

A Lazy Sunday With a New Plan

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}
Saturday, August 08 2009 7:00 PM -

Still not quite able to stretch his back after two days of laying tile in a new kitchen floor, and with the Indians making that second-half run he dreaded, if only because it loosened the noose around the Atomic Wedgie's neck, Paulie puts off some landscaping work that needs done on this 90-degree day and gets going, touching on Paul Dolan's comments on the economic situation that colored the Tribe's trades last week, some thoughts on the buying out of Moneyball and its new variation, and the new "wave of arms" to replace the wave that never arrived. It's Paulie C. with another Lazy Sunday edition.



Still not quite able to straighten my back fully after two days of laying tile in a new kitchen floor and with the Indians (surprise) making that 2nd half run that I dreaded, if only because it loosened the noose around The Atomic Wedgie's neck, let's get going while I put off some landscaping work that needs to be done on a 90-degree day. Obviously a pretty sweet weekend here (though I don't know if I'll make it to Bed Bath and Beyond...don't know if I'll have the time) with a Lazy Sunday smack dab in the middle of it all:

The big news of the week came from Paul Dolan, who asserted that the Indians would lose \$16M this season. While the dollars and sense of this is best left to others, here's [an excellent look from Anthony Castrovince](#) on how the very real economic issues on the club colored their actions of last week.

Within the fantastic look into the economics of the decisions, (and before getting into that fully), how about this little shot across the bow in the Dolan comments about the recent past and the direction of the team that may lend some insight as to the future of the Indians' manager past this year:

*"Eric and his staff have achieved a lot in their time here," Dolan said. "I think fans tend to forget that. When he took over in '03, he took over what was, in essence, an expansion franchise. In a relatively short period of time, he turned it into a competitive team. He and others deserve a lot of credit for that. **Despite that, we have not been successful the last few years with a team that***

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should have been successful.

We have to understand why that is. We also have to understand that sometimes fans want or need to hear a different voice. We have to balance that."

In the interest of full disclosure, I bolded the sentence...but "not successful...with a team that should have been successful"?

Anyone else seeing where the blame lies in that equation in one man's mind and wondering what number John Farrell will wear as the Indians' manager next year?

Regardless of the outcome of that whole issue (and it does feel odd watching the team night after night wanting the Indians to win, but not too frequently so it doesn't save Wedge's job), Castrovince's piece takes a pretty in-depth look at the Indians as they're set up to compete, the environment in which they're attempting to compete, and the stark realities of the imbalance of the two.

Couple it with [the video interview that AC did with Shapiro](#) (that is definitely worth 15 minutes of your life) that rises above the usual nonsensical questions that we normally see in these pieces for definitive answers on why LaPorta isn't here (he says it's because they need a 13-man staff for Masterson and a LF who can also play CF in Crowe, which still doesn't hold water with Gimenez AND Torregas on the roster), how Kelly Shoppach's time with the Indians appears to be short (if we're judging on Shapiro's obvious omission of Show Pack in his discussion of the catching position going forward), and a bit of an explanation as to why the trades of Vic and CP were ultimately made.

Interestingly as Shapiro frames the team's thought process on why they made the deals, the situation is not unlike [what I wrote here last Sunday](#) , but what he describes in terms of a ">window of opportunity" also seems to be a trend that may be emerging in MLB as

[SI's Joe Posnanski took the topic from a similar angle](#)

e, looking at all of MLB and not just the Indians as I had.

What my fellow South Euclid native JoePos ([who is going to be a Senior Writer at SI](#) ...and deservedly so) asserts in

his piece comes down to this, as he relates it to

[the principles outlined in Michael Lewis's "Moneyball" no longer simply being applied by the small-to-mid-market teams](#)

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The point here is not to write again about the disparity between big markets and small markets -- nobody cares anymore -- but only to say that just a few years after Lewis' wonderful book about the Oakland A's described "the art of winning an unfair game" well, it looks like the art is dead. Or, more to the point, the art has been bought out by large corporations.

There were many points to the book -- but probably the biggest point is that for a baseball team to win with fewer resources than other teams, the people running the disadvantaged team have to find inefficiencies in the market. That is, they have to find angles and bargains. They have to prize certain facets of baseball that others don't appreciate. It's never especially bright to compare real baseball to fantasy baseball, but I've long thought that a good way to think of trying to win as a small market team is trying to win a fantasy baseball league when you have half the money that other owners have. The worst thing you could do, in that scenario, is use the same fantasy baseball lists or fantasy baseball magazines they are using. That's the one sure way to certain defeat.

