

Comparatively Speaking

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}
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As fans, it's easy to say "the Indians should have made a move at all costs" before this past Tuesday's trading deadline. But when confronted with the actual players that you'd have to give up, would you still make that deal? In his latest column, Paul Cousineau takes a closer look at the Gagne, Dotel, and Teixeira deals ... and lays out what the comparative package the Indians would have had to give up in return for them.



The trading deadline has come and gone and the Indians have added the left handed bat they needed to augment the left field platoon, but came away with no reinforcements for the work-in-progress bullpen.

Names like Al Reyes, Damaso Marte, Troy Percival, Eric Gagne, Joaquin Benoit, Octavio Dotel, and David Weathers were all bandied about; but only Gagne, Ron Mahay, Dan Wheeler, and Dotel changed addresses for significant relievers as the other "Sellers" held on to their commodities for the time being.

Of course, at this point in the season, many teams still feel that they are "in" the pennant race and are reticent to sell off pieces for prospects. By August 31st, which is the Trade Deadline for players passing THROUGH waivers, that list could be a lot longer and could see some action on the trade front.

While frustrating to see the Deadline come and go without the Indians giving some support to the back end of the bullpen, the contingent of fans that simply want to "win at all costs...this year" and feel that the Dolans didn't "spend when the time was right" (think they'd like that phrase back?) need to examine what really happened with the deals that were consummated.

To say that Eric Gagne or Octavio Dotel were moved for nothing is false, but it's a widely held belief because Indians' fans don't know anything about Kyle Davies or Kason Gabbard and have no point of reference for their own knowledge of prospects.

With that in mind, here's a little analysis of the moves that were made that some fans probably would have liked to been in on and how the players given up for that "one piece" compare to players currently in the Indians' organization.

Eric Gagne for Kason Gabbard, David Murphy, Engel Beltre

Texas actually settled on a little less than most thought Gagne would bring, probably because Boston had to guarantee all of Gagne's incentive clauses (over \$2M) because they were on his no-trade list (just like the Tribe) as he won't be closing for the Sawx.

Whether Gagne still has much left in the tank will be the interesting thing to watch, particularly under the bright lights of Boston, as well as how he reacts to not closing (remember, he wanted to go to a team for

whom he would close, regardless of their likelihood of making the playoffs). Of course, if Gagne does do well, how quickly will it take the Boston faithful and media to pull the "Backup QB" syndrome and call for Papelbon to step aside?

It certainly bolsters the Red Sox bullpen for the stretch run, though Gagne is a FA at the end of the season, so the Red Sox gave up a bit to get 2 ½ months of him and will have to count on their other ballyhooed prospects (most of whom they were able to hold onto) to keep the pipeline to Fenway mound flowing.

How much in terms of Tribe prospects?

Hard to say because Kason Gabbard's 2007 success is comparable to what Jeremy Sowers did last year or would equate to Aaron Laffey (though a few years older) if Laffey comes up and goes 4-0 for the parent club. Otherwise, players like Brad Snyder (Murphy), Carlos Rivero or Nick Weglarz (Beltre) would be the comparable Tribe farmhands to those involved in the Gagne package.

While some could certainly say, "Sowers, Snyder, and some teenager...I'd do it yesterday", remember that Gagne had to agree to the deal and basically said that the only way he was going to Boston was if he would close or if they would pay him. Also, perhaps Texas demanded Atom Miller or Gutierrez as part of a Tribe package, which would have likely nixed the deal for the Tribe as the value of young, cheap MLB-ready players is what keeps most teams competitive.

Octavio Dotel for Kyle Davies

While it was widely reported that Ben Francisco was the target for the Royals, it's possible that KC GM Dayton Moore played it the way that smart GM's do, calling Atlanta to tell them that they had a deal with Cleveland all set unless they parted with Davies. When Atlanta agreed, Moore could have called Shapiro back to tell him that he had a better offer on the table and asked for Franklin Gutierrez or Jeremy Sowers to make the Dotel deal happen.

Rebuffed by the Tribe (and maybe other teams), Moore returned to the most attractive deal on the table, in his opinion, and added Davies to the rotation.

The clincher for the deal likely came in the fact that Moore cut his teeth in the Atlanta Front Office and is very familiar with the now 23-year-old Davies.

The comparable package for the Tribe is not a great one as Davies came up as a 21-year-old highly touted rookie, thought to be a potential front-line starter, and has struggled in his limited time in MLB, compiling a 14-21 career mark with a 6.51 career ERA.

