

Ever since the Bartolo Colon trade officially started the Indians rebuilding effort, Larry Dolan, Mark Shapiro, and Eric Wedge have all been consistent targets of the mainstream Cleveland media. But as the Indians close in on a division title and what looks like a 95 win season ... it appears there was a method to their madness all along. This season in particular, Mark Shapiro pulled a lot of the right strings. And Jarad Regano talks about them in his latest column.



Smart Moves in '07 Greatly Outnumber the Poor for Tribe

As certain as death and taxes, negative news will always get the nod over the feel good story of the day. Even so, the Indians do not even seem to get a fraction of the acknowledgement they deserve for where they are in the standings. At their current pace, the '07 Tribe will join the '05 edition as having a better regular season record than four of the seven teams during the golden years (95-2001). How they arrived here is a testament to in-season creativity, and an overall exceptional job by ownership, management, and even much-maligned skipper Eric Wedge. The Indians are a franchise that seemingly will never totally win all its fans back after early frugalness and perceived front office lip service. The levelheaded fan, though, better realize how good the decisions made THIS year were. Lets recap:

SIGNING JOE BOROWSKI

Where would the Indians be without Joe Borowski? See Philadelphia in the NL East Standings. After getting squeamish reviewing his physical,

the Phillies passed on adding Jo-Bo to the back-end of their bullpen. Mark Shapiro and staff did their own research, and brought him on board. Borowski, though entertaining each night, has a chance to break the franchise saves record. Piss and moan about his ERA all you want, but the Indians would not be here without him.

YOUR THIRD BASEMAN: CASEY BLAKE?

Committed to cramming Andy Marte down our collective throats, the Indians handed the starting third base spot to him in spring training. After a slow start, though, Wedge and Shapiro quickly went to Plan B. Doing so somewhat acknowledged that Marte was not the player they thought they had acquired last year. The pride swallowing led to Casey Blake, rumored to play nearly everywhere else in 2007, actually going back to third. Blake has provided steadiness and exceptional defense all year.

TRADE DEADLINE

The Indians resisted the urge to trade Franklin Gutierrez or Ben Francisco at the deadline for a late inning bullpen arm. That arm would probably have been Octavio Dotel. And that would not have worked out. Dotel soon went on the DL, and Gutierrez would go on to win the full-time right field job. At 24, he has a chance to be a corner outfielder for a long period of time in Cleveland. Francisco, on the other hand, went down to Buffalo and finished off an amazing season. There is a chance that both could be in the Tribe's plans next year.

Shapiro did manage to add Kenny Lofton, though. He only had to give up a single-A prospect, and was able to inject speed and a .300 hitter into the lineup. Lofton's acquisition was also the beginning of the end for Trot Nixon. Two birds. One trade.

ASTRO-CAB

Don't even lie and say you saw this one coming. Astrubal Cabrera is only 21-years old, and was shipped to AA this year after struggling at AAA last season. He put up solid numbers, and got a cup of coffee in Buffalo. Despite brilliant defense from Josh Barfield all year long, management felt Cabrera would be a better choice for a playoff run. Keep in mind this would be at a new position, and it would be his first taste of the big leagues. The move not only worked, Cabrera has solidified the two-hole and has been the best hitter in the clutch for the Tribe the past few weeks.

Barring an "Only In Cleveland" finish, the Indians are headed back to the playoffs for the first time in six years. Give props where they are due.