

Trying To Make Sense With Dollars

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}
Thursday, August 14 2008 7:00 PM -

Back in the saddle after a profitable trip to Vegas, Paulie C checks back in to give our readers an overview of how vital the performances of certain players are as the season continues what feels like a long backstretch. The way certain young players perform over these next six weeks will affect roster decisions this fall. And Paul talks about those players and those decisions in his latest column for us.



Apparently, I should get out of town more often as the Tribe rattled off four straight while I hit Sin City last weekend and helped pay for my trip with some winnings (thank you Anthony Reyes and Paul Byrd for some extra spending money) in the real "City that Never Sleeps".

Back in the saddle and back in front of a keyboard, I thought it would be a good idea to take an overview of how vital the performances of certain players are as the season continues what feels like a long backstretch...to Indians' fans at least. The way that certain young players position themselves for 2009 is important as the Indians are dealing with a predetermined budget going into next year and the needs of the team will be addressed in that greater budget. Thus, identifying said needs to prioritize and address them properly is paramount to 2009 not just turning into a "year to build on".

How large is that budget and how much money figures to be available on top of what has already been committed in guaranteed dollars?

The salary for the Indians 25-man roster entering 2008 was [\\$78,970,066 \(15th out of the 30 MLB teams\)](#)

and most indications from the Dolans and Mark Shapiro have sounded like the number for 2009 will remain right there or awfully close, so let's use \$80M as a likely (and even) number of where the Indians payroll will fall next year.

I'm not going to get into the wailing and teeth-gnashing of how or why the Indians come up with that number, if they should be spending more, if the Dolans are cheap, blah, blah, blah...let's just use that \$80M number for the purposes of the

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exercise.

Obviously, we all know about the salaries that are coming off of the books (or are already off of the books in the case of the Hefty Lefty) in terms of 2009:

Player - 2008 Salary

Casey Blake - \$6.1M

Joe Borowski - \$4M

Paul Byrd - \$8M

Aaron Fultz - \$1.5M

Jason Michaels - \$2.2M

CC Sabathia - \$11.25M (Brewers also assumed \$5M of CC's 2008 salary in trade)

Since it's not fair to assume that the money that the Brewers picked up for CC's 2008 salary is automatically going into the coffers for next year or what impact the Byrd deal to Boston will have (although it looks like the remaining \$2M on his contract will be assumed by the Sux), what [money is committed to what players in guaranteed dollars for 2009](#) ?

Player - 2009 Salary

Travis Hafner - \$11.5M

Jake Westbrook - \$10M

Cliff Lee - \$6M

Victor Martinez - \$5.9M

Grady Sizemore - \$4.77M

Jhonny Peralta - \$3.65M

David Dellucci - \$3.5M

Rafael Betancourt - \$3.35M

Masa Kobayashi - \$3M

Fausto Carmona - \$2.75M

Jamey Carroll - \$2.5M (club option for 2009)

Assuming we can't move Dellucci and have another team pick up his salary in the process, he's going to remain on the books for \$3.5M. Even if The Looch gets cut by the team (which is certainly a possibility), he'll stay on the payroll just as Borowski, Fultz, and Michaels continue to receive Tribe paychecks this year in similar situations. All told, assuming that Jamey Carroll's option gets picked up,

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the Indians have about \$57M committed to 11 players which could really be 10 roster spots if Dellucci is jettisoned.

Beyond that list, the players that figure to be legitimate candidates for the team working under minimum salaries would be:

Josh Barfield
Asdrubal Cabrera
Shin-Soo Choo
Ben Francisco
Ryan Garko
Franklin Gutierrez
David Huff
Aaron Laffey
Matt LaPorta
Jensen Lewis
Tom Mastny
Jon Meloan
Atom Miller
Edward Mujica
Rafael Perez
Anthony Reyes
Tony Sipp
Jeff Stevens
Jeremy Sowers

By the way, a quick hat-tip to Jay at [the LGT](#), who informs me that Barfield is NOT arbitration-eligible after this season as his service time will remain below Super Two status.

As for the players who DO hit arbitration after this year and don't fall under "minimum wage" category, it's a relatively short list who wouldn't command too much of a pay raise based on what they've accomplished thus far in MLB:

Andy Marte
Kelly Shoppach

Who among those young players above will be on the team?

