

It Takes Two To Tango

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}
Tuesday, June 17 2008 7:00 PM -

With Chien Ming Wang sidelined until September in the Big Apple and the Indians still unable to make a serious run at the .500 mark, Paulie C says that it's time to address the issue of potentially dealing The Hefty Lefty. Paul says he wouldn't panic yet if he were Shapiro, but if the Indians do fall out of it, the teams most mentioned as possible trade partners (Yankees and Cubs) may not make sense. And that the barely mentioned Rangers and Dodgers may.



With CM Wang out until September and the rumors flying fast and furious regarding the effect that a broken foot by a Yankee could have on the next month for our beloved Indians (and one in particular), I thought it was finally time to address this whole C.C. thing before it spirals away too quickly.

Now, by no means do I think that trading C.C. today, tomorrow, or next week is a good idea as I think I've been pretty clear that the AL Central remains a very winnable division, that the Indians' offense is showing signs of life just as they approach a very winnable stretch of games, and that the Indians with C.C. are certainly more likely to get back into the AL Central race (not that 6.5 games behind means they're out of it) than they are without him.

If, however, the Indians fall out of this thing in the range of eight to ten games out by the middle of July or so (and news that Hafner is going to see famous orthopedic surgeon James Andrews in Birmingham and that Carmona's feeling hip pain is not good news), there's no question that C.C. is the biggest chip to play...but only if the right package is coming back, and that's what I think bears addressing.

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As soon as the Indians had fallen off the pace earlier in the season, the doom-and-gloomers came to the immediate assumption that C.C. would head to New York as the Yankees are "the only team that can afford to keep him", so why not get something for the Hefty Lefty before he makes the assumed trip to the Bronx? Now with Wang out until September and the Yankees' already thin pitching rotation looking anorexic, there are certainly some fascinating perspectives emerging on the "C.C. to the Bronx talk to replace Wang" firestorm that seems to be descending over the East Coast. While so many of the national media have almost reached the "foregone conclusion" stage that Sabathia is gonzo to don some pinstripes, take a look at these thoughts from [Joel Sherman of the NY Post](#) and [Tyler Kepner of the NY Times](#)

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Sherman points out that these are not the Yankees that you think you know, no longer the team simply using the rest of MLB as their farm system, dipping into the trade market as soon as a need arises, mainly because GM Brian Cashman has realized the value of young talent and its importance in building a perennial winner:

"The only major in-season deal the Yanks have made since 2005 was for Bobby Abreu. And Cashman waited two months, until the price dropped from Phil Hughes to a bunch of non-entities and the Phillies agreed to throw in Cory Lidle, too. Last year, despite a yearning need for a set-up man to Mariano Rivera, the Yanks refused the Rangers' requests for Melky Cabrera and Ian Kennedy although it meant Eric Gagne would go to Boston. "

In the old days, Steinbrenner simply would have overruled his GM and Gagne would have been a Yankee. "

The Gagne non-deal is instructive to how the Yanks are likely to act now. Like Gagne last year, Sabathia is in his walk year. The asking price for a top, one-inning reliever - even in his walk year - was Cabrera and Kennedy. So anybody dreaming up trades should recognize how much greater the demand is going to be for the defending Cy Young winner."

And, let me point out, that the Gagne deal was done when Ian Kennedy still had quite a bit of shine on his apple and before the struggles of his 2008 season, so the Indians can certainly name their price...if it comes to that.

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Kepner echoes many of the same views as Sherman, analyzing the situation from all angles:

"Cashman will surely consider the downside of a Sabathia deal: he trades valued young players, Sabathia proves to be a bad fit in New York, and the Yankees let him walk after the season. The upside there is that the Yankees would get two high draft picks in return, replacing some of the talent they would lose in the trade. □

Another potential downside is this: the Yankees sign Sabathia to a rich contract extension (six or seven years, \$19 million or so per year) and he breaks down physically like Mike Hampton or Kevin Brown, or turns into a 2-10 pitcher like Barry Zito. Cashman understands the horrible track record of pitchers who sign \$100 million deals. But the upside is alluring. If the Yankees trade for Sabathia, who is a very large man but has no injury history, they instantly replace one ace with another for 2008 and continue the business of contending for a playoff spot. □

They would get a three-month trial run with the best pitcher on the free-agent market, and then they could re-sign him and enter the new ballpark with three ace-type pitchers - Sabathia, Wang and Chamberlain - born in the 1980s..."