_____snip_____

Now, six years later, it seems to me that the small-market teams are really grasping and trying to find some loophole, some opening that will allow them to win in this tough financial environment.

And it seems like the market inefficiency they have all come up with is this: time.

Here's what I mean: The big-payroll teams want to win right now. More than that, they HAVE to win now. They are spending too much money not to win now. They are leveraged. But most of the low-payroll teams -- say teams with payrolls of less than \$75 million -- have come to the conclusion that they are NOT going to win now. The one thing they have is time. And so, they're trading time.

Very simply, the landscape of MLB has changed even from the one that we knew 4 or 5 years ago, something that has become painfully obvious as the Indians go back to the drawing board in an attempt to

build a better mousetrap again and (from afar at least) that new mousetrap foundation was hopefully laid over the past month with all of the prospects coming into the system.

How do all of those prospects rank in terms of the other young players that found themselves in new organizations during the Trading Deadline?

Well...Fangraphs posted a series on the Top 35 Prospects traded at the Trading Deadline and while Justin Masterson was not eligible, the new Indians find themselves spread out through the list. They certainly ought to for 1 ½ years of both Lee and Vic, but the ranking of them is interesting, if only to see where some of the guys we saw as "throw-ins" or "projects" rate in relation to each other. The whole series of rankings can be found [here](#) , [here](#) , and [here](#)

- but here's the info that you'll find most interesting:

4. Nick Hagadone, LHP

From Boston to Cleveland

Like Knapp, Hagadone's potential is just too good to ignore even though there are health questions after he underwent Tommy John surgery and missed almost all of the 2008 season. The hard-throwing southpaw has shown good stuff in low-A ball this season with an impressive ground-ball rate of 57.6%. Hagadone has allowed just 16 hits in 28 innings of work this year, while also posting a walk rate of 5.04 BB/9 and a strikeout rate of 11.52 K/9. The former supplemental first round draft pick's control was not a strength prior to the surgery, so it could take a little while before it improves enough to pitch

successfully in the upper minors and Majors. Hagadone, 23, has the potential to be a No. 2 starter but the injury has definitely slowed down his ascent through the minors.

5. Jason Knapp, RHP

From Philadelphia to Cleveland

The Phillies organization knew Knapp was promising (The club drafted him in the second round out of a New Jersey high school in 2008) but he showed solid results sooner than expected. The Indians were so happy to have the chance to acquire him that the organization took him in the trade even though he was on the disabled list with shoulder fatigue. If Knapp cannot hold up to the rigors of pitching as a starter, he could become a dominating closer with a fastball that creeps up near 100 mph. He also has a power slider and a good changeup. This season in low-A, Knapp allowed 63 hits in 85.1 innings of work, while also posting a walk rate of 4.11 BB/9 and a strikeout rate of 11.71 K/9.

7. Carlos Carrasco, RHP

From Philadelphia to Cleveland

Value-wise, Carrasco peaked as a prospect mid-way through the 2007 season. The right-hander stopped trusting his stuff when he struggled after being promoted to double-A. His formerly plus

curveball has regressed to the point where it is an average pitch for him. Carrasco now relies mostly on a low-90s fastball that can touch 95-96 mph and a changeup. Prior to the trade, the Venezuelan native allowed 118 hits in 114.2 innings of work. He had a solid walk rate of 2.98 BB/9 and a good strikeout rate at 8.79 K/9. Carrasco has won both his starts since he was traded to Cleveland, but he's been far from dominant by allowing nine runs on 13 hits and three walks in 13 innings. With a little more aggression, and if he can regain his plus breaking ball, Carrasco could realize his potential as a No. 2 starter.

9. Lou Marson, C

From Philadelphia to Cleveland

Marson's value has taken a bit of a hit in 2009. He's shown that he can consistently hit for average but the right-handed hitter has struggled to hit the ball with authority. Scouts were already knocking the catcher for his lack of power prior to 2009, but his ISO has dropped

from .120 in '07 to .102 to .076 in '09. He's hit just one homer and 14 doubles this year in 228 at-bats. On the plus side, he continues to get on base via the walk (12.4 BB%) and keeps the strikeouts to a minimum (19.0 K%). With Carlos Santana already established as the catcher of the future in Cleveland, Marson is headed for a back-up role if he's not traded again.

