



It's no secret that the Cleveland Indians are always looking at ways to cut even the most modest of unnecessary costs. The latest player at risk of being let go by the Tribe due to budgetary concerns is Drew Stubbs. After it was originally thought that Stubbs would be a [non-tender candidate](#)

, [Buster Olney reported](#)

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that several teams are knocking at the Tribe's door in an effort to acquire Stubbs.

The rumors and reports of the Tribe moving on from Stubbs seem to come from the fact that he and the [freshly-extended Ryan Raburn](#) fill the same role on the roster as right-handed hitting outfielders, and it's not financially prudent for the Tribe to spend roughly \$7 million to carry both guys.

The presence of Stubbs on the roster is why I never understood the Raburn extension. It's not the dollar amount that bothers me. Dave Cameron at FanGraphs wrote an article [dissecting the recent contract Nick Punto signed with Oakland](#), and he came to the conclusion that a \$3 million contract for a quality bench player is generally a fair deal. Going by that logic, the roughly \$2.5 million due annually to Raburn is very reasonable, and might actually be a bargain compared to what he likely would have gotten as a free agent.

No, my problem with extending Raburn for two years is that the team is guaranteeing Raburn a roster spot even though they already have Stubbs; who fills the same role on the team and is still under team control for three more seasons.

What makes it even more frustrating is that I think Drew Stubbs is a better fit going forward than Ryan Raburn. Now, you don't need me to point out that Raburn bested Stubbs in WAR last season (2.3 to 0.7 according to Baseball Reference) to know that Raburn was the superior player. But there's still ample reason to believe that Drew Stubbs would be the more useful player for the Tribe in 2014.

When it comes to comparing the two players, Stubbs' all-around game makes him a much more versatile option than Raburn. Stubbs is obviously the superior base runner, and not just when it comes to stealing bases. Stubbs also excels at stretching singles into doubles, going from first to third or second to home, and the other little things that come with being a fast, intelligent base runner.

Stubbs' speed also gives him an advantage over Raburn when it comes to patrolling the outfield. Despite Stubbs' struggles in [UZR in 2013](#), especially in center field, I still think his actual defensive value lies somewhere between the 9.0 UZR/150 games he posted in 2012 and the -3.8 number he posted in 2013. In other words, Stubbs is at worst a league average centerfielder and an above-average option in right field.

The point about Stubbs being able to play center field should not be taken lightly. It's just not that easy to find guys who can play a quality center field. It's the type of thing fans don't normally think about until there's an injury or two and all of a sudden [Rick Ankiel](#) is playing center field. Yes, the Indians have Michael Bourn and Michael Brantley, but Stubbs ability to play center is still a major checkmark in his favor.

Ultimately, if Stubbs is markedly better than Raburn on the base paths and in the outfield, the only reason to keep Raburn would be if he is a significantly better hitter than Stubbs. As good as Raburn was last season, there's no certainty that he will outperform Stubbs again in 2014. The only reason the Tribe was able to sign Raburn last offseason was that he was absolutely brutal for Detroit in 2012 (.171/.226/.254). That's not to say that Raburn will go back to being terrible in 2014, but it would not be shocking if Stubbs out-hit Raburn in 2014.

Even if Raburn does out-hit Stubbs, it's important to consider what the Indians want from this roster spot. The Indians' opening day right fielder is likely going to bat either eighth or ninth in the lineup. Regardless of who ends up as the Tribe's right fielder, the team should be able to

score plenty of runs in 2014. I would much rather get solid defense and quality base running out of the Tribe's right fielder, even at the expense of 50 points of OPS.

The last, and perhaps most important part of the Stubbs-Raburn debate is durability. Beginning in 2010, Stubbs has played 150, 158, 136, and 146 games. Raburn, on the other hand, has never played more than 121 games in a season.

But as telling as those numbers are, they don't explain the whole story. Part of the explanation for Raburn's struggles in 2012 was he had [never previously been an everyday player](#). Whether it was the inability to make in-season adjustments, the additional defensive responsibilities, or simply the mental and physical wear and tear that accompanies playing every day, Raburn has shown during his career that he cannot be relied upon to play every day.

Therein lies the rub when it comes to the Indians' right field situation. While I'm reasonably certain of what kind of production the Indians can get from Drew Stubbs, I have no idea what the team will get from Ryan Raburn. I'm okay with the Indians going into the 2014 season with the combination of Drew Stubbs, 30 games of Nick Swisher, and Minor League Free Agent X handling right field duties. I can't say the same thing about Ryan Raburn.

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