

When Mark Shapiro woke up one morning in 2006 and found the Indians hopelessly adrift and six miles out of first place in the AL Central, he knew he had to make a decision. So he did. He traded away several of the team's expendable veterans for young players. Fast forward to 2008. Another lost season, another moment of truth for Shapiro. To trade or not to trade? But this time, the stakes are much higher. Papa Cass talks about it in his latest piece.



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Eduardo Perez was sent to Seattle for Asdrubal Cabrera. Later, Ben Broussard followed suit in exchange for Shin-Soo Choo. Bob Wickman was pawned off on Atlanta for catching prospect Max Ramirez, who was swapped for Kenny Lofton a year later.

Simple enough, right? When your team is floating through a lost season, you jettison the guys who don't figure into the future, and try to get a little bit of extra depth for your farm system in the process.

It was relatively simple, paint-by-numbers retooling for Shapiro in '06. Ryan Garko was waiting in the wings for his shot to relieve Perez and Broussard at first base, and Fausto Carmona was -- at least we thought at the time -- a budding closer prospect, ready to replace Wickman. There wasn't a whole lot of risk in trading Perez, Broussard or Wickman, for the '06 season or beyond.

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This time, when and if Shapiro pulls the trigger on trades, it will impact the front of

the starting rotation and the heart of the already-wounded batting order. This year, the potential trade deadline subtractions will cut deep, and could have impacts ranging far beyond this year.

If Shapiro deals C.C. Sabathia, Casey Blake, Paul Byrd and maybe a bullpen arm (let's just say Rafael Betancourt for argument's sake), that's four-fifths of the opening day rotation gone, counting the injuries to Carmona and Jake Westbrook. Deal Blake, and you're dealing your leading RBI man and best clutch hitter. Deal Betancourt if the right trade arises, and you just pulled the plug on one of your two workhorses from the 2007 bullpen.

Unless those players yield a booty of major league-ready or nearly major league-ready prospects, there is a high probability that the hangover from the deadline purge will continue into 2009. Even if a series of deadline deals does bring one or two players who can step in and contribute in short order, it's probably not going to be enough to save 2009 from the effects of lost production, unless Shapiro bails the team out with some nifty wheeling and dealing over the winter -- though many of Shapiro's previous attempts at making worthwhile offseason moves haven't panned out.

In scuttling the 2008 season by dealing off the likes of Sabathia, Byrd and Blake, Shapiro will likely take 2009 with it, meaning the earliest we could probably hope for an Indians rebound would be 2010. And so many things can happen in two years, it's almost ridiculous to try and predict that far ahead. Ask the people who are trying to accurately weigh LeBron's love of New York against his ties to home.

Of course, all three Tribe players would almost certainly be gone after the season, so what is the harm in dealing them? Well, if Shapiro nabs a few top prospects in the process and the fans are willing to age another two years, minimum, before they see contending baseball again, nothing is wrong with trading them.

But at what point do you draw the line between retooling and rebuilding? At what point does a simple reloading of the the gun chamber turn into a trip to the gunsmith for extensive repairs?

Trading two-fifths of the starting rotation and your leading RBI hitter isn't on par with the demolition job performed by Shapiro in 2001 and 2002, but there is no question it's far more extensive and risky than dealing away assorted flotsam like Perez and Broussard.

The prospect of trading away major parts combined with the fact that Travis Hafner faces an uncertain future, Westbrook faces a yearlong rehabilitation stint, and Carmona and Victor Martinez are both on indefinite timetables to return from injuries, and you could make a case that Shapiro's original rebuilding plan has become derailed. Not beyond repair, but certainly damaged.

Hafner, Westbrook, Carmona and Martinez will all return to fight again with varying degrees of effectiveness. But the team they return to -- depending on how long each is sidelined -- might be vastly different than the team they left. It will be younger and will have a number of new last names stitched onto jersey backs. Grady Sizemore, who will turn 26 at the start of August, could be among the veteran leaders. Martinez, 29, will be a wise Yoda figure compared to some of the greenhorns likely to occupy the roster.

And that roster will have to learn how to win all over again, just like this roster did in 2005 and '07. If that happens, then to me that falls under the definition of a rebuild.

Rebuilding doesn't always mean that a team's front office blew up the plan and started over. Sometimes, it means going forward with the same idea, but a significantly changed roster compiled over several years of non-contention. That's the possible future of the Indians over the next year or two, unless Shapiro has some tricks up his sleeve that we haven't seen yet.

If that's the way it shakes out, the fans will once again be asked by their team to look to the future and see the prize down the road. Perseverance and patience are noble qualities, but once you remember that the Indians' last World Series title came during the Truman Administration, somehow grinding it out, taking a Eric Wedge-approved mentality to being a fan, it's just not that satisfying anymore.