Interesting that Kepner points out the value of the two high draft picks that would come as compensation for the YANKEES losing Sabathia if they were unable to re-sign him or deemed it to be too risky.

I find these thoughts fascinating because it illustrates the point that it's going to take two to tango if C.C. does hit the block (and, AGAIN, it is far too early to make that determination), rather than the Indians simply naming their price for the Yankees, or any interested team, to fetch the youngest, most talented players that they find to their liking.

It goes hand-in-hand with a conversation that I had with my future brother-in-law (who is an enormous Cubs fan who pores over the denizens of Wrigley Field as I do our Erie Warriors) over the weekend. As we settled in to watch the Twins crush the Brewers in Miller Park on Friday night, I asked him to make me an offer (on behalf of the Cubs) to add a LH stud to the Cubs' rotation. His answer surprised me as he said, "I can't do it";

Wait...WHAT!?! He wouldn't want the reigning Cy Young Award winner to pair with

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Zambrano and do just about anything to make it happen?

He clarified to say that he'd love to have C.C. pulling a Cubs' hat on cockeyed, but that the Cubs simply didn't have what it would take to compel the Tribe to make a trade. I pressed him on it, saying that they were set at so many positions with young talent (namely C, 1B, 3B, LF) that there surely must be a guy ready to break out, blocked by Lee or Ramirez. He told me that they didn't, although they did have a number of middle-to-back of the rotation starters (Sean Gallagher and Sean Marshall), a glut of middling middle infielders (Mark DeRosa and Ronny Cedeno), a platoon OF (Matt Murton) and some prospects that were thought to be studs-in-waiting (Felix Pie and Rich Hill) who are now entering what he called "Corey Patterson Territory" in that he thought that both were more highly regarded than they should be who could be bundled in some sort of trade to acquire C.C.

His best offer to pry C.C. out of the North Coast was to throw in A LOT of quantity without a lot of quality...but even he knew that a package of roster filler, without an impact centerpiece, would be unacceptable. Hearing a package of what would equate to guys like Sowers, Barfield, and Marte in the Indians' system, I broached the one name that would make me think long and hard about a trip to the NL Central for the Crooked Cap...Carlos Marmol. After he picked himself off the floor essentially saying, "we're going to destroy our bullpen for 2008, a strength this year after it has sabotaged so many seasons, by giving you a stud 25-year-old reliever who could anchor the 9th inning for us for the next 6 years...for 3 months of Sabathia and PRAY that we win a World Series with him?", he politely passed on the idea of creating a hole to fill a hole.

And I guess those two examples underscore where this whole C.C. thing lies for me:

How many teams are willing to give up that most valuable commodity in MLB these days (which are young, club-controlled, inexpensive, impact players) for a 3-month rental of C.C. in the hopes that he can bring them home a ring?

And how many teams even HAVE that type of talent close to the Bigs that could be deemed fungible by their current team?

Or, to put it another way, do the Indians want to trade C.C. for the marginal MLB players or low-level prospects that the Cubs would be throwing on the table? How

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about a team like the Phillies, with the scorched Earth of their farm system, and the fact that (much like the Cubs or anyone else for that matter) they're not going to create one or two holes on their roster to fill one hole at the top of their rotation. Is a return of Shane Victorino and a few mid-to-low level prospects something you might be interested in? Me neither.

If you think that the Indians are going to net a player who is contributing for a contender this year, without that team having a viable 2nd option ready and able, you're fooling yourself. So hold off on the deals that center on Geovany Soto and Chase Utley for a moment and realize how this thing (if it were to happen) figures to go down. That is, the Indians need to find a trade partner that has a player that is a bona-fide impact player either in MLB or MLB-ready that is essentially blocked by a player currently on the parent club...and is willing to deal them, which is not a certainty anymore given the landscape of how GM's are approaching roster construction.

