



The Indians have been here before. Yet, they haven't quite experienced this before.

They've put themselves in this position before, but they haven't quite had any opportunity to show us what they are made of in regards to the situation.

So with a team that has become increasingly easier to read in how they like to operate over the years, we've now reached a situation where it becomes difficult to understand how Chris Antonetti and company are going to approach this situation.

Now, the whole Terry Francona involvement, as well as that financial windfall from last offseason have definitely augmented the way that the Indians operate in the offseason and has thrown in some new aspects that disrupt the norm. But the underlying principles of this front office remains the same.

Calculated moves, low-risk high-reward signings, trading when the time is right and trading for less-known commodities, the way that this team operates will never change as long as Antonetti is in charge. There's a way that they go about making their moves.

And one way that the Indians have operated in the offseason even back through the Mark Shapiro days has been how they've signed starting pitchers. The last time the Indians signed a starting pitcher to a free agent deal more than one year (Brett Myers and the one year deal with an option aside)?

Are you ready for this?

Good old double winder Paul Byrd, when the Tribe signed him to a two year free agent deal worth \$14 million.

Since 2001 the Cleveland Indians have signed pitchers like Scott Elarton, Brian Anderson, Jason Johnson, Brett Myers, and Carl Pavano, but they've signed them all to one year contracts. Myers and Johnson had option years, neither of which became exercised due to the failures of each pitcher in their one year of opportunity with the Tribe.

This Shapiro/Antonetti regime has set a trend for this. They will not sign free agent starting pitchers to long deals. They'll sign CC Sabathia and Cliff Lee to long term deals when they are young and lock them up through arbitration and perhaps a few years of free agency.

But a free agent? You better be either old or broken down, because if you meet any other qualifications, the Indians will not bite, not even for their own players. It makes the future of Ubaldo Jimenez with Cleveland pretty clear. It makes it clear what kind of starting pitchers the Indians will pursue this offseason as well.

Cross Matt Garza, Ricky Nolasco, Ervin Santana, Bronson Arroyo, and Jason Vargas off your list. Add Bartolo Colon, Tim Hudson, Aaron Harang, and Joe Saunders.

Not that the first batch of names elicits any excitement, but we're talking about your multi-year guys and your one-year hanger-on-ers and your reclamation projects. Reach into the grab bag of old names and old success and maybe you'll pull something out and turn it into gold. Josh Johnson or Jason Johnson? Phil Hughes or Phil Humber?

The nice thing about this way of living is that the Indians have actually made a living off picking up good people off the scrap heap and turning them back into the viable starting pitchers that they once were. The thing is that the scrap heap comes with relatively low risk. The only thing you really are risking is a spot. You have to have a spot for Scott Kazmir for him to do what he did.

This year though, the Indians are in a different position. They've got no shortage of arms that they could give opportunities to and if one fails, move onto the next. That's what makes the question that is currently on the minds of a lot of fans a difficult one to process. It makes it hard to wonder how the Indians will handle this situation that they've found themselves in.

When you take a chance and it works out, how nice is it that you get to enjoy the payout of the risk you've taken? Equate it to gambling I guess. You go out and put a dollar down and turn it into five. Do you take that five dollars home and enjoy your four dollars of profit? Or do you put not just that four dollars, but five more additional dollars at risk to make 20?

That's what the Cleveland Indians are looking at with Scott Kazmir. They spent a dollar to bring him and see if he could be the winning lottery ticket. And he was, he helped the Indians cash in and get to the playoffs and pitched really well. The thing is, the [Indians are contenders now](#) . They're losing Ubaldo Jimenez and while they have options, depth is never a bad thing, especially when you can pencil in a guy like Kazmir, who is left handed and attributed to the pitching staff that struck out more hitters than all but one other team.

Do they pony up? Do they take that five dollars and put it back into the pot, and say, here's five more, let's go for more?

You see the Indians have been in this position where they've made profit. But they've never been in a position to turn that profit around. They've usually just been the guy that was happy to be there, taken their five dollars and gone away. In the past though it has been with cents rather

than dollars and with players you probably wouldn't feel comfortable raising dollar amounts on.

So the situation is unique, but it definitely leads us into some insight as to whether or not going back to that well that was so nice to us in the past is a good idea. You don't know who came along in the time you were gone and spit in it. Right?

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The last time the Indians went searching for a thrown away meal in the dumpster, they came out with a half-eaten Carl Pavano. Okay, I'm just going to remind you of the Pavano situation before this analogy goes too far.

The Yankees signed Pavano to a long term deal after a good career in Florida that including beating the Yankees in the 2003 postseason, back when the Indians were signing Jason Bere in attempt to find some magic (spoiler alert, they didn't). Pavano's deal was for four years and would net him close to \$10 million per and a whole lot of fame and attention.

Long and incredibly over-dramatic New York story later, Pavano was nicknamed American Idle and had started a grand total of 26 games in three seasons for the Yankees. Enter the Indians, who know an opportunity when they see one. A million and a half to take a chance on a guy who was good when didn't play for the Yankees? Sure, why not.

Pavano started 33 games in 2009, 21 as a member of the Cleveland Indians, far surpassing the amount in three years with the Yankees, who had to cut ties with Pavano, who was seemingly "not cut out for the bright lights" of New York City. With the Tribe he carried a 5.37 ERA, won 9 games, didn't do anything really spectacular. In fact, those numbers look incredibly average, if not, below average. But he pitched well down the stretch for the Twins when the Tribe traded him for minor league Yohan Pino (Pino and Jason Bere reference? Score!). So well, the Twins managed to make the postseason and put him out there against, you guessed it, the New York Yankees. He lost both games, but Pavano didn't pitch too poorly. In fact the first game was simply not his fault as he went seven innings giving up two runs and striking out nine hitters. Game two was a different story, but that season Pavano did something he couldn't do since his days with Florida.

