

## Pavano Signing Brings No Guarantees

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Wednesday, January 07 2009 7:00 PM -

---

The Indians put their primary focus this offseason on significantly upgrading their bullpen (which they have done) and finding a good option to plug in at second or third base (also done). Their biggest need, in Tony Lastoria's mind, was a starting pitcher to plug into the middle of the starting rotation. And he's not sure they've done that, even with the Pavano signing. Tony talks Pavano, talks starting rotation in his latest.



*Programming Note:* Tony and Paul Cousineau will have all three of the players the Indians traded to the Cubs for Mark DeRosa on their show

[Smoke Signals tonight from 9:30-11:00pm](#)

*Jeff Stevens, Chris Archer, and John Gaub are all scheduled to appear on the show.*

The Indians put their primary focus this offseason on significantly upgrading their bullpen (which they have done) and finding a good option to plug in at second or third base (also done). Their biggest need, however, was a starting pitcher to plug into the middle of the starting rotation since they have several question marks up and down it not knowing if Cliff Lee and Fausto Carmona will be v2007 or v2008 this year, the unknown health of some like Anthony Reyes and Aaron Laffey, the unproven Scott Lewis and David Huff, and the depth fodder that is Zach Jackson and Jeremy Sowers.

GM Mark Shapiro was openly concerned about the makeup of the rotation from Day One this offseason, and said so in his [year end press conference](#) :

*"We have a lot of alternatives. I'd feel better if we had one more experienced top-of-the-rotation guy. The area I feel least comfortable with in our organization is our upper-level starting pitching. ... I don't see us allocating a lot of dollars to a fifth starter.*

## Pavano Signing Brings No Guarantees

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Wednesday, January 07 2009 7:00 PM -

---

*Our goal would be to acquire a guy who would pitch in the first three games of a playoff series.*

*Our hope is that guy would be Jake Westbrook, who would be coming back in June or July if he doesn't have any setbacks.&quot;*

Shapiro also said he would rather roll the dice in-house than go the route of signing a Paul Byrd or someone of that ilk. So, since they did not want to allocate much money to a fifth starter, and did not want to entertain the idea of a Paul Byrd-type and instead go with someone in house, what did they do? They went and signed Carl Pavano.

Color me flummoxed.

On Tuesday the Indians went and signed free agent right-hander Carl Pavano to a one year \$1.5 million deal. A deal that is also loaded with incentives that if he reaches 18 starts several performance bonuses will start to kick in where as he reaches innings pitched and start thresholds he could make up to \$6.8 million total on the deal. The guaranteed deal inserts him into the third spot of the Indians starting rotation with Lee and Carmona occupying the first two spots.

Depending on the health of Reyes - who if healthy is also a lock for the rotation - it would likely push Pavano to the fourth spot in the rotation.

After such a great showing this offseason with the acquisitions of Kerry Wood, Joe Smith, Luis Valbuena, and Mark DeRosa, the cherry on such a successful offseason is *this*? Yes, *this* is Shapiro at his worst.

He has often been criticized in the past for his penchant to scrape the bottom of the bargain bin for free agents, and like an addict Shapiro was just unable to restrain himself and avoid his nasty habit from resurfacing where he once again went the bargain bin route.

In the past the bargain bin signings arguably made sense, but in this case it is really hard to defend this kind of signing.

It is one of those &quot;what is the point?&quot; moves.

The problem with this signing is not the cash the Indians spent as the \$1.5 million the Indians blew on him is not the chief concern here. This is the cost of doing business since any non-roster veteran signing would have made around \$900K or more if they made the Indians 25-man roster. The issue at hand is with giving Pavano a guaranteed deal where for all intents and purposes, right now, he has already won a job in the Indians 2009 starting rotation to start the season.

This is absurd given his injury and performance history to go along with all the young pitching options the Indians have at their disposal.

I don't know about you, but I in no way feel any better about the rotation going into the 2009

## Pavano Signing Brings No Guarantees

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Wednesday, January 07 2009 7:00 PM -

---

season with Carl Pavano in it that I did prior to his signing with the likes of Aaron Laffey, Scott Lewis or David Huff in it. If Laffey is healthy, he is a better pitcher than Pavano, and I'd rather have Lewis or Huff in there as well. If the prospects of our #4 and #5 spot in the rotation was in the hands of Jackson and Sowers, yes, ok, I would understand a Pavano signing, but with Reyes, Laffey, Lewis and Huff also in the mix, again, what is the point?

Just a senseless move if you ask me.

Pavano is not a top-of-the-rotation starting pitcher, and is probably not even a middle-of-the-rotation starter at this stage of his career after all the injuries he has incurred the last four years. Aside from a gork season in 2004 when he went 18-8 with a 3.00 ERA in 31 starts and in 2003 when he had a sensational playoff showing and went 12-13 with a 4.30 ERA for the Florida Marlins, Pavano has never been a very good starting pitcher. Right now, at best, he is a fifth starter or a major league depth guy teams sign to a non-roster deal and stash in Triple-A as a depth option to use during the season. He may prove to be more than that over the course of the upcoming season, but this is what he is right now and the deck is really stacked against him being anything more than that.

