

Reading Between The Words

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}
Monday, November 10 2008 7:00 PM -

With all of the rumor and conjecture flying around MLB after the GM Meetings, Paulie C checks in today to read between the lines of the public comments made by Mark Shapiro and Eric Wedge regarding potential off-season moves. Paulie tells us what they said, what they really meant, and what the team is likely to actually do as we head into Hot Stove season. Just a little over three months 'till pitchers and catchers report!



With all of the rumor and conjecture flying around MLB after the GM Meetings, let's make a quick attempt to read between the lines in the now-famous "Shapiro-Speak" with its offshoot "Wedge-Speak" (you know, those languages that contain a lot of words, but little meaning) with one of the more telling comments that came out recently pertaining to the Indians' off-season needs and the plan to address said needs.

[Shapiro](#) - "We clearly need an infielder...we can't go to spring training with the infielders we've got. We could go to spring training with the starters we have. We could go to spring training with Jensen Lewis at closer. It doesn't mean I rank getting a starting pitcher any less important."

Now let's go back to the quote from Wedge when the season ended:

[Wedge](#) - "At some point, I do feel Jhonny is going to end up at third base and Asdrubal will be at shortstop".

As I've said before, for an organization that makes such measured statements and generally refuses to comment specifically on particular players, these comments intimate that the Indians have gone over their roster with a fine-tooth comb, while surveying the scene of available FA this off-season and have come up with the conclusion that an infielder is their GREATEST need as it cannot be filled in any legitimate sense internally and that a 2B is going to be more readily available, prompting Wedge's quote to lay the groundwork for the subsequent

Reading Between The Words

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}
Monday, November 10 2008 7:00 PM -

likelihood of Peralta slotting to 3B.

Are you getting this yet?

While it may not be ideal, internal options may suffice for the rotation and bullpen - but no such internal options exist for an infielder and the idea of going into 2009 with Jamey Carroll, Andy Marte, or Josh Barfield simply doesn't look to be an option.

Now, take it a step further and realize that many of the available 2B and 3B available via FA aren't enough of an upgrade over Jamey Carroll (and would take dollars away from filling other holes without being a permanent fix), and it would seem that the first problem that figures to be addressed will be the infield. If the infield is augmented, the Indians can then creatively attempt to supplement the rotation or fortify the bullpen by moving some pieces and parts around, but aren't necessarily forced to do so, as the internal pieces exist for them to go into 2009 with the rotation and bullpen as each is presently constructed.

Essentially, as it stands now, the Indians COULD go into the 2009 season with their rotation populated by Lee, Carmona, Reyes, Laffey, and Huff and be somewhat comfortable in those principals holding down the fort until Jake returned. Certainly a 3rd starter after Carmona would be ideal to let Huff and Laffey fight it out for the 5th spot (with the "loser" being the 1st option in Columbus), but having the aforementioned pitchers as the rotation isn't going to sabotage the season...just go back and look at some of the pitchers that started games for the Indians as they closed out their 2008 season. Additionally, Jake Westbrook is SUPPOSED to be ready to go after the All-Star Break, making the Indians deeper in the rotation once July hits.

Likewise, the Indians COULD go into 2009 with Stomp Lewis as the closer, The Fist of Iron and The Fist of Steel (since it's been a while since that one was used, that's Betancourt and Perez because "if the right one doesn't get you, then the left one will") setting him up and the young arms like Bones Melan, Atom Miller ([who's hitting 97 MPH in the Dominican and WILL be a reliever in 2009](#)), Nasty Boy Tom Mastny, Eddie Moo, The Zach Attack, Rich Rundles, Jeff Stevens, Masa, and even Tony Sipp (down the line) slotting around to fill out the bullpen. Yes, an "established" closer would help settle it, or even just another experienced reliever with closing experience would allay fears that the 2008 Hellpen could rear its ugly head again. But, unlike last year,

Reading Between The Words

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}
Monday, November 10 2008 7:00 PM -

the Indians have better overall arms (and some who could develop into homegrown closers...finally) and better depth in the bullpen that the team could rely on its internal options.

Again, not ideal...but feasible.

With the infield, though, it's a completely different story (and Shapiro's comment verifies that the organization feels the same way), in that there are no internal options that can serve as "Plan B" if a piece isn't added. Andy Marte and Josh Barfield don't look like they're part of this team's plans going forward and Jamey Carroll is best used as a utility player.

But herein lies the problem, as the infield options are SO limited (unless you want to give up Asdrubal and Fausto for 1 year of Brian Roberts, as was recently reported to be the asking price of the Orioles) both in terms of FA and trade that the Indians may be handcuffed in what they can add that would truly represent an upgrade.

Is Mark Grudzielanek REALLY worth committing 2 or 3 years to?

As for the other alleged options, they're all fraught with questions:

What if Joe Crede is signed and his balky back gives out?

What would it cost to add Garrett Atkins or Kelly Johnson...and do [we really want those players](#) ?

How many years are too many to add Orlando Hudson?

Regardless of the answers to those questions, my best guess is that the Indians address the infield issue first, probably via FA, even if it means they give too much money and too many years to Orlando Hudson, who's suddenly the prettiest belle at the ball.

After that addition is made (whether or not it is Hudson), the Indians can then shop for the best deal for Kelly Shoppach, with the idea that they're not hamstrung by HAVING to deal him for an infielder and can optimize his trade value by (hopefully) flipping him for a young, top-to-middle-of-the-rotation starter or a

Reading Between The Words

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}

Monday, November 10 2008 7:00 PM -

young, legitimate closing option and another piece.

Certainly it's not an announcement of a game plan, per se, but when has anything been remotely laid out in the press by the Tribe brass? For lack of that announcement, it would seem that wading out into the ocean of words (much of which "say" absolutely nothing) that come out of the Indians' Front Office is where the Indians' plan seems to be taking shape.