

Jarad Regano gives fans the green-light to boo Jim Thome at will, but also indicates there should be more boos to go around within the front office.



It had been three full seasons since Jim Thome donned a Cleveland Indian uniform. The Tribe had avoided Philadelphia for three years in interleague play, so the tension was high when the White Sox came to town in early April. Would the tribe homerun king be celebrated? Would he be booed for leaving the franchise in which he was nurtured? Would the time gap dull either?

To the astonishment of national and local media alike, Thome was booed badly. Tribe fans were ridiculed everywhere from Mike and Mike in the Morning, to Ken “Put it On the Board” Harrelson, to our own Tom Hamilton;. “Everyone likes Jim Thome,” quipped a sober Rick Sutcliffe on Tuesday’s ESPN game. Mike Greenberg compared Thome’s return to Cleveland with Frank Thomas’ return to the Windy City. Unlike Thome, Thomas was applauded each and every time he dug in.

That simple comparison shows how out of touch the national media can be. Without even going into the intricacies of Thome's departure that make it harder on us, the facts are obvious. Jim Thome left the Indians and its fans. Contrarily, the White Sox left Frank Thomas. Big difference. In a game where it is more and more difficult each year to attach yourself emotionally, a player CHOOSING to leave your city is much harder to take (even if it is an obvious financial move). Perhaps if the Kenny Williams/Frank Thomas feud had never happened, Thomas would have elected to go elsewhere anyway. But, that never came to be. So the fans did not even consider it.

While that line of thinking bothers me, it was not the reason Jim Thome had such a negative reaction in his return. And least not in this Tribe fans opinion. I understand that Jim Thome left for more money. Albert did it. Manny did it. Both made no impression to any of us that would stay. It was their one big chance to break the bank. They did it.

The problem I (and I would guess many of you) had was the lip service throughout the entire summer of 2002.

It was the most interesting summer for a non-contending Indians team in my life. After an 11-1 start, the “rebuilding on the fly” Indians faded fast. Come early June, GM Mark Shapiro was dealing anything and everything he could in the organization. As part of a “full-fledged” rebuild, the Indians had added an abundance of minor league talent. The last desirable asset was Jim Thome. Thome, sporting a no-trade clause, went public with his desire to be an Indian for life. “They’ll have to tear the jersey off of my back,” he quipped. The dagger for me was when he joined the Mike Trivisono Show from Jacobs Field a few hours before a game. Thome wanted the interview to make his strong feelings for Cleveland known. “Unbelievable”, I thought. He really wants to play here.

Making us feel like he was going to be here forever is the main reason I now dislike Jim Thome. But there is another caveat that irks me almost as much. The demand was high for Thome during that summer. He was having a great year. Could you imagine having traded for another Grady Sizemore or two that summer? His “desire” to stay forced the Indians to not even ask him to consider a trade.

The Dolan Family and front office, as you may guess by who the author of this column is, shares part of the blame as well. The ironic, humorous thing about it is that they really do not. Think about that. Larry Dolan gets blamed for everything (did you notice he makes the pretzels in the shape of "I's" to cut down on the cost of dough?). But, in this case, he gets a pass.

The Indians best chance to sign Jim Thome was the previous offseason. While it was public knowledge that he was open to negotiating that winter, newly hired GM Mark Shapiro was busy throwing dollar after pointless dollar at sub par free agents. The time to hammer out a deal was then. With no competition from any other team. Yes, it was more important that outbidding ourselves for Ricky Gutierrez.

While that might be more of a front office fault, the initial offer to Thome has to fall at the feet of Larry Dolan. What in the world was that? I realize that putting your best foot forward in negotiations is a mistake. But, 4 years/\$44 million? A statue of Thome at the Jake? I think there was a vacation package to Colonial Williamsburg in there too. While the offer would improve,

it still had to be somewhat insulting.

I was confident Thome would be treated poorly in his return. For those of you who think the wrong guy took the heat, though, you can be sure of this. Post Larry Dolan's picture on the scoreboard, and you would hear the same reaction.