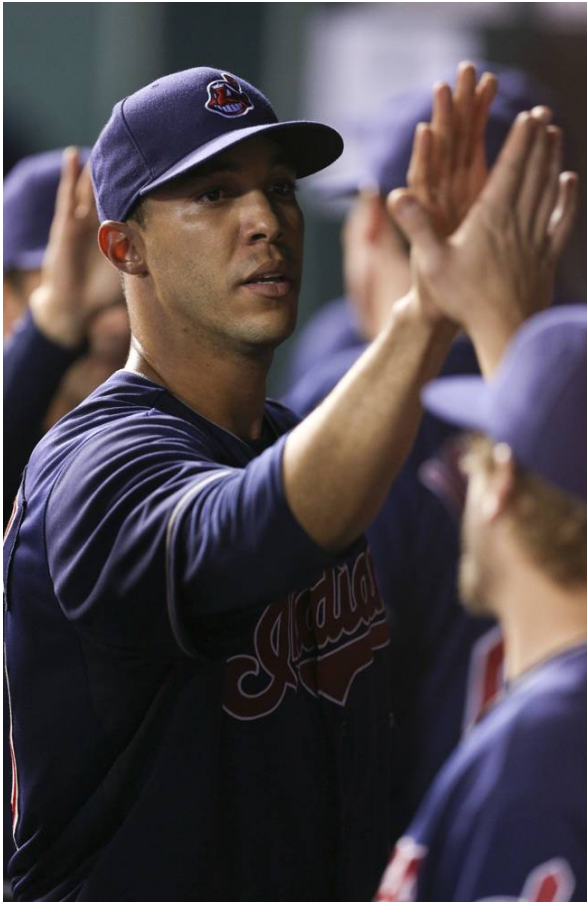


## Offseason Rundown: Qualified Decisions Loom Large, Indians Ponder Ubaldo, Kazmir, Options

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

Tuesday, November 05 2013 5:00 PM - Last Updated Tuesday, November 05 2013 11:27 AM

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You know what sucks the most about the baseball season ending? This cold weather. Just as baseball ends, the weather gets cold and that to me is symbolism at its finest. When spring gets her, flowers bloom and baseballs come out of them. This is scientific fact. When baseball ends, they explode into falling cold snow.

This is all true. I've studied it using science, so don't try and debate me.

Even more annoying than the cold is the space between news items. I suppose I could sit here and talk endlessly about one thing, but the cold makes me not want to. That's why whatever is going on right now with the Indians and all this flurry of topical items makes me warm.

See what I did there?

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So I suppose that I should stroke this fire that is going on instead of continuing on with my dumb banter. As fun as my dumb banter is.

### [QUALIFYING PRINCIPLES]

The reason that this part of the offseason is so active for the Indians is because that for once in a great while, the Indians have these things called free agents. I know it is a novel concept here in Cleveland, but with a competitive team to the very end, the Indians were not sellers and therefore have players in a position to leave the Indians the way most players leave a team.

And with that comes the trickiness of the new process in Major League Baseball when it comes to free agents. Here's all you have to know.

Free agents are in a position to receive qualifying offers from teams. That offer is a one year deal worth a set amount determined by salaries and numbers and fun things we need not go into. This year that number is set at \$14.1 million dollars. Think of it like the NFL's version of the franchise tag, only the player has the option to decline that offer and go into free agency.

Last year, nine people were offered that deal and all nine declined. This year, the Indians have two players that were in discussions for receiving a qualifying offer, starting pitchers **Scott Kazmir** and **Ubaldo Jimenez**

Jimenez was [put into that position by voiding the option](#) that the Indians picked up days ago.

The Indians had until 5 PM on Monday to extend a qualifying offer to Big U and Kazmir. If a player declines a qualifying offer and signs elsewhere, the team gets a draft pick. So obviously, it makes sense to offer the deal if the player is going for a longer contract and the chances of him signing that one year offer are low.

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It comes with the risk of tying up that much money though, for a small market team that may not be able to afford it, it could drastically impact how they operate the offseason.

The Indians have decided the risk is worth taking [as they extended that offer to Ubaldo](#) and will now wait for a week to find out if he is going to accept it, or bypass it and test free agency. Jimenez has exactly a week to response and announce his intention. Based off numbers floating out there, it seems like Jimenez will be going to free agency because the way that teams sign starting pitchers, especially ones coming off good seasons, makes it likely someone will award Ubaldo with a long term deal.