Sure, if Pavano tanks in spring training or the first month of the season he could be released and then the Indians can fall back on one of their young lefty starters. That is always a possibility. But, going with the Indians track record, if Pavano struggles we already know this will not happen as they are more than likely to ride Pavano out as long as possible before releasing him.

In 2006 they did not release Jason Johnson (3-8, 5.96 ERA, 14 starts) and his one year \$3.5 million contract until June 20th which was basically the halfway point of the season, and did not release Guillermo Mota (1-3, 6.21 ERA, 34 games) and his one year \$3 million contract until August 11th.

In 2007, they did not release Roberto Hernandez (3-1, 6.23 ERA, 28 games) and his one year \$3.5 million contract until June 28th.

Last year they did surprise and go against the norm when they released Aaron Fultz and ate his one year \$1.5 million contract when they released him at the end of spring training on March 28.

However, they were back to their old ways when they did not release a struggling Joe Borowski until July 10, even though he had arm problems and performance issues since the middle of spring training unable to throw anything above 82-83 MPH.

In a nutshell, given their history when significant dollars are committed, unless Pavano's arm falls off (which it might) he is going to be in the starting rotation no matter what the first two months of the season.

I hope I am wrong.

The fact that the Indians are going to rely on Pavano to go out there for at least 10-14 starts and

## **Pavano Signing Brings No Guarantees**

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Wednesday, January 07 2009 7:00 PM -

---

test run him to see what he can do when they already had very capable arms in tow is the concern here. They are potentially sacrificing early season wins for the very limited upside Pavano provides.

I mean, the guy has been hurt the last four years and has only been good for one and a half seasons in his career and has been average to below average at best the rest of his other nine and a half seasons.

The man is living off of one very good season in 2004 which is completely overshadowing the rest of his career. Some would like you to believe this is a low risk signing with the upside like Kevin Millwood in 2005, but this is so far from the truth it is not even funny.

Look at Millwood when we signed him going into 2005 versus Pavano now (\* - includes time in the minor leagues):

### **Kevin Millwood (8 seasons, 1997-2004):**

228 games, 1367.1 IP, 98-64, 3.89 ERA, 1.25 WHIP, 8.44 H/9, 0.90 HR/9, 2.78 BB/9, 7.46K/9

- 4 of 8 seasons of 200+ innings
- 5 of 8 seasons of 150+ innings
- 7 of 8 seasons of 100+ innings
- 3 of 8 seasons of 17 or more wins
- 4 of 8 seasons of 13 or more wins
- 5 of 8 seasons of 10 or more wins

### **Carl Pavano (11 seasons):**

193 games, 1083.1 IP, 66-66, 4.32 ERA, 1.36 WHIP, 9.7 H/9, 1.0 HR/9, 2.5 BB/9, 5.7 K/9

- 2 of 11 seasons with 200+ innings pitched
- 4 of 11 seasons with 150+ innings pitched\*
- 6 of 11 seasons with 100+ innings pitched\*
- 1 of 11 seasons of 17 or more wins
- 1 of 11 seasons of 13 or more wins
- 2 of 11 seasons of 10 or more wins

Not. Even. Close.

If anything, this signing is a lot closer to the Jason Johnson signing in 2006. If you compare the histories of Johnson and Pavano, Johnson has arguably outpitched him and been more reliable in just about every season but that one year for Pavano in 2004.

Yuck.

Here are Johnson's career numbers through 2008 (\* - includes time in the minor leagues):

### **Jason Johnson (11 seasons):**

## Pavano Signing Brings No Guarantees

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Wednesday, January 07 2009 7:00 PM -

---

255 games, 1357 IP, 56-100, 4.99 ERA, 1.49 WHIP, 10.1 H/9, 1.2 HR/9, 3.3 BB/9, 5.4 K/9

- 1 of 11 seasons with 200+ innings pitched
- 5 of 11 seasons with 150+ innings pitched\*
- 8 of 11 seasons with 100+ innings pitched\*
- 0 of 11 seasons of 17 or more wins
- 0 of 11 seasons of 13 or more wins
- 2 of 11 seasons of 10 or more wins

And, really, what is the difference between Pavano and Tomo Ohka who the Indians signed to a minor league deal in early December? If we wanted a veteran depth rotation guy for the staff, why not just consider Ohka for the job in the spring? Be

lieve it or not, but his career numbers are as good or better than Pavano's, and he has less of the injury issues.