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The better question to ask is what positions are filled by players already under guaranteed contracts at numbers that are not the minimum salary:

- #1 Starter (Lee)
- #2 Starter (Carmona)
- CF (Sizemore)
- DH (Hafner)
- C or 1B (Victor)
- SS or 3B (Peralta)
- Bullpen (Kobayashi)
- Bullpen (Betancourt)
- Utility (Carroll)

I'd put Asdrubal (whether it be at 2B or SS), Shoppach (assuming his trade value isn't determined to be at its peak), and Perez as the only definites from that list of minimum salaried or arbitration-eligible players, but I think that many other positions will be filled by one of a few players. For instance, I could see the Indians filling two rotation spots from a competition between Huff, Laffey, Reyes, and Sowers (or even Miller) just as one of the OF spots (at least) figures to be filled by Choo, Francisco, LaPorta, or Gutierrez or some combination of those players in a platoon.

The same logic can be applied to the bullpen as it would seem that 3 of the spots are nailed down and one is going to be filled from outside the organization, leaving the likes of Lewis, Mastny, Meloan, Miller, Mujica, Sipp, and Stevens (with Donnelly and Rincon as options as well, assuming they're re-upped) to fight for those final three available spots down the stretch this year and next Spring in Goodyear.

All that being said, and back to the number portion of the show, I would figure that 2 spots in the rotation will be filled by minimum salaried players, as will 3 spots in the bullpen and 6 to 7 of the position players' spots. That brings us to a total of 11 to 12 players who figure to be on the Indians' 25-man roster in 2009 playing for the minimum salary. Figuring that the minimum salary for next year will be around \$400K, that would add \$4M to \$5M to the \$57M number committed to the 10 players determined previously (remember, I don't think Dellucci's playing for us, just getting paid by us) that are working under guaranteed contracts.

Add the \$5M for the 12 players that will be paid about \$400K next year, to the

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\$57M committed to the 10 players that are guaranteed their money, and the Indians project to have 22 players on their roster for a price of about \$62M. If, then, we're assuming that the Indians are sticking with a payroll close to that of the 2008 squad, they'll have about \$18M to spend on acquiring help from the outside.

That's quite a bit of scratch...until you realize that they'll be looking to add some bullpen help if not a legitimate closer, a middle-of-the-rotation starter, and perhaps a starting position player (whether that be a 2B or a 3B or a corner OF) to the mix - all for that \$18M, or \$25M if you're throwing the money that the Brewers picked up on CC's contract into the mix or the recouped cash from Byrd.

Unfortunately, to paraphrase a trite saying - " \$20M doesn't buy what it used to";

And as absurd as that notion is, consider that the Yankees will have a comparable amount coming off the books after this year...in Jason Giambi's expiring contract ALONE. Giambi's \$22M option for 2009 is likely to be declined (at the cost of a \$5M buyout), which gives the Yankees that Monopoly money to combine with the expiring contracts of Bobby Abreu (\$16M in 2008), Andy Pettitte (\$16M in 2008), Mike Mussina (\$11M in 2008), Carl Pavano (\$11M in 2008), and Kyle Farnsworth (\$5.5M in 2008). Those numbers add up to...well, about the Indians total payroll for 2008, so it's not as if the Indians will be able to spend their available money on Free Agents in a vacuum.

And that's just the cash coming loose in the Bronx!

Which is what makes the balance of 2008 that much more important.

The Indians need to determine where their biggest need lies by watching the players already in the organization as the season winds down to see where the biggest hole exists and address it properly. Certainly some of the pictures of where these players fit is becoming a little clearer (Show Pack has an OPS of .973 since becoming the everyday C, Asdrubal has an OPS of .847 since being recalled from Buffalo), but questions abound when determining what plan of action the Indians should take this offseason.

Are there enough talented young arms to cobble together 3 starters (and depth) behind Cliff and Fausto until Westbrook gets healthy, or is a starter needed in the

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mix?

At what cost?

Do the youngsters who figure to be in the mix for the corner OF or 2B/3B merit a longer look to start 2009 or are any potential Free Agents at those positions compelling enough to justify the long-term deal that would otherwise block players whose projected ETA may be 2010 or earlier?

Will internal help emerge to save the bullpen?

Will it happen in my lifetime?

Depending on how these questions are answered, the Indians need to figure out how to best spend their money. Because, barring a trade, we're watching the players that figure to make up the majority of the 2009 Cleveland Indians. Whatever massaging needs to be done to the roster will come at a price and the Indians, dealing with the dollars that they have already committed to spending and the finite options for them in how to spend their available money, need to make some decisions this offseason that look good next August.