

Now in year six of the Mark Shapiro Rebuild, the Indians have nary a playoff appearance. And are spiraling the wrong way once again this season. Yet the Indians have not only extended the contracts of Mark Shapiro and Eric Wedge, but gone out of their way to heap praise on them. This baffles Jarad Regano, who rants on the topic in his latest column.



Playoffs Just The Tip of The Iceberg to Importance of Home Stretch

(to 99 bottles of beer on the wall)

One Year of the Rebuild in the Books,

One Year of the Rebuild...

Don't win jack, pat yourselves on the back,

One Year of the Rebuild in the Books...

Two Years of the Rebuild in the Books,

Two Years of...well, you get it. And like the original, the lyrics do not change. Unlike beer though, each verse of this version gets harder to stomach. Sure, leeway is due after a massive rebuild like that in 2002, and small strides certainly do deserve accolades and rewards for management and coaches alike. As clubs drift further and further from Ground Zero of a full blown roster purge, though, these expectations generally rise. Perhaps my biggest gripe with the Indians right now is not how poorly they are playing, but how highly they think of themselves.

We are in Year #6 of the rebuild, people. Since its inception, we are the only Major League Central team to not play in a postseason game (counting Kansas City as AAA, of course). Despite this the Dolans have endlessly talked about the unbelievable job GM Mark Shapiro and company have done in "rebuilding" the franchise. Nothing was more notable than the love fest from Paul Dolan at Mark Shapiro's contract extension media session. Now I will admit, keeping Shapiro around was probably the best option the Indians had. Ownership was able to keep an established general manager as opposed to training a rookie or trying to throw chump change on the open market. But I cringed at the tone of Dolan, speaking as if Shapiro had built a perennial playoff team. While I would have preferred the "we are

ready for the next step" speech, it was instead a "we have arrived" speech.

Next on the list is manager Eric Wedge. After having his roster shaved following a 93-win season in 2005, Wedge managed the Indians to an under performing fourth place finish in '06. While he survived the season, he was not given the job security his boss had come to realize. It was enough for most Tribe fans, including myself, to have someone on the spot this year. *It is 2007 now, right?*

Then after one-half year of contending baseball, the Indians chose to extend... not pick up the option mind you, but extend Wedge for three more years. Unfortunately, this showed many a Tribe fan that consistency in personnel and individual personalities could be the most important thing to the organization. Maybe even more important than, say, winning! A scary thought is that contractually, Eric Wedge could be on the Dolan payroll as manager for nearly a decade without a playoff game! Could someone check with Baseball Prospectus on this? Has this ever happened?

Moving on down the line, it appears pitching coach Carl Willis' job is as safe as George Washington's is on the one-dollar bill. While the players themselves step between the lines and play the game, is anyone accountable for the loss of Jeremy Guthrie? Where should the finger be pointed for the huge regressions of Cliff Lee and Jeremy Sowers? Shouldn't Fernando Cabrera be closing for us by now? Certainly, all clubs have their issues, but it seems like they are more prevalent here.

If the Indians right the ship and make the postseason, all of the above will be dismissed by Tribe fans. But, if the team continues to unravel and misses the playoffs once again, a PR nightmare would no doubt ensue. How can you sell tickets to a 7th sequel?

Mark Shapiro and Eric Wedge will be back next year and for the foreseeable future. What happens in the final stretch run could very well shape the Indians success for years to come.

Postseason would bring a renewed love affair with the team, closure to a rebuild, and plenty of filled seats. Missing out even by one game though, would be a dagger in the hearts of an already fickle fan base. Barring something out of the ordinary in the off-season, 2008 would be a really tough product to promote.

So starting tonight, Go Tribe! Make this article a moot point.