He stayed on the diamond and was a workhorse. He was an innings eater, you could count on him for six every time out. So the Twins, they ponied up. They re-signed Pavano that they liked him so much. There was thought that the Indians could re-visit signing Pavano after the year, perhaps at one of those one year deals they like giving older pitchers.

But they didn't, because the Twins offered salary arbitration and Pavano accepted because, uh, who would turn down \$7 million coming off a year with a ERA in the 5s? No one, that's who. Pavano had a career year with the Twins in 2010, leading the league in complete games, winning 17 and carrying a much more respectable ERA in the 3s.

The Twins signed him to a two year contract, that half eaten dumpster meal turned into something that held the Twins over for a few days after the Indians got in a few nibbles and felt they could swap it for a few extra cents. Sorry, the analogy came back.

Perhaps this isn't a good example, because the Indians never really were in a position to re-sign Carl Pavano. Sure they could have revisited after Pavano's year of salary arbitration, but the Indians, while seeing a similar pitcher with a similar possible contract, were not really in the position they are now. Remember, a contender.

So let's find one that may be.

In 2004 the Cleveland Indians were coming off a surprise run. They won 68 games the year before, not much was thought of the fourth place Tribe. Then they won 80 games and started to challenge and show that the Shapiro Blue Print was very much taking physical form. CC Sabathia was coming into his own, there were other guys like Jake Westbrook and Cliff Lee who looked like parts that were worth keeping around and building a rotation on, perhaps Scott Elarton merited a longer look.

The Indians made their customary minor league signings like Jason Bere (there he is again!) Billy Traber was re-signed, Denny Stark (wow) was added on a minor league deal, the Indians seemingly were just going to fill in people, perhaps give Jason Davis a look.

Then they signed Kevin Millwood in January. Millwood was coming off a year in Philadelphia in which he started 25 games and wasn't the most reliable, but he was a veteran and he served a need in Philadelphia. Cleveland saw someone who could eat some innings and knew how to pitch. Would he headline a rotation? No, but he could teach their younger guys something.

Millwood didn't just have an impact on Ace CC Sabathia, he led the league in ERA in a surprise twist to the signing. It was a one year deal, it was worth \$7 million and it was supposed to be an opportunity for him to get a long term deal and for the Indians to teach their young guys something.

It wasn't supposed to turn into what it turned into. Millwood, despite his losing record, lead the American League in ERA and was a hot commodity following the season. The Indians won 93 games and finished second in the American League Central. Surely, they were primed to make a playoff run in 2006. Westbrook, Lee, Sabathia, even Scott Elarton had a good year. Millwood could have helped fill out the rotation and establish the Indians as a contender.

Then Texas came around and offered him a five-year deal worth \$60 million. Remember that whole thing about not signing guys to long term deals? Yeah, here is why.

Millwood had a decent follow up year in 2006 with the Rangers. He didn't lead anything in ERA but he won 16 games and was a workhorse for Texas pitching in a ballpark that was notorious at the time for being a hitter's park. But then the downfall. Millwood started at least 29 games in all four years he spent with Texas and actually started 31 games after being traded to Baltimore. The problem with all of it is that he wasn't very good. Sure he had a good year in 2009 when he had a 3.67 ERA.

But he was your typical veteran starter. He was good for giving you inning, keeping you in the game, but he was not worth the incredibly insane five year deal that the Rangers gave him. A good starter yes, an elite one worthy of that type of contract, no. The Indians would have been justifiably crazy if they had tried to re-sign Millwood at that type of deal.

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So there's your long drawn out context with some assistance from some really weird and strange analogies.

And here's the Cleveland Indians, staring down the barrel of making this decision about Scott Kazmir. The difference between Millwood and Pavano and Kazmir are there. This is not the same exact situation, but the Indians are in the same sort of position. Kazmir was a minor league signing, out of baseball the previous year and given virtually no chance to ever coming back and pitch a meaningful inning. But Kazmir rebuilt himself, re-strengthened his arm, and became a pitcher who knew how to pitch, but also found some of the old-stuff in the process.

The Indians put no real risk into signing Kazmir other than only giving him a spot. Millwood was given some money, Pavano had incentives added to a major league guarantee. Kazmir had to win a spot, didn't really get rewarded for the season he had.

All he has now is the deal that he will get this offseason. And there may be teams knocking down his door.

Will they be giving him a Kevin Millwood-like deal? No, teams have learned. Kazmir will probably net something in the range of a two to three year deal. He'll make some decent coin from it as well and the comeback will be complete.

The question now is, do the Indians buy into the comeback. The case is compelling. You have someone, despite not pitching in the game the year before, who measures up at any spot you would worry about. There are risks, but it seems as if they are calculated risks. Risks that you take on and feel good about because they're aspects Kazmir has battled through and given reason to believe.

But they are still risks. He is still coming off a year in which he battled injuries and arm fatigue. He is still a guy who broke down completely and was out of baseball. He is still getting older and could hit a mountain of dirt.

I don't think the Indians will make the deal in the end. Reports are they will do a one year deal, but Kazmir will get more elsewhere. So the Indians will move on and sign someone with less of a handcuff than a multi-year Kazmir would come with. They'd love to have a lefty and someone who is familiar to the team, but the Indians will not compromise their values, something we've seen time and time again.

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