Reports that Dotel has not received rave reviews from scouts following him over the past two weeks could not have enhanced his desirability, regardless of the name recognition or track record.

For those looking for that "big bat" and some relief help, here's the deal that would have quenched your thirst:

Mark Teixeira and Ron Mahay for Jarold Saltalamacchia (#1 ATL prospect) , Elvis Andrus (#2 ATL prospect), Matt Harrison (#3 ATL prospect), Beau Jones (#14 ATL prospect), and Neftali Feliz (#18 ATL prospect) - rankings from Baseball America

There's your blockbuster!

Atlanta's GM John Schuerholz has the uncanny ability of identifying the right players in his system and dealing the excess, rarely trading away players that develop into superstars, but this is a pretty big package of highly rated players. The fact that Schuerholz rarely makes a "looks awful in hindsight" move with his prospects is quite a testament to his talent evaluation, but it's also something that is pretty rare in baseball.

The comparable package for the Tribe would likely equate to Ryan Garko (Salty), Asdrubal Cabrera (Andrus), David Huff (Harrison), Neil Wagner (Jones), and Luis Solano (Feliz).

Before the argument comes out that Teixeira is worth the prospects because of his ability to anchor the middle part of a lineup, consider the numbers of Garko-my-God-did-you-see-how-far-he-hit-that and Big Teix this year:

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Player - HR / RBI / BA / OBP / SLG / OPS

Garko - 14 / 43 / .311 / .378 / .520 / .898

Teixeira - 13 / 49 / .297 / .397 / .524 / .921

Take Teixeira's Gold Glove out of the equation, and the two are having pretty comparable years with Garko under club control until 2012 and Teixeira due to earn \$9M this year and probably close to \$12M next year, his last year of arbitration.

Some have said that Schuerholz is only tied to the Braves until after the 2008 season and has decided to go for it this year, regardless of the consequences on the team going forward, so this is a definite "Let's Go For It in 2007" move...but the team has a way to go to ensure a playoff berth.

Dan Wheeler for Ty Wigginton

Although the Tampa Bay bullpen is historically bad, this one is a little hard to figure. With as many holes as the Rays have, you would have thought that they would have been looking for something else for Wigginton, who is a pretty productive bat as well as being a versatile player.

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From the Astros' perspective, consider that the Tribe comparison for Wigginton is Casey Blake as both are super-utility, productive players around the same age. The Astros received a player like Wigginton for a middle reliever, albeit a very good one. Hard to argue with that logic and easy to see how, if that is what they were looking for in exchange for Wheeler, the Indians couldn't really have been in on the discussions without creating a HUGE hole at 3B.

Perhaps you still could be sitting there thinking that it's time for the Indians to part with some of their prospects to bolster the parent club, and you may be right. Remember, though, that "The Plan" is built around a deep, strong farm system to fill holes that reveal themselves in Cleveland.

If I had told you at the beginning of the season that Jeremy Sowers AND Cliff Lee would be in Buffalo and Jason Davis AND Fernando Cabrera would have been DFA'd, would I have had to preface it with a plea for you to stay calm or to even step away from any nearby sharp objects?

Where would we be this year without Fausto Carmona or Rafael Perez and the organizational depth that they represent?

Will all of these prospects that the Indians are "holding onto" pan out? Certainly not, but not many of these GM's are particularly dumb (especially now that Steve Phillips has left the GM chair), or desperate (unless you're from Pittsburgh), so they're going to ask for a lot and wait it out.

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Who's to say that Tampa Bay didn't ask for Asdrubal Cabrera (who played one game at 2B in Akron...hmm...before being promoted to Buffalo) AND something else for Al Reyes, or that the Nationals were looking for Chuck Lofgren, Franklin Gutierrez AND two more top prospects for Jon Rauch or Chad Cordero?

We all have heard that Boston, when asked by Cleveland what it would cost to get Manny, told Shapiro that Carmona, Atom Miller, AND Crowe would be the starting point. Most people said that Miller was too valuable to give up in that package.

Right now, would you trade Manny for Carmona straight up?

The trade of Bartolo Colon was the last trade before the Teixeira deal that included the greatest commodity right now, multiple MLB-ready or close-to-MLB-ready prospects. The Indians claimed to have explored every trading opportunity, but to make a move means that you have teams willing to deal with coveted players, have a match in the exchange of players, and aren't overbid by another team desirous of the services of the coveted player. In this changing world of MLB economics and trade values, it's becoming a more difficult thing to do every year.