

A Flurry Of Inactivity

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}
Wednesday, January 23 2008 7:00 PM -

Much has been made of the Indians' activity this off-season, or lack thereof, since coming thiiiiis close to the World Series before dropping three straight to the Red Sox in the ALCS. Even more has been made of the additions to their AL Central rival Detroit Tigers and the continued merry-go-round of players that fill out White Sox roster. In his latest, Paul breaks down what has (and hasn't) happened this offseason, and what it all means for the Indians.



Much has been made of the Indians' activity this off-season, or lack thereof, since coming thiiiiis close to the World Series before dropping three straight to the Red Sox in the ALCS. Even more has been made of the additions to their AL Central rival Detroit Tigers and the continued merry-go-round of players that fill out the White Sox roster. The dreadful feeling that the Indians are running in place as the rest of the American League is passing them by and that somehow the "window is rapidly closing" due to their inactivity has pervaded many Tribe fans' minds as Spring Training draws closer. The sense that the Indians didn't do anything to improve their team, by way of adding outside players, while the Tigers added a huge bat and a back-of-the-rotation starter to augment their roster, has led some to believe that the Indians have already been passed by as favorites in the AL Central due to their inactivity.

But, outside of the movement in Motown, it has been a relatively quiet off-season for the rest of the bona fide contenders in the AL as most "experts" feel that the Red Sox, Yankees, Indians, Tigers, and Angels enter Spring Training with the best teams in the AL. Knowing what the Tigers have done, how active have those other teams been this winter? Examining the transaction logs for each of those teams, the movement of players and additions can be broken down as "Retained", "Lost", "Added", or "In Limbo".

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"Retained" meaning that the players either had options picked up or signed new contracts with their former teams, "Lost" meaning that a member of the 2007 roster has signed elsewhere, "Added" meaning a player not on the 2007 roster who has joined the club since the end of the 2007 season, and "In Limbo" referring to players on the club's 2007 roster who became Free Agents and have not yet signed with another team.

Boston

Retained - Javier Lopez, Mike Lowell, Doug Mirabelli, Curt Schilling, Mike Timlin, Julian Tavarez, Tim Wakefield

Lost - Matt Clement, Eric Gagne

Added -

In Limbo - Bobby Kielty, Eric Hinske, Kevin Cash

Truly, some excellent retentions (Lowell, Schilling), but nothing added to Boston to augment their notoriously shaky middle relief or lineup. Of course, they're looking at full years out of their young 2B (Pedroia) and young OF (Ellsbury) to go with the maturation of their young arms (Lester, Buchholz, Delcarmen, etc.) for improvement - but where does that fortification from the development of young talent sound familiar? All told, the Red Sox...the defending World Series Champion...will be coming back with no big additions or truly new faces as they keep essentially the roster mostly intact from their championship run of a year ago in the hopes of attaining a similar result.

New York

Retained - Jose Molina, Andy Pettitte, Jorge Posada, Darrell Rasner, Mariano Rivera, Alex Rodriguez

Lost - Luis Vizcaino, Tyler Clippard

Added - LaTroy Hawkins, Jonathan Albaladejo

In Limbo - Roger Clemens, Doug Mientkiewicz, Ron Villone

Again, like Boston, the Yankees retained a number of their stalwarts from the 2007 season (notably Pettitte, Posada, Rivera, and A-Rod), but haven't added much outside of a few bullpen arms. For all of the talk at the end of 2007 about how the Yankees simply didn't have the pitching to match up with the Tribe (much less the Sawx) in the playoffs, nothing has been done to date to strengthen their rotation via FA or trade. Pending any Santana deal, the Yankees seem to be

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content to allow their young talent (Chamberlain, Hughes, etc.) to help their own team, rather than flipping them for established players. While far from a novel concept, it represents a decided shift in thinking in the Bronx most likely spearheaded by GM Brian Cashman, who has allegedly wrested some influence away from Big Stein's Inner Circle in Tampa. The new strategy - fortifying from within rather than continually making the big splash in Free Agency to fill holes - is one that Cashman is banking on panning out. If you think the off-season has been relatively quiet in little ol' Cleveland, imagine how the New Yorkers, accustomed to using the annual FA list as their personal grocery list, are reacting to their winter of discontent, when even an ALCS appearance was denied by one of their "feeder teams".

Los Angeles

Retained -

Lost - Orlando Cabrera

Added - Torii Hunter, Jon Garland

In Limbo - Bartolo Colon, Dallas McPherson

Outside of the Hunter addition, which theoretically gives their lineup some pop (for a few years at least) and depth, the Angels also seem to be subscribing to the method of letting their young talent emerge and contend simultaneously and letting their undoubtedly deep and talented farm system bear some fruit in California. The youth movement is personified by a projected infield consisting of C Mike Napoli (26), 1B Casey Kotchman (24), 2B Howie Kendrick (24), and SS Erick Aybar (24) who have combined for 1,485 career AB - which is about 576 fewer AB than Grady Sizemore (25) has amassed in 3-plus MLB seasons. They still have some very-well-known quantities on their roster in Hunter, Vlad, and Lackey, but the subtraction of Cabrera essentially amounts to another move of the Angels trusting their farm system as stud SS prospect Brandon Wood is not too far removed from Anaheim. In short, you knew that the Halos were not going to stand pat, if only for owner Arte Moreno to try to lure more LA Dodger fans into Orange County, but the addition of a athletic CF to help out Guerrero in the lineup sounds like [a song I've heard before](#) .

Meanwhile, back on the North Coast, we all know about the Tribe's moves:

Cleveland

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Retained - Joe Borowski, Paul Byrd, Aaron Fultz

Lost - Chris Gomez

Added - Masahide Kobayashi, Jamey Carroll

In Limbo - Kenny Lofton, Trot Nixon

The Indians had a hole in LF (which is almost universally acknowledged by anyone who doesn't own a Dellichaels jersey) and needed bullpen depth. One of the needs was checked off by the retention of JoeBo and Fultz combined with the importation of Kobayashi. Outside of that, the Indians have replaced Chris Gomez with Jamey Carroll and have, apparently, decided to go with David Dellucci and Jason Michaels in LF. The latter decision didn't exactly set the AL on fire last year, and I have a feeling that something will still happen before the team breaks camp to remedy (or at least modify) the LF situation, even if only with the possibility that Ben Francisco and, later, Jordan Brown somehow enter the fray in 2008.

But for all of the hand-wringing about Shapiro sitting on his hands and doing nothing to improve the Indians, outside of the enormity of Miggy Cabrera (pun intended) arriving in the AL, have any of the other assumed AL contenders done THAT much to improve their teams? Due to a dreadful FA market, where a lot of bad (and by that I mean putrid) money was spent, and the trade market essentially consisting of teams looking for their Bartolo Colon deal to jumpstart their player development and stock their cupboard, the winter has been generally quiet.

For as much talk as there was about Johan Santana and others, the only real earth-mover was Cabrera heading to Detroit this off-season in the AL. If the lack of activity this winter in light of the Detroit trade comes back to haunt the Indians, they won't be alone among AL contenders.