Here are Ohka's career numbers through the 2008 season (\* - includes time in the minor leagues):

### **Tomo Okha (10 seasons):**

184 games, 999.0 IP, 50-63, 4.14 ERA, 1.39 WHIP, 10.0 H/9, 1.1 HR/9, 2.5 BB/9, 5.0 K/9

- 1 of 10 seasons with 200+ innings pitched
- 6 of 10 seasons with 150+ innings pitched\*
- 8 of 10 seasons with 100+ innings pitched\*
- 0 of 10 seasons of 17 or more wins
- 1 of 10 seasons of 13 or more wins
- 3 of 10 seasons of 10 or more wins

Sure, Pavano has thrown 200+ innings twice in eleven seasons, but in the other nine seasons including time split in the minors he has thrown over 150 innings just twice and thrown over a 100 innings only four times. Compare that to Ohka who has thrown 200 innings once in 10 seasons, 150 innings or more 6 of 10 seasons, and 100 or more innings 8 of 10 seasons.

I'd be happy to eat crow if I am wrong on this, but Pavano's upside at best is probably more his 2003 season which was very average.

And the likelihood of him getting there with so many potential pitfalls is an extreme long-shot.

Pavano's claim to fame is his two year run in 2003-2004, but everything other than that in his other nine seasons he has been - as the esteemed Steve Buffum would call - a fungus. Ohka's 2002-2003 two year run where he went 13-8 with a 3.18 ERA in 32 starts in 2002 and 10-12 with a 4.16 ERA in 34 starts in 2003 is very much like Pavano's 2003-2004 run.

You take out those two years for both players and what do you get? Retread depth...erm, a fungus.

## Pavano Signing Brings No Guarantees

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Wednesday, January 07 2009 7:00 PM -

---

Ohka and Pavano are the same age, and Ohka has more recent success whereas Pavano has barely pitched the last four years. Pavano did come back last year, but what in his seven starts did he show?

Pavano's 2008 line in seven starts: 5.77 ERA, 3.93 K/9, .306 BAA, 0.68 G/F, and a .835 OPS.

As a reference point, Jeremy Sowers in 22 starts in 2008: 5.58 ERA, 4.76 K/9, 1.64 K/BB, .291 BAA, 0.76 G/F, .825 OPS.

Sowers had better numbers across the board.

Yikes.

And Ohka has been better recently than Pavano. First off, he has no real injury issues.

Secondly, in 2005 he was 11-9 with a 4.04 ERA in 32 games and threw 180 innings. That same year in his first year in NY, Pavano threw 100 innings and came up lame and finished 4-6 with a 4.77 ERA in 17 games.

2006 and 2007 was a wash for Pavano and Ohka, but while Pavano was hurt, at least Ohka was still throwing and splitting time in the bigs and minors. In 2008 Ohka threw 135 innings for the White Sox Triple-A affiliate.

So, as a guy named Denzel once said, someone explain it to me like I am a four year old how Pavano is better than Ohka? It certainly isn't their "stuff", and as far as track record goes, they both are at least the same, with Ohka the more sustained success and better health record.

This is not a "Ohka for the rotation" campaign, as I do not want him in the rotation to start the season either. This is merely to compare the two players and different deals they were given.

If you want Pavano, then sign him to a non-guaranteed deal as a non-roster spring training invitee (NRI). If he would not agree to a non-roster invite, you pass.

No loss at all.

I'd have been much happier going out and signing two or three more NRI veteran pitchers to compete for a spot in the rotation - but have no guaranteed roster spot - than doing what they did with Pavano. It would be one thing if he in fact did have a history of success like with Kevin Millwood when we got him, but Pavano is a far cry from that.

This is my biggest beef with Shapiro, and I have mentioned this in the past, but [his inability to trust his farm system](#) and avoid these retread signings often seems to stall the development of some of his younger players.

Guys like Laffey, Jackson, Sowers, Huff, and Lewis need to be used now.

They need to make a decision on these guys and quit putting off the decision until they have no

## Pavano Signing Brings No Guarantees

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Wednesday, January 07 2009 7:00 PM -

---

choice because the player runs out of minor league options.

As a minor leaguer honk, I'd just like to see a little more faith in their prospects.

It certainly is a dangerous slope to walk on with young talent, but is it any different when you are dealing with such low-upside veterans like the Carl Pavano, Jason Michaels, Aaron Fultz, and Aaron Boone's of the world?

Bottom line, Huff is healthy, has tremendous upside, and is considered major league ready and projects to be a middle of the rotation guy. Heck, I would be more inclined to even go with Scott Lewis over Pavano.

Maybe something has changed this offseason with the questionable health of Laffey and Reyes to where they no longer felt comfortable with their in-house alternatives, but the decision to sign Pavano to a guaranteed deal was lacking in good judgment by Shapiro.

Those that know me understand that I am typically on-board with Shapiro most of the time with his decisions, but in this case I am not.