To me, the most intriguing matches from teams that could be interested (as per Gammons) would come from the Red Sox, the Dodgers, and the Rangers. Boston fits the mold with their pitching depth (although Theo Epstein seems to subscribe to the same magazine that Shapiro does called "Waves of Arms") and the fact that some of their recent drafts have started to bear fruit. But it's important to remember that the only regulars in the lineup under the age of 32 are Youkilis (29), Pedroia (24), Crisp (28), and Ellsbury (24) and they'll be looking to reload from within in the very near future from within. Just as an aside, Casey Blake (34) and David Dellucci (34) are the only Indians' position players OVER the age of 32.

The Dodgers have a good deal of young talent that has been bandied about ad nauseum in these discussions before (Matt Kemp, Andre Ethier, James Loney, Andy LaRoche, Chad Billingsley, Jonathon Broxton, etc.), have a GM in Ned Colletti with a tendency to go with veterans over youngsters (with a history in SF as the Assistant GM before he got to Chavez Ravine) and a manager in Joe Torre who doesn't figure to be interested in growing with a young team and would likely prefer to win right now. I suppose if Colletti and Torre are shortsighted enough to part with some of the best young talent in MLB, rather than watch them mature into the perennial contender that they look poised to become WITH all of that young talent, there's no question that Shapiro and the boys should burn up the lines to La-La Land. However, the Dodgers' issue this year has not been their pitching (even considering that Brad Penny just hit the DL), as they rank 4th in the

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NL in team ERA. Rather, their issue is scoring runs (295 runs in 70 games) and short of them making another trade for a bat ALONG with netting C.C., I don't see how adding Sabathia solves their problems, regardless of Cy Cy's pedigree and his ability to shift the balance of power in any division he would join.

The Rangers, or the "Dark Horse", are the Wild Card as they have a history of irrational, short-sighted moves when they sit anywhere close to the top of the division (acquiring Carlos Lee on July 28, 2006 with a losing record and 3 GB in the AL West with hitting being the least of their problems at the time springs to mind) and a glut of attractive players. If the Rangers think that C.C. is that "one missing piece" for a prolonged run at the division (and he isn't, given their pitching as a whole...which one person won't fix) and are willing to part with a player like Ian Kinsler because Hank Blalock gets healthy and Ramon Vazquez can slide over to 2B without their obscenely loaded offense suffering too greatly, I'd take the 26-year old Kinsler with open arms. But, to a rational person, it's the same principle as the Soto or Utley dreams as the Rangers would be giving up their table-setter for a top-of-the-rotation starter for all of 3 months, while trying to run down the A's...THEN the Angels.

If we get closer to the Trading Deadline and the Indians have not been able to right the ship, I'll get much more into possible destinations and packages (trust me, this is not in detail); but I think that this idea that the Indians are going to fill their holes at 2B and 3B while adding another starter and a reliever for Sabathia (all at the ML level) is ignorant to a certain point when you consider the potential trading partners and their limitations in terms of available talent or their organizational philosophies. If they can find that sucker out there willing to part with young impact players for a look at it this year, a deal should be done if the determination is made that the 2008 season is lost.

Interestingly, consider where these teams that are "allegedly" interested in C.C. all reside in the standings and how it relates to the Tribe, as not all of the teams linked to the Crooked Cap are division leaders:

Dodgers - 4.5 GB

Yankees - 5.5 GB

Rangers - 7.0 GB

Indians - 6.5 GB

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Obviously, the mounting injuries (and the longer stays on the shelf for the principals already residing there) play a huge role in the difference of being a "buyer" and a "seller", but let's continue to take a wait-and-see approach on this thing. If the Indians can get hot at the right time, they could catapult themselves right into the thick of the AL Central race. If they don't, however, and C.C.'s leaving on a jet plane, the Indians need to make sure that the return that they're netting is more than just roster filler or lower-level prospects and include that impact player (or, better yet, two of them) because they only have one chance to do this (if it comes to that)...and I'm not so sure that perfect deal is out there.