

## The Anti Divine Comedy

Written by {ga=gdbenz}

Tuesday, July 28 2009 7:00 PM -

---

Mark Shapiro has struck again, trading off another key asset in the yearly salary dump. This time they did it in unprecedented fashion, again trading the reigning Cy Young winner, Cliff Lee for some pitching and some position players. The Indians also threw in Ben Francisco. Gary sees all this as Dante's Divine Comedy, but only in reverse.



It was only an inkling but now it's confirmed. The worst thing that can happen to a major league pitcher wearing a Cleveland Indians uniform is to win the Cy Young award. Just hope that Victor Martinez doesn't win the batting title.

In ground no other club would ever dare tread, the Indians once again sent a reigning Cy Young award winner, this time Cliff Lee, packing for a parcel of Philadelphia prospects, only two of which are pitchers and only one of which is in the high minor leagues.

Indians general manager Mark Shapiro, apparently wilting under the potential pressure of having to trade a non Cy Young award winner next season decided instead to jump early, way early in dumping Lee on a salivating Phillies organization. In exchange for Lee, the Indians get a Triple A pitcher, a Single A pitcher (apparently the key to the deal, which is laughable if you allow yourself a moment of levity), a catcher and a shortstop. The Single A pitcher, Jason Knapp,

is on the disabled list. When healthy, he can apparently throw really, really fast. Let me guess, he's got swing and miss capability.

So much for Shapiro's "pitching, pitching, pitching" mantra. It's now been revised to "pitching, pitching, position player, position player" and that's without getting into the finer points about whether or not the Indians needed still another catching prospect or even another shortstop prospect. Shapiro, just because he felt like it, also gave the Phillies Ben Francisco. I wonder if the Phillies even realize it. If they don't they will when Francisco shows up, bat in hand. The Indians have gone from a team with a bunch of young outfielders to a team with a really young bunch of outfielders.

At this point it really doesn't matter what Shapiro has to say about any of these prospects. Cleveland fans have been through this drill so many times that they can conduct the press conferences themselves. The prospects are all great, the economy is tough, and the Indians didn't think they'd be able to sign Lee to an extension. Any questions?

Of course, the Indians never did try to sign Lee to an extension. His agent tried to engage the Indians in those discussions before the start of this season but Shapiro wanted none of it, probably because Lee's leverage was at its peak given his Cy Young season of 2008. But as Lee continued to pitch well for a truly awful team put together by Shapiro, it became apparent that the Lee's price wasn't going in Shapiro's direction. Time to move on.

Trading Lee now also allows Shapiro to go avoid any serious questions about whether or not trading Lee next year would have brought more value. Shapiro will undoubtedly say that because Lee had another season left on his contract, the Phillies were willing to part with more than they would next season. The great thing for Shapiro is that there's no way to prove or disprove that theory.

One theory that actually is getting disproven though is that it's easier to fire the

## The Anti Divine Comedy

Written by {ga=gdbenz}

Tuesday, July 28 2009 7:00 PM -

---

manager than the players. Shapiro isn't just conducting a fire sale. He's in full liquidation mode, sacrificing nearly any player with a decent pulse while saving his erstwhile blood brother, manager Eric Wedge from the apparent voice mail telling him to report to Shapiro's office and bring the playbook.

And speaking of Wedge, if anyone stands to gain by Shapiro's latest brand of nuttiness, it's him. Shapiro has this unhealthy belief in Wedge's ability to manage a young team, unhealthy because, speaking strictly factually, Wedge has done nothing to actually nurture and grow either a young player or a young team. Past being irrelevant, Shapiro will no longer be compelled to fire Wedge come season's end. What would be the use in that? A young team begs for a patient steady hand and on that score, Shapiro believes Wedge has the hands of a surgeon.

Thus it's now more likely than ever that Wedge will be guiding whatever faux major league lineup that emerges from spring training next year and suddenly that's turned into the least of issues. The real point here is that there is no longer any point to this franchise. Right in front of our eyes, Shapiro has turned into John Nash, another brilliant Princeton alumnus who went eventually went paranoid. Nash eventually regained some semblance of footing. If it were up to the fans, Shapiro might never get that chance.

While it's doubtful that the Dolans are exactly celebrating the fact that their franchise has once again been relegated to a national embarrassment after trading another Cy Young award winner they are probably secretly thrilled that Shapiro has literally taken a meat cleaver to the budget. Wins are nice and all, but when it's your money on the line there are other priorities. On that level, Shapiro, like Wedge, is probably as safe as he's ever been.

Don't be confused. In a world inhabited by the rational, Shapiro would probably be fired for the kind of mess he's made. In a world where the balance sheet is far more important than the standings, Shapiro is probably in line for a hefty raise. Indeed, Shapiro's cutting payroll as if he's got an incentive clause. All any of this means is that the regime is probably solid even if the franchise is not.

## The Anti Divine Comedy

Written by {ga=gdbenz}

Tuesday, July 28 2009 7:00 PM -

---

There's no doubt in my mind that, starting with Shapiro but certainly not ending there, a whole bunch of Indians apologists will defend this trade like they have all the others--by focusing on the souvenirs the Indians received in the exchange. But extolling the virtues of this pine tree or that says little about the forest. The Indians are not a better team or franchise today than they were yesterday and yesterday they weren't so hot.

The Indians are defying gravity and poetry by going in reverse order of Dante's Divine Comedy. Having started in relative paradise, they are blasting through purgatory at warp speed on their way to the depths of Hell. This time, though, Dante and Virgil, in the form of Shapiro and Wedge, aren't nearly as likely to escape.

The Indians long ago stopped giving fans a reason to invest in them for this season and now have jump started that process for next season In turn, less attendance means an even smaller payroll and on and on it will go.

At this point it's more than fair to ask if there is a realistic path forward. The last time the team was in it this deep they at least had an injection of cash coming from the new stadium that would be opening. It literally changed their fortunes. There is no such cash cow on the horizon this time. Right now the franchise is encircled by a boa constrictor with each subsequent movement only tightening the grip. Without a few years of serious deficit spending in order to actually rebuild this franchise with bona fide players that can yield a contending team, it will get more and more difficult to breathe. Once a franchise no longer has promise to sell, the end is near. Shapiro may not see bottom but the ticket-buying, television watching, product buying public is starting to see it in high definition.

But hey, look at the bright side. An "anonymous major league source" sounding an awful lot like the Indians' Chris Antonetti, supposedly told the Plain Dealer's Paul Hoynes that Knapp, the alleged key to the deal, has "a great pitcher's body." So there is that. Of course so did John Rucker.