

Regano comes large with a fantastic article. His premise? Maybe this years Indians aren't as bad as they look to all of us right now. And that a perfect storm of happenings caused last years team to outperform their talent level, setting unrealistic expectations for this season.



## **Why this year's Tribe might be closer to reality than last year's**

Mark Shapiro had done it. After a summer of wheeling and dealing in which even ushers had to have feared they would be traded, Shapiro had assembled a ridiculous quantity of young talent. This, in fact, has been his greatest achievement in Cleveland thus far. Amassing so many young players that some of them had to make it to the big leagues and perform well. He may, though, get just a little too much credit for his "savvy" eye for prospects. His most prized acquisitions (Alex Escobar and Brandon Phillips) were busts here. Shapiro wanted Brad Wilkerson in the Colon trade, not Grady Sizemore. And the Chuck Finley for Coco Crisp trade was actually the Chuck Finley for Luis Garcia trade. Crisp was a throw in and was not looked at as a starting outfielder by the Indians at the time (or now, for that matter). Garcia on the other hand, was released not too long afterwards.

Then, Shapiro called his shot. The Indians made a push for the division in 2005, the exact year he pinpointed a return to contention. And, to give credit where credit is due, 93 wins would have made the playoffs in most years.

2006 was the next step. The time was now to add the final few pieces to the puzzle to compete with the Sox. Instead, the Indians completely failed in their off-season free agent search. In addition, the team did not want to part with young prospects to go out and get those final pieces. What DID happen was a regression. Shapiro not only did not finish the aforementioned puzzle, he mailed some of the pieces he did have to various cities throughout Major League Baseball.

But first, let us take a step back to 2005. Could it be that our summer of fun was

more a culmination of a lot of good breaks than a team ready to join the elite of the league? An unprecedented two missed starts in the rotation is a good place to start. It is something we will never see again. Every night you could expect a healthy starter to give six to seven innings and then turn it over to a lights out bullpen. Bob Howry and Bob Wickman combined to be the most effective set-up/closer combination in the majors. And finally, the Baltimore Orioles. Had they thought just a little less of Hayden Penn, Millwood would have been out of here in late July. Bob Wickman would have helped him clean out his locker. If Larry Dolan and Mark Shapiro had their druthers, both would have been traded by the deadline. History shows us that they were not, and the inevitable late summer run began. Can you imagine if that run never happened? Where would we be now? What would we be saying?

From the fan's perspective, it was a good time to watch the Tribe as well. The Cavaliers had floundered away a playoff opportunity, and the upcoming Browns season was already dedicated to rebuilding. Despite the strong hatred for Larry Dolan, it was hard not to become endeared to this team. Hell, there was nothing else to be endeared to!

As we sit here in May of 2006, though, times have changed quite a bit since last October. Take off your Indians hat for a second and consider the following facts:

1. We were not good enough to win the division LAST year
2. We lost the AL ERA champ
3. We lost the best setup man in baseball
4. We traded our .300 hitting #2 hitter for a prospect
5. The team that beat us out got better

Around town, however, the Cavaliers have had us on the edge of our seats for a quarter of the baseball season. August and September will be filled with excitement over the rejuvenated Browns, who (close your ears, Larry) spent all kinds of money this off-season.

I had concluded before the season that we were not "there" as of yet. Furthermore, we were a little further from "there" than in 2005. Andy Marte may be the next Mike Schmidt, despite the fact that he and I are both tied in International League homeruns as of this article. Unfortunately, the message the Crisp trade sent to fans was that the budget conscious Tribe traded an everyday player for a minor leaguer in a year they said they were a playoff team. More so,

the unwillingness of the Indians to enter into long term deals with any player is troubling. We all know Larry Dolan is "careful with his money," but is Shapiro the main culprit here? After the disastrous contracts given to Lawton and Guitierrez, is he too gun shy to lock into any long-term commitments?

I am sure the "Fire Eric Wedge" chants are sure to come soon. I certainly am not his biggest fan, but he has been given an inferior product to last year. Those who picked the Indians to win the central this year were bonging Mark Shapiro's Kool-Aid. Not to mention the thought of Larry Dolan eating Wedge's contract. Save your breath.

The Indians are going to have some tough decisions. Their last batch were shaky at best. Luckily for us though, we can turn our attention to LeBron if things do not improve.