

Thome Deserving Of Boos

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Wednesday, July 18 2007 7:00 PM -

It's a divisive topic here in Cleveland. Does Jim Thome deserve to be booed for leaving Cleveland for more money? Or does he deserve praise for the twelve years of service he gave the Indians? Tony Lastoria has his opinions on the matter. And while we originally ran this column back in April, we are re-posting it in light of his visit to Cleveland this week to provide a pretty damning case as to why the boos are appropo for him.



When you think about the Indians of the 90s, six players (The Big Six) usually come to mind as the faces of the franchise those years: Manny Ramirez, Kenny Lofton, Jim Thome, Omar Vizquel, Sandy Alomar Jr, and Charles Nagy. Other like Albert Belle, Roberto Alomar, Dennis Martinez and Orel Hershiser had their moments, but the Big Six were mostly here from the beginning to the end of the "Era of Champions" from 1995-2001.

Slowly, The Big Six left the organization for various reasons, but Thome's departure was the one that hurt the most and has been the one most often talked about by Indians fans.

When Thome hit the free agent market after the 2002 season it was a key time for the Indians organization. After the 2002 season, the Indians were in transition and in the early stages of a complete rebuild after General Manager Mark Shapiro's roster purge the previous summer. To fans, Thome was largely viewed as the most popular Indian, and was basically Mr. Indian. Many fans felt he would forever go down as one of the Indians greats of all-time, shatter tons of club records, and end up having his number retired and displayed in the right field mezzanine with the likes of Boudreau, Feller, Colavito and others.

But, that all changed on December 6, 2002 when Thome packed his bags, boarded a plane with his "Rock" (his wife), and shunned the very fans who grew to adore the farm kid from Peoria, IL by taking a six year \$85 million deal from the Philadelphia Phillies.

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Shun you ask? How can he shun the fans by taking six years and \$85 million over the Indians final offer of five years and \$62 million?

The difference in the two deals was indeed roughly \$23 million in total guaranteed money, and most players would take the higher offer in a nanosecond. But, the catch here, is Thome was supposed to be *different*. A throwback. A player with loyalty and supposedly one who loved this city and the fans. As fans, we have seen numerous players in other cities take much, much less to stay with their teams, and we thought for sure Thome would do the same.

Thome even said so himself, as noted by two quotes from the Plain Dealer near the end of the 2002 season:

"I've never even thought about playing for another team. I really like the idea of playing your whole career in one place. That doesn't happen much today. You look at Cal Ripken, Tony Gwynn, Kirby Puckett. For them to play their whole careers for one team, that's very special."

"What I do know is that my wife and I love it here, and we'd love to stay."

The Indians themselves even thought Thome would eventually resign with them. Thome had a no trade clause, and the Indians never approached him to waive it when they purged the roster of expensive veterans for young prospects during the roster purge in June and July of 2002. The reason was because Shapiro had no desire to trade him, and Thome told them he had no desire to leave. The two sides seemed to have an amicable relationship where a deal getting done seemed a foregone conclusion.

The Indians organization and fans all felt Thome would stay with the team, but when free agency started and dollar signs flashed in front of Thome's eyes, things changed. When the time came back up his all his talk, he didn't. Greed took over. And, that right there is the reason why Thome is vilified by the fans (you reading this [Ozzie Guillen](#) ?).

Albert Belle once confessed openly that is exactly what he did when he signed with the White Sox, that he went for the last possible dollar. And, he was promptly greeted with a cascade of boos and fake money

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rained on him in left field the first time he returned. But, for as much of a jerk he was, at least Belle was honest and displayed integrity about it. Thome was a weasel and lied through his teeth. While Belle and even Manny unequivocally left for the money, Thome alleged that he left for the chance to 'win'.

When reviewing the facts from the contract negotiations made public in the Thome free agent war between the Indians and Phillies, it is easy to see that Thome was driven to get the last dollar.

According to ESPN, Philly originally offered Thome five years and \$75 million, and the Indians offered four years and \$48 million. At the time, the original Phillies offer was \$27 million more in guaranteed money than the Indians offer, which obviously is substantial. However, it was not substantial enough for Thome to sign right then and there with the Phillies.

