



It's no secret that the Cleveland Indians are looking to add a free agent pitcher to their rotation this offseason, and even though we have yet to reach the annual winter meetings, free agent starting pitchers are flying off the board. With the possible options for the Tribe's rotation rapidly dwindling, it's time to take a look at the remaining free agent starters and assess which ones would be good fits in Cleveland.

I've ranked several of the remaining options based on the likelihood they come to Cleveland, keeping in mind that the team is [already pushing dangerously close to its 2013 payroll of \\$82 million](#) (although for the fun of this exercise let's pretend they have a little more wiggle room than last season, especially considering all the [new television money flowing through baseball](#)), as well as whether or not I would personally pursue them. The following list is sorted based on

[HardballTalk's 2014 Free Agent Tracker](#) and all listed ages are the age the player will be on opening day.

The Top Options

Masahiro Tanaka, Japan, Age 25

It's safe to say that there is absolutely zero chance that the Indians sign Tanaka based on the posting system for Japanese players crossing over to MLB, or [lack thereof](#).

It would seem as though any potential changes to limit what teams can spend on posting fees would benefit the Tribe, but at the same time it's unlikely the Indians will ever post for a high-end Japanese import. Even if the posting bids are limited, a team as cost conscious as the Indians just doesn't have room in the budget to pay for a posting fee on top of a contract for a high end free agent.

Likelihood he comes to Cleveland: Zero

Would I do it? No

Matt Garza, Rangers, 30

Ervin Santana, Royals, 31

I'll group these two together because, again, there is zero chance the Indians sign either player. Both guys are curious cases because their performance has fluctuated wildly throughout their careers, Santana's due to ineffectiveness (FIPs by season starting in 2006: 4.29, 5.13, 3.30, 5.02, 4.28, 4.00, 5.63, 3.93) and Garza's due to injury (he only pitched 259 innings combined in 2012 and 2013).

[Buster Olney](#) wrote a few days ago that the market for these two guys as well as Ubaldo Jimenez (more on him in a bit) will be depressed due to a variety of factors. He may very well be right; we already saw the Nationals trade for [Doug Fister](#), and with David Price, Jeff Samardzija, and Brett Anderson still on the trade market, there are alternatives for teams that don't want to pay a boatload of cash or a draft pick in the cases of Santana and Jimenez. At the same time this is still the silly season, so don't be surprised if a team forks over a hefty contract to either of these guys.

I think whichever team does give a long term deal to either of these guys will regret it. Both of these pitchers rely more on their pure stuff than the ability to locate and change speeds. According to his [PITCHf/x data](#), Santana is basically a two-pitch pitcher; in 2013 he threw his fastball 51.6% of the time and his slider 38.3% of the time, with the slider accounting for 1.12

wSL/C and his four-seam fastball actually producing a slightly below average -0.1 wFB/C (you can read a primer on the pitch f/x data [here](#) and [here](#) , but the gist is the figures I'm sighting are weighted runs saved per 100 pitches, and the numbers tend to range between 1.5 runs and -1.5 runs with zero being average). In short, Santana goes as his slider goes, which is shown in his fluctuating FIP numbers over seasons and which makes him a pretty risky bet going forward.

As for [Garza](#) , he at least has the ability to mix in a two-seam fastball, cutter, and curveball to go with his four-seamer and slider. The only problem is, those pitches aren't very good; all of Garza's fastballs combined resulted in a -0.21 wFB/C (although his two seamer came in at a decent .69 wFT/C) while his curveball produced an unsightly -1.43 wCU/C. So while his slider is currently an excellent pitch (1.67 wSL/C last season), any loss of sharpness or bite in that pitch as he ages will likely render Garza ineffective.

Likelihood he comes to Cleveland: Zero

Would I do it? No



Ubaldo Jimenez, Indians, 29

I could delve deep into the numbers for Jimenez, but there's really no point. As good as he was in the second half of 2013, he was equally terrible for the prior two and a half seasons. With Jimenez it comes down to whether or not you think he can repeat his delivery consistently

enough to produce results similar to what he did in the second half. I'm not an adept enough scout (well, I'm really not a scout at all) to say whether or not the change is sustainably or whether it is the product of praying at the [Tao of Mickey](#) .

What's fascinating about Jimenez from the Tribe's perspective is, if Buster Olney's analysis is correct, his price may drop far enough to where the Indians can get involved in the bidding. There's no way the Indians go four years on Jimenez, but would they do three years, \$45 million? The answer is probably still no, but if the price tag falls even further than that, things will start to get interesting.

Likelihood he comes to Cleveland: I'd still say there's a less than one in ten chance he returns, but because he's tied to a draft pick, there is a chance.

Would I do it? If I could somehow get his AAV to around \$12 million, I probably would.

