

No matter how inconsistent and flawed the teams above the Tribe are, making up an seven-games-and-growing deficit in a division that will almost certainly send just one team to the playoffs is a daunting proposition. Victor Martinez and Travis Hafner could return with a vengeance after the all-star break, and it would still likely be too little, too late. It appears that Shapiro and his staff will gear up to have a mini-fire sale, much like what occurred in 2006. And in his latest, Erik Cassano looks at the players most likely to be moved between now and August 31st.



The tease-and-falter pattern of the Indians season continues. A week ago at this time, they had won five-of-seven, four of them at home, prompting me to write this hopeful column arguing that maybe, just maybe, Eric Wedge and Mark Shapiro were onto something by benching their injured players and relying on their healthy players to carry the load.

Then they went on the road and were swept right out of Colorado by the lowly Rockies. They won Friday night in Los Angeles, but needed a 10th-inning two-RBI hit off the bat of Jhonny Peralta to rally for a 6-4 win after Rafael Betancourt and Joe Borowski couldn't protect a four-run lead.

Cliff Lee handed the bullpen a 4-0 lead and walked away with a no-decision. He is stuck at 10 wins, and with each passing start that is not converted into a win, his bid to become the Tribe's first 20-game winner in 34 years is gradually slipping away.

There was reason for some guarded optimism for the Indians in the first half of June. Their offense burst onto the scene in splitting four games in Texas, followed by a four-game split in Detroit. After home series wins against the Twins and Padres, it looked like there was some actual momentum building. But the sweep in Colorado killed all that off. Even Terry Pluto, one of the few glass-half-full types in the Cleveland media, [proclaimed the season dead](#) in Friday's Plain Dealer.

Whether you think the '08 Tribe's tombstone should have been etched five weeks ago, or whether you steadfastly believe in the gospel of the 1964 Cardinals and 2007 Phillies -- the one that says you're not dead until you're mathematically eliminated -- there is no denying that while, in the words of one Mr. Berra from New York, it ain't over 'til it's over, it also gets late really early around here.

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It appears that Shapiro and his staff will gear up to have a mini-fire sale, much like what occurred in 2006. Veterans who don't project as part of this team's long-term plan will be sold off between now and the end of July for prospects. Say "fire sale" and the first name that pops into your head is C.C. Sabathia. But he won't necessarily be the first player out the door -- if he's even traded at all.

Below is a list of the Indians' most tradeable assets, ranked by the likelihood that they will be traded.

1. Casey Blake

In a shocker, C.C. is not at the top of the list. It's Mr. Grinder himself, Casey Blake.

When you look at the numbers, it's really a no-brainer. Making him appealing to other teams: he led the team in RBI and doubles through Friday, he's raised his batting average from the .210s to nearly .270 over the past month, he's hitting .342 with a 1.029 on base plus slugging percentage figure on the road through Friday and he can play multiple positions.

Making him movable for the Tribe: He's already earning over \$6 million this year, he's eligible for free agency and probably an additional bump in pay this winter, and moving Blake would allow Andy Marte to get an extended look at third base for the remainder of the season, something he hasn't been afforded on the big-league level so far.

Possible destinations: The Yankees might be able to use Blake as a plug-in at both corner infield and corner outfield spots. Blake has historically hit well in Fenway Park, so the Red Sox might be interested as well -- though it would be hard to see Blake getting consistent at-bats in that stacked Boston lineup.

2. Paul Byrd

How does Byrdie end up above C.C. on the list? I mean, look at the man's stat line: 3-7, a 5.21 ERA with 45 earned runs and 19 homers surrendered in 14 starts and 77 innings pitched. Gag me with a spoon, right? And we haven't even mentioned the stench of HGH scandal that will continue to stick to Byrd, deservedly or not.

But Byrd is a veteran who knows how to pitch. He's had a history of performing well on playoff-bound teams, and let's not forget that the majority of playoff-bound teams are usually looking for that fourth or fifth starter who can help solidify their rotation for the stretch run.

Byrd would fit the bill, with the added bonus that, as a future free agent this winter, he's a half-season rental who will likely come at a half-season rental price. For maybe a marginal A-ball prospect, there will likely be more than a few teams willing to take Byrd off the Tribe's hands and attempt to give him a 100,000-mile tune-up.

