on Perez earlier this month](#) and his appeal on the trade market.

He pitches with a lot of deception, hiding the ball well from lefties. His 92-94 mph fastball speeds up on hitters because of how late they pick it up. Four of Perez's 20 inherited runners have scored.

Perez is a free agent at season's end.

Scott Downs (LAA): Downs may be due for some regression, he's the diamond in the rough Angels bullpen. Downs has a 1.24 ERA but a 2.94 FIP, mostly due to a 2/1 K/BB ratio, but his K/BB ratio against lefties is 4.33/1. Downs is a ground ball machine, with 57.4 percent of balls in play on the ground in his career and over 65 percent this season. Lefties are batting .200/.259/.220/.479 off Downs this season and .207/.273/.295/.568 for his career.

Downs is a free agent at season's end.

James Russell (CHC): With the LOOGY role being an annual need for the Indians, James Russell could make a ton of season. He's actually under contractual control until the end of 2015. He has a 2.68 ERA with a 3.24 FIP this season. He has already made 50 appearances on the season for a beleaguered Cubs bullpen.

Like Downs, and a lot of matchup lefties, Russell doesn't throw very hard. But, he throws five different pitches and would come with the unfamiliarity factor, having pitched exclusively in the Cubs organization.

Joe Thatcher (SD): Again, perhaps the crown jewel of the bullpen arms comes from San Diego. Joe Thatcher has made 48 appearances this season with a 2.22 ERA and a 2.98 FIP.

He sports a phenomenal 7.00 K/BB ratio this season. Lefties are helpless against Thatcher, with a .191/.239/.210/.449 slash line this season. Thatcher's career slash against lefties is .198/.266/.314/.580.

Thatcher is signed through next season, making him a very attractive trade candidate. Like Russell, Thatcher has spent his entire career in the National League.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The Indians will get one of the lefties available on the market. Steve Adams at MLBTradeRumors has an [excellent primer on the lefties that are available](#). I would be surprised to see the Indians get a position player or a starter, save for maybe Schierholtz. There are other teams interested in Schierholtz, so the Indians would have to win a bidding war for his services, but he would be a nice complement to Stubbs in RF and could DH if need be against a righty. The downside to acquiring a position player is that the Indians would probably have to part ways with Jason Giambi. I say "downside" because the front office would not want to do that and the clubhouse adores and respects Giambi. He may simply be a necessary presence, even he's a part-time player, and a mediocre one at that. He'll be invaluable if the team is in contention in September.

Anybody looking for the Indians to acquire a starting pitcher is going to be disappointed. The trade deadline "acquisition" of a starter is Zach McAllister, and when you consider the cost of acquiring a pitcher in a weak SP market, McAllister is probably more valuable than any starter the Indians could have gotten.

I would look at a lefty reliever and possibly another right-handed reliever as a win at the trade deadline. The lineup and rotation should be good enough to get by, but the Indians clearly need reinforcements in the bullpen.

The worst thing Antonetti can do is nothing. If he stands pat, the Indians will continue to have bullpen troubles exacerbated by starting pitching and position player inconsistency. For the Indians to stay in contention, they cannot lose games where they have a lead or get a good start. Bullpen improvements are out there and must be acquired.