The Oldies But Goodies

Hiroki Kuroda, Yankees, 39

A.J. Burnett, Pirates, 37

Both of these guys have indicated that they will either return to their incumbent teams or retire, so there doesn't seem to be any possibility of the Tribe adding either player. For what it's worth, both of these guys were quietly among the best pitchers in baseball last season (3.56 and 2.80 FIPs respectively) and I would love it if the Tribe were able to bring one of them in on a one-year deal. Unfortunately, that doesn't seem to be in the cards.

Likelihood he comes to Cleveland: Zero

Would I do it? If I could I would. So close, yet still so far away.

The Rest Of The Middle Tier

Bronson Arroyo, Reds, 37

For whatever reason, I'm more down on Arroyo than others in the industry. While he has posted an ERA below four in four of the past five seasons, he has only one season with a FIP under 4.49 in his past seven seasons. In general, I'm usually against giving multiyear deals to pitchers with underwhelming stuff.

The one saving grace for Arroyo is that he's been pitching with diminished stuff for a while now; his fastball velocity dropped from 89 MPH in 2007 to 87 MPH last season, but 87 MPH was actually a slight uptick in velocity from 2011 and 2012. This is a guy who has gotten the job done his whole career by mixing speeds and locating his pitches, and there's reason to believe he can keep doing that into his late thirties. Also in his favor is that he's pitched 199 innings or more in every season dating back to 2005.

Does all that mean I would take a chance on him? No, not when he's looking for [\\$14 million per year](#).

Likelihood he comes to Cleveland: Slim to none

Would I do it? Not at that price

Bartolo Colon, Athletics, 40

Now we're getting somewhere! Since coming back in 2011 after receiving a stem cell injection

in his shoulder, Colon posted FIPs of 3.83 and 3.82 before posting a career best FIP of 3.23 in 2013 (Let's pause for a moment to appreciate the fact that Colon posted his career second-highest ERA+ of 141 at the age of 40. I always knew that guy was a [paragon of health](#)) . There's no mysterious in how Colon is getting it done; he pounds the zone with fastballs (throwing them 85% of the time) and dares hitters to beat him. His groundball percentage isn't especially noteworthy (41.5%), but his BABIP of .294 suggests he wasn't overly lucky either. But just by greatly limiting walks he was able to fashion a K/BB ratio of 4.03, good for sixth in the AL (according to ESPN).

If Colon can keep that K/BB ratio close to four, he should be able to pitch at least as well as he did in 2011/12. His physical appearance would seem to indicate he's an injury risk, but he made 80 starts from 2011 through 2013. If his price falls far enough, I wouldn't be surprised if the Indians make a move on him, and personally I can't deny that there would be great nostalgia in watching the big guy toe the rubber with the word INDIANS splashed across his ample chest.

Also, at one point in his life he looked like [this](#) .

Likelihood he comes to Cleveland: I wouldn't put a percentage on it, but considering he's likely in line for a one-year deal, he could be an excellent fit.

Would I do it? I would, just so I could see stuff like [this](#) . (Please, if you're going to click on one link in this manifesto, make it that one.)

Scott Feldman, Orioles, 31

Paul Maholm, Braves, 31

I'm again going to group these guys together because despite the fact the Maholm is a southpaw and Feldman isn't, they both share very similar profiles. In fact, if you want to know more about each, just read [this analysis](#) by Aaron Steen at MLBTradeRumors.com, since he basically covers all the bases (Ha! Baseball puns!).

As for how these guys fit in with the Indians, it all depends on the size and length of the contract. These are the type of free agent pitchers that can be had for extreme bargains if the market for their services dries up quicker than they expect. This is likely the Indians strategy at this point; with little room left in the budget, they may just be waiting for the market to fully flesh itself out, and then they will try and strike a one-year pact with one of these guys.

If I had my druthers, I'd prefer Feldman to Maholm because I think his pure stuff is a little better and he's already pitched in the AL before. But at the end of the day, either of these guys would be a nice fit in the back of the rotation because they offer a little more certainty in what they will provide when compared with the [current fifth starter pu-pu platter](#) .

Likelihood he comes to Cleveland: There's a pretty good chance one of these guys ends up in Cleveland for 2014.

Would I do it? If I could get either guy for one year, \$7 million, I would.



And The Rest!

Roy Halladay, Scott Baker, Jason Hammel, Bruce Chen, Jake Westbrook, Chris Capuano, Joe Saunders, Chad Gaudin, Mike Pelfrey, Gavin Floyd, Edinson Volquez, Shaun Marcum, Jerome Williams

These guys are in this section either due to injury, ineffectiveness, or both (or, in Bruce Chen's case, being Bruce Chen). A lot of these guys will get guaranteed money, but out of the ones that don't, it's a good bet one or two of them will wind up in Goodyear this spring.

Likelihood he comes to Cleveland: There's a really good chance at least one of these guys ends up in Cleveland.

Would I do it? My preference would be Chen because he is [gregarious like Ryan Dempster](#) .

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(All statistics courtesy of FanGraphs. I don't know how people managed to even watch baseball before that site was around.)

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