

## A Common Conversation

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}  
Monday, June 30 2008 7:00 PM -

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Today is July 1st. The Major League Baseball trading deadline is July 31st. With the Indians all but out of it, and C.C. set to chase the last penny in free agency this off-season, it's becoming more apparent by the day. The Indians are going to trade C.C. Sabathia, the lynch pin of the team's starting rotation for the last half decade. In his latest, Paulie C talks about the difference between trading C.C. now and right at the July 31st deadline, and also talks about what he wants to see come to Cleveland in return.



As the Crooked Cap spins round and round, perhaps it's time to take a look at the latest and greatest in regards to reports about what's happening with C.C., as well as touching on what the Indians' game plan should look like for the next four weeks pertaining to their aCCe.

First and foremost is the [new report of what would likely constitute a final offer to C.C. from the team](#), which conspiracy theorists would have you believe is a way for the Indians to save face when C.C. turns it down. Without getting into how skeptical of everything in life you must be to truly think that, does anyone think that SUDDENLY he's going to reconsider this situation with obscene amount of money and security (more than the Tribe figures to offer) mere months away? C.C. will not be an Indian when the 2009 season starts and the reason is that he won't take anything less than a guaranteed six or seven years, which [history has taught us is a contract too long for starting pitchers](#)

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Take this report (reported by the NY media, who will print anything) for what it is - the Indians are seriously considering moving C.C. and it would be irresponsible of them to do so before throwing their best offer on the table and seeing if the Big Fella bites.

If he accepts it (he won't), the trade discussion is off the table.

If he rejects it (he will), the Indians continue with their due diligence before making a determination on what to do with him and, if they decide to trade him, what to ask for.

There's nothing more sinister at play here, it's simply a matter of the team asking, one last time, if C.C. is willing to accept the deal that the club is comfortable offering.

Think of it this way, what if C.C. gets traded and says after the trade, "you know all they had to do was sit back down with me and maybe we could have worked something out...because I wanted to stay" - everyone would rip the Tribe up and down for not making one last-ditch effort while they were the only team that held exclusive negotiating rights. That's all this is...one last-ditch effort to sign him as part of the overarching organizational analysis of whether he stays or goes prior to August 1st.

Moving on, as we all know, the national reporters have taken the C.C. trade discussions to new levels as all of the principals are here with thoughts. [Jon Heyman hits on it on SI.com](#)

(note that he doesn't list the Byrdman in his Top 10 starters who could be available) while

[Jayson Stark addresses the C.C. topic while touching on a few more Indians who could be ordering new return address labels soon](#)

and

[Ken Rosenthal gets in on the act](#)

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, addressing the possibility that C.C. AND Blake could be trade fodder.

To me, it still feels awfully early to start attaching names and teams to C.C.. Much can change in divisional races prior to July 31st, particularly given the parity throughout the league and the fact that so many teams remain in the hunt for a playoff spot as the halfway point in the season passes. That is, the Brewers are just as likely to go on a run to pull themselves close with the Cubs or gain a

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commanding lead in the Wild Card race as they are to having the bottom drop out and find themselves in a similar situation to the Indians, looking to sell off pieces like Ben Sheets and Eric Gagne. The same goes for the Dodgers, the Rays, or any other team alleged to be in the mix.

The only argument that makes sense to me on trading C.C. now instead of waiting for a month is the idea that trading C.C. now means that his new team has one more month of C.C. to help their team which, in turn, drives up his price. If the Indians truly feel that there is no chance for them to climb back into the AL Central race and even a hot couple of weeks aren't going to change their mind that C.C. WILL be traded, trading him now actually makes more sense than waiting it out. If a team like the Brewers or the Rays is willing to deal right now, despite the fact that a great deal can happen before July 31<sup>st</sup>, and is offering what is perceived to be fair value, the Indians should strike quickly and decisively...after checking around the league, of course.

Unless they feel a bidding war will heighten Sabathia's value as July 31<sup>s</sup>  
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approaches, and if the writing is on the wall for this team (and, really, one more loss in their next 7 divisional games should have the white flag raised...if it isn't already), then one more month of C.C.'s starts would mean more to a team intent on contending, meaning that they would be more inclined to give up more to get him sooner rather than later.