Now, everyone knows this is just a starting point for discussions, and that there is usually back and forth negotiating before a deal is ultimately reached. But, the tactics used by Thome were questionable, and illustrate his greed. Thome wanted the Indians to match the fifth year - which was understandable - and the Indians obliged by countering with a five year \$62 million deal. The Indians matched the 5th year the Phillies had offered at Thome's request, and now the difference in guaranteed money was only \$13 million.

But, this is where (at least to me) it shows Thome and his agent were not looking for a fair deal, but instead were looking for the Brinks truck to be backed up in Thome's driveway. Instead of accepting the Indians offer after they obliged with the fifth year, or at worst maybe asking them for a little more money to bridge the gap in the difference of guaranteed money between the two deals, instead Thome and his agent took the Indians deal and shopped it to get more cash from the Phillies.

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Apparently, the Indians offer was enough for Thome and his agent to shop it to the Phillies to try and fleece them for more money, and the Phillies accommodated by offering the six year \$85 million deal. Then, Thome came back to the Indians (again) and asked for them to add another year (again) to the deal. The Indians said no thanks. Had the Indians obliged (again) and added a sixth guaranteed year like they did the fifth year, whose to say Thome does not go back to the Phillies and gets seven years? Eventually, you draw a line in the sand, which is what the Indians did.

It should be noted, while the Indians did not come back with a guaranteed sixth year, unbeknownst to many Indians fans, the Indians DID come back with one final offer where they added a sixth year to the deal as a vesting option for \$12-13 million. It was not guaranteed money, but was probably tied to plate appearances and reportedly the option was easily attainable if he stayed reasonably healthy. The Indians were concerned about Thome's back (which in hindsight was a legit concern), and they wanted to insure themselves if he went down with a back injury. Had the vesting option matured, the final difference in money would only have been around \$10 million in total dollars from the final Phillies and Indians deals.

So, the original difference in the value (including the option year) between the two deals went from \$27 million to about \$10 million. Yet, after all that legwork and all those negotiations to get the Indians offer more competitive with the Phillies offer, Thome still chose to sign with the Phillies.

What a piece of sh.....(well, you know).

Can it get any clearer than that? If the guy was on the fence when the deals were \$27 million apart, but when widdled down to a \$10 million difference in total contract value, you would think the player who had supposedly grown to adore the city and fans and wanted to be an

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Indian forever would have signed on the dotted line....with the Indians. But he didn't. He instead took the last dollar, and went to the Phillies.

And, Indians fans are not stupid. While a lot of fans consider Indians owner Larry Dolan a tightwad and cheap, they know when they have been duped. They know Thome's real motive here was nothing more than M-O-N-E-Y. They know his words of wanting to stay here was nothing more than hollow lip service, and that he ended up being "just another ballplayer" looking to get paid.

The Indians fans showered Belle with boos and fake money because he was a jackass, not because they felt he screwed the fans over. The Indians fans shower Thome with boos because he DID screw the fans over into believing he would stay and that the love between ballplayer and fans was mutual, and he turned out to be a jackass in his own right. Thome was supposed to be a player who would hold true to his word, and he didn't. And THAT is why the fans boo him at Jacobs Field.

This is the difference from him being Albert Belle and going for the last dollar and say Trevor Hoffman/Tony Gwynn/Craig Biggio who actually lived up to their word and stuck around with their teams for much less coin. Heck, look at Jake Westbrook. He clearly wanted to stay in Cleveland, loves it here, and felt some loyalty to the organization. So, he gave the team a hometown discount and signed for three years and \$33 million, when he probably could have gotten much more in free agency. Why couldn't Thome do that?

The Indians offer was very fair, and very similar in nature to what some of the other players in the league have stuck around for when giving hometown discounts. Isn't it ironic that the man (Belle) who displayed significant objectionable behavior off the field is the one who was honest, forthright, and displayed integrity?

In the USA Today in August 2002, Thome said:

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"You shouldn't play this game for the money. You should play it for pride, and for the love of the game. ... My dad always told me it's not what you do when you walk in the door, it's what you've done after you walk out. It's what kind of an impression you've left."

Well, Mr. Thome. You certainly left an impression. Kiss my ass.