

In his most recent piece, Jarad Regano asks the question: should the Indians entertain trading C.C. Sabathia right now? Regano says it's simply not realistic to expect the team to resign C.C. in the wake of the numbers guys like Zito and Schmidt recieved this off-season. And Mark Shapiro has been unable to close the deal on other big names like Ryan, Sheffield, Hoffman, Ramirez, and Alou. Could a deal of C.C., with two friendly years left on his deal, yield the pieces needed to get this team over the top?



### **Should the Indians consider trading their ace now?**

Another offseason filled with big expectations. Another yawner turned in by GM Mark Shapiro. After the thrilling events that led the Tribe to a 2005 playoff push, management has seemingly been unwilling to commit to putting the final pieces to put the team over the top.

Another winter of false rumors. Another Christmas of second place offers to free agents. Instead of the big trade to acquire the big bat to protect Travis Hafner or signing an impact free agent, we got more of the same. Mark Shapiro handing out three and four million dollar contracts like they were \$10 Starbucks gift cards.

The “window”, as is industry speak, is closing fast for this team. While venetian blinds currently encompass a large chunk of the view, there is still optimism. But that optimism is for two more years only. The wave of core signings by management only locked up Travis Hafner through 2008 (oops!), while most of his teammates arriving on the scene at the same time were extended two to four extra years. Staff ace C.C. Sabathia signed his extension two years ago, and he too will be off the payroll after 2008.

With this fact bearing down on the club like an oncoming train, one would think only two solutions could have been on Mark Shapiro's mind:

He is confident he will be able to extend both of his two best players. If you are not laughing yet, consider that there is no precedence to this whatsoever for this club. Even with 455 straight sellouts. Even while we had a GM that did not work “payroll flexibility” into each and every lame interview with Mike Trivisono. Are you aware that we still have never given a player a \$10 million contract for more than one year?

That leaves the only other option. The one that I thought was sure to happen after last offseason...the "Shapiro Debacle of 2006." This would entail getting the big time piece or pieces to win in 2007 and 2008, knowing full well that you are not going to keep either of your best two players past then.

Shapiro chose solution #3. Check with pocket aces and hope for the best. The final tallies on this offseason report card show similar strategies to last year's "flexibility style" signings. Fixing the bullpen consisted of one year deals to a bunch of guys either hospital ridden last year, or members of AARP. They also added a platoon outfielder. The one player who should help is second baseman Josh Barfield, who's addition perversely puts an end to the Brandon Phillips nightmare. Too bad it cost the organization one of the most major league ready prospects in baseball.

My point is clear. No matter how you look at it, no matter what set of circumstances set up the failure of each transaction, Mark Shapiro cannot close the "big deal." Whether it be Gary Sheffield, Manny Ramirez, B.J. Ryan, Moises Alou, or Trevor Hoffman. All were different situations and all were the same result. His personal fetish for payroll flexibility will always be greater than taking that final leap of faith. The possibility of a "bad contract" and how it could affect this market will always outweigh any upside a player may have, no matter how large.

The Indians were light years behind the Tigers last year. With the addition of Sheffield in Detroit, I do not see the gap any narrower (even WITH Aaron Fultz). So I am turning my attention to what Mark Shapiro DOES do best: trading superstars at what is seemingly the most inopportune time, and raping an organization's minor league system.

Now is the time to take offers. No, not a Milton Bradley "he will be gone in 72 hours" type situation. But calls should be made. Talks should take place. With pitching in such high demand right now, an ace with two years left on a club friendly contract could potentially bring back a Bartolo Colon type return. With C.C. out of the picture, Hafner would have to be extended. And the window would be extended as well.

Sure, a trade like this would bring out the Dolan haters. But something big has got to happen. Since it seems as though it will never happen in terms of US adding the big piece, it may have to be the other way around.