Possible destinations: Look up and down the starting rotations of teams in first and second place. Anywhere you come across a fourth or fifth starter and say "Who is that?" you have found a potential destination for Byrd.

3. C.C. Sabathia

Obviously, the hefty lefty is the Tribe's biggest trade bullet to fire before the deadline. Which is why he didn't crack the top two.

Many fans subscribe to the "get whatever you can for C.C. before he leaves" school of thought. Shapiro probably doesn't share that view. He knows that any trade for C.C. is going to have to bring much in return. When you're haggling with other GMs over the top two or three prospects in their farm systems, an impasse can appear as quickly as a pothole on a Cleveland street in the winter.

Shapiro doesn't have to try to sell a C.C. deal. Other teams will beat a path to his door, particularly well-endowed teams like the Cubs, Dodgers, Yankees and Red Sox, who can afford to not only acquire C.C., but ink him to a generous extension before he has a chance to become a free agent. But just because the interest is there doesn't necessarily mean a deal will get done.

Shapiro will (or should) drive a hard bargain. Other GMs will offer and pull back prospects in an endless shell game aimed at enticing Shapiro and outmaneuvering other teams. It's a complicated dance with no definite ending.

Possible destinations: Rumors have already connected C.C. to the four teams mentioned above. From a prospect return standpoint, you'd be wise to root for C.C. to be traded to the Dodgers and (painfully) the Red Sox.

4. Jhonny Peralta

It appears the Indians have cooled considerably on Peralta over the past three years. It's not just the up-and-down statistics or the woeful lack of range at baseball's most important defensive position. It's the fact that Peralta's focus seems to zone in and out from game to game, week to week.

His bat is still dangerous when he connects, which would make him a good auxilliary piece for a

team filled with good bats. But as a heart-of-the-order hitter on a Tribe team with sparse offense, his all-or-nothing approach yields little in the way of results.

Peralta will either move to third base or be traded, if not before the deadline, then over the winter. At this point, it's probably better to move Peralta than try to shoehorn him in at another position. But it would still be nice to wait until his numbers are better and he'd yield more in a trade.

Possible destinations: It's difficult to tell because it's hard to peg where a swing-for-the-bleachers right-handed hitter without a true natural fielding position fits with another team. His relatively low '08 salary -- the balance of \$2.5 million -- means that lower-budget contenders like the Rays might get in on the action if Peralta is shopped.

5. David Dellucci

With Ben Francisco and Shin-Soo Choo fitting comfortably into the outfield rotation with Grady Sizemore and Franklin Gutierrez, Dellucci is being phased out of the Indians' plans.

As long as Hafner and Martinez stay on the DL, there will be at-bats for Dellucci in the DH spot, or in the outfield while someone else mans the DH spot. But sooner or later, Looch will be squeezed out of the lineup.

Dellucci might be moved in a minor trade for the legendary Player To Be Named Later.

Possible destinations: Dellucci might end up back with the Diamondbacks, where he won a World Series in 2001. Arizona could stand to add some veteran outfield depth for another playoff run, and Dellucci would be a cheaper option than some others.

6. Joe Borowski

Yeah, I know. Who would want him? He just got done blowing a save Friday night. But the quest for bullpen help does strange things to teams.

Possible destinations: I predict that Borowski will be the annual Superfluous Bullpen Addition By A Paranoid Big Market Team Convinced It Doesn't Have Quite Enough Depth. Octavio Dotel and Eric Gagne have held this title in previous years.

Look for Borowski to be pitching the 11th inning of a playoff game for Red Sox or Cubs or the like, getting predictably annihilated in a blowout loss and then predictably shredded in the local newspapers. I'll just feel sorry for JoBo in advance.

7. Andy Marte

Wedge won the argument with Shapiro over Brandon Phillips. Shapiro will probably see to it that it doesn't happen again with one-time uber-prospect Marte. In the third base wars, Wedge favorite Blake will be shown the door before Shapiro's prized pickup Marte.

But in the event that Shapiro caves, pawns off Marte and keeps Blake, don't expect the trade to register on the Richter Scale. The only sound you'll hear is the sound of thousands of Tribe fans gnawing on their nails LeBron-style, waiting for Marte to bust out with .320, 40 homers and 115 RBI with his new team next season.

Possible destinations: The Reds. They traded for Danny Graves, Sean Casey and Phillips. Why fight it?