The Indians did not however extend that offer to Scott Kazmir and he becomes a legitimate, no-strings attached free agent for anyone to sign. Let's be honest, we're talking about a guy who didn't pitch in the major leagues the season before this past one. Sure he may want some long term security, but if you dangle \$14.1 million in front of him and say, "you put together one more year like last year and you will get one heck of a multi-year offer somewhere" how could he not take it?

And if he doesn't, who will sign Kazmir knowing they lose a draft pick? Some teams may not care all that much, but diminished the value of Kyle Lohse last year, no doubt it will impact Kazmir's market. So the Indians, at the risk of having to pony up nearly \$30 million to two starting pitchers for one year, decided not to offer Kazmir the deal.

And I hate to say it, but it brings up that debate we had as the season was coming to an end. Kazmir or Ubaldo? Because that is where we are at right now.

I mentioned last month that I'd probably be bringing back Kazmir over Ubaldo this offseason. I took some brush back because that sounded crazy. But when you look at financials, Kazmir comes cheaper, with less risk, and less uncertainty. Sure, they aren't that much different in risk, but there's different kind of risk involved. Just a simple adjustment and Ubaldo's mechanics are out of whack. Not to mention, one bad outing and the guy gets back in his own head.

Not saying that that is all going to happen or anything, but those are the risks involved with

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Ubaldo. With Kazmir, the risks are ones you are a little more willing to live with if they come to fruition and, with a lower price tag.

I wasn't to willingly commit to full-out re-signing Kazmir at that point, only that I'd take Kazmir over Ubaldo in the offseason based off all the financials and risks. Now, I'm willing to take that step. The Indians should sign Scott Kazmir, because he's not old, he had a good season and showed some real durability despite the fact the fact that he spent the previous year pitching in independent ball, and he may just give the Indians a stronger look than other teams because they took a chance on him.

And I'm not the only one that is on the re-sign Kazmir train. [My TCF colleague Al C. and the great Paulie C. are both on board](#)

Re-up with Kazmir. If you re-add Kazmir, you put yourself in a good position depth wise. Each rotation needs a veteran like Kazmir and heck, if you could also get a veteran that is a left-handed starter, even better.

That all being said, Kazmir could be a really attractive option for a lot of teams, and the bidding could get pricey for the Indians. Pricey not in the amount of money, but the length of contract. We know the Indians history in long term deals with starting pitchers. It virtually is non-existent when it comes to guys outside the organization. They just don't do it under the Shapiro/Antonetti era because it doesn't make financial sense. The biggest risk they ever took was Jake Westbrook and because of injuries, it blew up in their faces.

So don't expect the Indians to be looking further than two or three years, which means it would be important for the Indians to try and make a move with Kazmir sooner rather than later if they can.

Don't expect them to stand pat though if Kazmir goes elsewhere. This team seems like they are intending on adding a veteran starter. There are [already reports out there that the Indians have made an inquiry](#) on **Tim Hudson** and are after the veteran right hander. Hudson reportedly has been offered a deal by the Braves to return and could show loyalty and jump at a chance to win now.

But it has also been reported that Terry Francona has been working the phone lines already

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and is already mixing and mingling with people and Hudson is one of them. MLB.com says that he had a conversation with Hudson and has ties with him dating back to Oakland when Tito was a bench coach.

So that's the type of veteran you could see the Indians go after. Not your Jason Johnsons or Brett Myerses or anything like that, but perhaps a bonafied veteran starter that they could sign to a strong one or two year deal.

Two-thirds of your rotation are testing the waters. Yes there are in-house replacements, and without injuries to start it out, there should be enough people to contend for rotation spots. But the deeper the team the better. Look what happened when plans went up in flames. Brett Myers was a bust, Carrasco was not what the Indians were looking for, Kazmir, Masterson, Kluber, and McAllister all dealt with injuries at various points in time, and it wasn't until the second half that Ubaldo was really starting to be as dominant as he was.

The Indians wouldn't have made it as far as they did without that starting depth.

The Indians say that they'd like to [keep Jimenez and that "they'll do what they can"](#) to try and get Ubaldo Jimenez back in the fold. That just seems incredibly unlikely looking at it right now.