With all of that being said, let me reiterate the main point on trading the Hefty Lefty:

If the Indians make the determination that 2008 is a wash and turn their attention to 2009, C.C. is the biggest chip that the Indians have to play in this trade market and the return that they should hold out for in exchange for him should be MLB-ready players, not "high-ceiling" AA guys or players that COULD contribute in 2009.

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If, say, the Indians DO trade C.C. on July 31st, I want our lineup for the parent club on August 1st or August 2nd to contain a player (or players) that were obtained for the Crooked Cap. If they trade him before that...fine, as long as the players that come to Cleveland are sitting in or near the middle of the lineup for the Indians as soon as they join the team. I'm not interested in the principal player in the acquisition needing more "seasoning" in AAA or a player who has mashed all of this year...at AA or high A. That's not to say that the player that they should be looking to acquire should be contributing in 2008 in Cleveland because the Indians are still looking to contend, because they're not. But the player should have some semblance of a track record of success in MLB, not simply having the feather in his cap to date of just crushing AA pitching as the list of players who have thrived in AA, only to see their careers stall somewhere between Erie and Cooperstown is long and well-documented.

Look at it this way, if the Rangers can acquire Jerold Saltalamachia (and some other high-level prospects) for Mark Teixeira (albeit for a year and a half of him) from Atlanta and solid contributor David Murphy from the Red Sox for three lousy months of Eric Gagne last year, is it really too much to ask for players that can step into the Tribe lineup a few days after a trade, with a track record of success in the minors that has at least translated to some MLB success?

If we're trading C.C., I want someone who can contribute at the big league level right away! The reasoning being that this is not 2002 (when Colon was moved), when the team was a collection of overpaid, aging players that couldn't be counted on going forward (as much as the people that can't stand Lacey Cake

and The Looch and what they "represent", only Jamey Carroll joins them as "regulars" over 31 and Carroll was signed as a Futility Infielder) and needed to be jettisoned for sorely-needed young talent.

For comparison's sake, consider that the 2002 team had three position players UNDER 30 in Milton Bradley (24), Russell the Muscle (26), and Einar Diaz (29), so the roster and the whole organization was in need of an injection of youth, even if it took a while for the acquisitions to mature into MLB players. Time was not of the essence in 2002, development with an eye toward the future was.

Not so in 2008, where pieces ARE in place as the Indians still boast a 24-year old ace who flummoxes hitters and makes them feel "hungover" with his nastiness, a groundball-inducing 23-year old LHP with an ERA of 3.24 in his 1st ML season, a 29-year-old LHP who will probably start the AL All-Star game by totaling 11 wins in 1/2 of the season on a team with only 37 wins, a 25-year-old perennial All-Star and Gold Glove winning CF who could go 40-40 this year, a slick-fielding 22-year-old Middle IF who has taken any frustration for his recent demotion out on International League pitchers, and a catcher and a DH under the age of 31 whose three year averages from 2005 to 2007 give them OPS of .971 (Hafner) and .863 (Victor), meaning that track record for the past few years dictates that 2008 is likely the aberration and (hopefully) not the trend.

### Are there holes to fill?

No question, as some impact hitters at or close to MLB are needed, as are some starting pitchers to flesh out the depth that figures to be thinned out during and after this season. But the team is not as hopeless or without talent as the people who sense an impending 15-year stretch of bad baseball (and, trust me, they're out there) and see a team that needs to be rebuilt...again. Talent (and young, elite, MLB talent at that) does exist on this roster, it simply needs to be augmented properly, from within and from the outside, to get back to the level of winning that 2007 seemed to promise.

In short, I'm not looking for a REBUILD when the Indians figure to sell off pieces and parts that don't fit in their long-term plans. Rather, I'm looking for a RELOAD that surrounds a rotation built around Carmona, Lee, and Laffey for next year and a lineup built around Grady, with the hopes that Victor and Hafner can get healthy and productive, with progressions from the likes of Francisco and Asbrubal, and with Garko and Peralta (assuming they're both still around, which is no given) taking the next step as players who don't simply mire in the mediocrity that has been their 2008.

Rebuilding is not a word that should be in the Indians' vocabulary as they face the next month of 2008, given the amount of talent under club control for the foreseeable future...retooling or reloading would fit the bill better to me and that approach should be the one that the front office takes as they start cashing in some of their chips.