11. Scott Barnes, LHP

From San Francisco to Cleveland

Barnes is rated a little higher here than many people might expect, but you have to appreciate what he's done in a very short period of time. The southpaw was nabbed in the eighth round of the 2008 draft out of college after flying under the radar. He had a dominating debut and continued to pitch well in '09 despite jumping up to high-A in a very good hitter's league. In 98 innings with the Giants' club, Barnes allowed 82 hits and posted a walk

rate of 2.66 BB/9 and a strikeout rate of 9.09 K/9. He's handled right-handed hitters very well in his career with a batting average allowed of just .207 (.224 vs LH hitters). Barnes has a very good changeup and deception in his delivery. His fastball works in the upper 80s, but he can touch 91-92 mph. If his curveball can improve a little more, Barnes could very well end up as the steal of the trade deadline.

12. Bryan Price, RHP

From Boston to Cleveland

The trade from Boston to Cleveland could really benefit Price, who was blocked by a number of other talented starting pitchers in his former organization. The right-hander began the year in low-A where he allowed 37 hits in 44 innings of work and posted solid walk

and strikeout rates. Promoted to high-A, Price's ERA rose from 2.45 to 6.54 but his FIP was a solid 3.22. The Texan allowed 62 hits in 52.1 innings, while also posting a walk rate of 3.27 and a strikeout rate of 9.80. He had a nice debut in the Cleveland system with six shutout innings in high-A. Price's repertoire includes a fastball that can touch 95 mph, a plus slider and a changeup. A reliever in college, he has a chance to be a solid No. 3 starter in the Majors.

16. Connor Graham, RHP

From Colorado to Cleveland

Graham, 23, is a hard-throwing, right-handed pitcher who is probably better suited for set-up or closer chores than he is for starting. He has a good slider and a fastball that can touch 95 mph. Prior to the trade, the 6'6" former fifth-round draft pick allowed 68 hits in 80.1 innings of work, along with 41 walks and 87 Ks. The 4.59 BB/9 rate is worrisome but Cleveland immediately promoted Graham to double-A after the trade.

20. Jason Donald, SS

From Philadelphia to Cleveland

Donald, 24, has followed up his offensive-breakout campaign in 2008 with an injury-filled '09 season. An average fielder at shortstop, Donald will likely have to move to second base in the Majors, although the hot corner is an option if he develops more power (which is not expected to happen). He hasn't looked overly sharp since coming back from his injury.

Not wanting to be left out of the party, [ESPN's Keith Law also produced a "Top](#)

Prospects Traded

brought to my attention by the esteemed Al Ciammaichella from Baseball Digest

, and you may notice a trend among the top names entering the organization:

2. Nick Hagadone, LHP, from Boston to Cleveland:

Hagadone is just 26 innings into his return from Tommy John surgery, and while his development was slowed by the injury and long layoff, at

worst he looks like a very good late-game reliever who can get left- and right-handed hitters out. There's still a chance he can develop into a starter, although that's going to take time.

7. Jason Knapp, RHP, from Philadelphia to Cleveland

: Knapp has a big arm and a violent delivery; he's had great success as an

18-year-old in full-season ball, but is currently on the shelf with minor shoulder fatigue.

8. Carlos Carrasco, RHP, from Philadelphia to Cleveland: Carrasco has had success in the minor leagues without a plus pitch, although on a good day he will show three average pitches. The Phillies had

*soured on Carrasco's
makeup, allowing
Cleveland
to pick him up as a
distressed asset.*

**10. Bryan Price, RHP,
from Boston to
Cleveland: Price is in his
first full pro year and his
first year as a starter after
he was an infrequently
used reliever and spot**

starter at Rice; he has the stuff to pitch in the middle of a big league rotation but has been hit around some in high-A and he has already thrown more innings this year than he did in all of 2008, including his collegiate work.

I know, I know...you're damn right that the Indians should be well represented

on these lists having given up Lee and Martinez. But look again at Law's list - it's pitching, pitching, and more pitching and at all levels...catching the theme here for an organization that "felt good" about their organizational depth among position players and sorely lacking in pitching?

How about this, in terms of these arms (and more) coming in?

Chris Perez - 1st Round Pick (42nd overall) in 2006 by St. Louis Cardinals

Bryan Price - 1st Round Pick (45th overall) in 2008 by the Boston Red Sox

Nick Hagadone - 1st Round Pick (55th overall) in 2007 by the Boston Red

Sox

Justin Masterson - 2nd Round Pick in 2006 by the Boston Red Sox

Jess Todd - 2nd Round Pick in 2007 by the St. Louis Cardinals

Jason Knapp - 2nd Round Pick in 2008 by the Philadelphia Phillies

Lou Marson - 4th Round Pick in 2004 by the Philadelphia Phillies

Jason Donald - 3rd Round
Pick in 2006 by the
Philadelphia Phillies
Connor Graham - 5th
Round Pick in 2007 by the
Colorado Rockies
Scott Barnes - 8th Round
Pick in 2008 by the San
Francisco Giants

Carlos Carrasco is not
included as he was an
international Free Agent

signing, but do you see the trend there? The Indians obviously targeted players whose talent was substantial enough to be drafted high (6 of the 10 were drafted in the 2nd Round or higher), watched them to see if their talent would translate to MiLB, and then asked for them in these deals.