### [RANDOM RUNDOWN]

Speaking of free agents, MLB Trade Rumors [has their top 50 free agents](#) and predictions for where each one is headed. The two aforementioned starting pitchers are on the list, as is reliever Joe Smith. Ubaldo Jimenez checks into 11th and MLBTR believes he goes to the Blue Jays on something around a four year contract. Seems very realistic in terms of destination and contract.

There are teams out there, like Toronto, that will always be willing to spend money in that way. The Indians are not one of those teams, so they stand to gain from a team's willingness.

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Kazmir comes in a few slots later at 16 to the Twins on a two year deal. They are predicting a \$16 million agreement for two years, which I could easily see the Indians going for if that were to be the case. I could just as easily see them declining that idea too and opting to sign a guy like the MLBTR 22nd-ranked pitcher, Bartolo Colon. Not saying I'd sign Colon, but that's a much cheaper, low-risk option than signing someone to a two-year deal.

Other options on the list that come to mind, Paul Maholm, also a lefty option that won't come at a high price tag, Josh Johnson who will be looking to regain some steam and will probably sign on a one year deal, and the aforementioned Tim Hudson.

The other Indians on the list is Joe Smith, who they have going to the Rockies. It will be really interesting to see where the market goes for Smith, who may be one of the more popular non-closer relievers available on the market. He's durable, versatile, and has a proven track record in the AL and NL. Someone will surely want him and we've some stupid looking contracts given out to middle relievers before. The Indians should not give out that stupid-looking contract to him by any means, but it would be nice to keep him if they can.

The Indians [did add a reliever to the mix](#) on a minor league deal last week. They signed and invited reliever J.C. Ramirez to spring training. Ramirez is still young, 25, and was with the Phillies last year. They also re-signed Ryan Rohlinger and invited him to spring training as well. It makes it three, yes, three, arms added to this bullpen mix already between Capps, Ramirez, and Hynes in just a few weeks of offseason.

Jason Giambi spoke to the media after re-upping with the Indians last week. He said he isn't sure when he'll stop saying yes to playing, but he's ready to play again next year, because he's just accumulating the gravy.

*"I think you only dream about it," Giambi said on Friday. "You go through your certain stepping stones of your career, where it's, 'I need to get to the big leagues,' and then, 'I need to stay in the big leagues,' and then, 'I need to try to last in the big leagues and get my 10 years in.' Then, everything is kind of gravy after that. So I'm definitely blessed and I'm truly grateful for this opportunity. Not in my wildest dreams did I think I'd still be here."*

Yet he's here, and he'll be back in 2014 and perhaps beyond in a different role. This team loves

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Giambi and Giambi has suddenly fallen in love with this team. It is easy to see why Colorado entertained the idea of adding him as their manager and keeping him in the fold and why he kept going back there to be a part time player.

Finally, MLB announced their first offseason award and [it was the Comeback Player of the Year](#) . Scott Kazmir was reportedly nominated for the award in the AL, but in the end, it went to, guess who? Mariano Rivera of the Yankees. The idea of comeback could be anything. It can be from an injury or a bad year.

Or in the case of Kazmir, completely falling out of professional baseball and having to rebuild yourself as a starting pitcher.

Which to me, is a more impressive comeback than the one Rivera had from an injury. But you know, when a guy like that is nominated for an award, it hard to see him not get it. Like when he won the All-Star game MVP. I mean, that was great, and at the time, I mentioned how it was really nice that they gave that to him, because in the end, it doesn't matter.

And in the end, neither does this, but why do we give it to the guy that is most popular? Was Kazmir's comeback not more impressive? The guy was out of baseball, he pitched for some team called the Skeeters last year. He was putrid when he last was in the major leagues. And he came back out of no where and turned in one heck of a year and is probably going to get paid handsomely for it.

It is a little bias because Kazmir is our guy, but damnit, if that isn't the definition of a comeback then I don't know what is. That's how I'd define the award at least, not so much the injuries, but the return to glory from once being good, to falling on hard times and struggles.

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*Read more from Nino on [The Tribe Daily](#) , his own Indians blog. Don't miss all the fun, photoshopped Indians players, and LOLTribe ridiculousness.*

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