Unquestionably, this is not without logic but it also brings to mind the question that's been nagging at fans for most of the season - why did we need this infusion of arms, what went wrong here?

Without getting into [another 2,000 word explanation](#), let's just say that the drafting and development

system left the Indians in this position, where the pitching depth simply wasn't there and wasn't coming. Thus, the decision was made to infuse the organization with these arms in an attempt to put quality pitching up and down the system...hopefully to finally, legitimately, create those "waves of

arms".

The first wave never materialized and while the Indians can spin the moves that they made in terms of money or how the organization needed arms, how refreshing would it be if they simply admitted that they created this chasm of ineffective pitching by their own faulty decision-making

and poor drafting? Come out and say that a vital portion of "The Plan" failed as a result of the Front Office's poor decisions and, when combined with other factors, simply became too much for the organization to remain competitive in the short-and-long-term, making these trades necessary in their eyes.

As serial poster Cy Slapnicka has said, "The Plan" looked to be sound in 2002 and the basic tenets of it make sense...the execution of it however is where it fell short. So if we're looking at "The Plan 2.0", how about some accountability that the first one didn't work, why it didn't, and why this

one is going to end differently if it means different people making decisions or a change in strategy?

Speaking of these trades (even though we've all tried to erase those ugly days from our memories) and going forward, [Terry Pluto checks in from vacation on the trades](#)

, happy with most of the deals and explaining them as they have been, but remains underwhelmed with the return for Lee. While most of it serves as a recap of what we've been talking about for the better part of a few weeks, it is (as always from Pluto) a refreshing, even-handed look at the moves from a micro and macro point of

view.

As for the trade of Pavano (which I would have been more upset had they kept him), chew on these numbers that may not be exactly accurate, but are going to be close enough that it should erase any question as to whether Pavano should have been moved and in short order:

Pavano's Base Salary

Indians - \$1M in base salary

Twins - \$500K in base salary

Both the Indians and Twins were at the $\frac{2}{3}$ mark of their season at 108 games when the trade was made and Pavano's base salary was \$1.5M.

Before looking at his incentives , know that Pavano had 21 starts, 125 1/3 IP when the trade was made with 10 likely starts, if he's on a 5-man schedule for the rest of the season.

Let's put the conservative numbers of 9 more starts and 45 more IP (only 5 IP per start).

Pavano's Incentives

Indians - \$100K for his
18th start, \$100K for his
20th start

Twins - \$100K for his 22nd
start, \$200K for his 24th
start, \$200K for his 26th
start, \$200 K for his 28th
start, \$250K for his 30th
start; \$100K for 130th IP,
\$100K for 140th IP, \$100K
for 150th IP, \$150K for

160th IP, \$150K for 170th IP

He could hit more incentives, earning \$300K for a 32nd start, \$350K each for a 33rd and 34th start, and \$400K for a 35th start with inning incentives coming in at \$200k for his 180th IP, \$250K each for his 190, 200, and 210th IP, \$300K for his 215th IP,

\$400K for his 225th IP, and
\$500K for his 235th IP.

But if you're talking about
reasonably expected
results, here are the
projected totals:

Indians - \$1.2M

Twins - \$1.85M

If Pavano was going to hit
those incentives, in what

world does paying Pavano close to \$2M for the rest of the season make sense?

In [a piece related to the Red Sox NOT getting Carl Pavano](#), how about these little snippets:

"Clay Buchholz looks like he can't get his head screwed on straight..."

"Michael Bowden is puttering away in Triple-A, posting a 3.40 ERA in 20 starts over 103.1 innings. However, the Sox don't seem too enthused with Bowden and an NL scout said Bowden ‘didn't look very good at all; in his Wednesday start."

Justin Masterson and his waffle-ball pitches are suiting me just fine right now, thank you.

The march toward 2010 continues now with players like Masterson getting ready for his role in the rotation at that point with the moves of in place to hopefully usher in a new Plan, one that finds

ultimate success in 2011
and beyond.

For now, we wait...oh, and
get some landscaping
done while sweating off a
couple of pounds.