

## Managing Expectations

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}

Tuesday, September 29 2009 7:00 PM -

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With the announcement today that Eric Wedge and his entire coaching staff will be let go after Sunday's final game of the regular season, it's finally not too early to talk about the direction that the Indians figure to take in their search for a new skipper of the Good Ship Tribe. A new manager is coming ... but what kind of manager should the Indians be targeting? Paul Cousineau lays out 21 different names that the team may consider for the post and discusses the merits of all of them.



With the announcement today that Eric Wedge and his entire coaching staff will be let go after Sunday's season finale in Boston, it's finally not too early to talk about the direction that the Indians figure to take in their search for a new skipper of the Good Ship Tribe. A new manager is coming...but what kind of manager should the Indians be targeting - a "fresh set of eyes" to add to an organization grown stale, an experienced hand (perhaps even from the Indians' past) to bring the group of young players assembled to a level of contention, or somebody from within who would be familiar with the group of said young players with the idea that he would further their development through familiarity and consistency?

Before getting into all of that, let's firmly establish that the 2010 team that this new manager will be leading is not likely to contend in 2010. Yes, perhaps some things break right for them, but to introduce the new manager with any expectations that 2010 is anything more than a hopeful launching pad past next year is doing the new manager a major disservice by burdening unreasonable goals in front of him. The fact is that...yes, the Central is "winnable", but that would hinge on the development of the young starting pitching in place for the immediate future.

Maybe we should start there, given that the lineup and bullpen seem (relatively) settled for the short term and the starting pitching would seem to be the indicator of the team's success, or lack thereof for 2010 and beyond. With that in mind,

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perhaps there's something to the idea of bringing aboard a new manager with a pedigree in pitching (regardless of what history says about pitching coaches' inability to succeed as managers), particularly in the development in young arms.

I know, do we really want a pitching coach to be the manager, or wouldn't the description above fall under the umbrella of what a...you know...pitching coach should do?

No question, but this organization has fallen short recently of developing home-grown arms that consistently succeed at the MLB level and if the expertise that can be brought to the young pitching staff comes from the manager's chair as well as from that of the pitching coach, perhaps that's what the organization needs to get back on track with their prudent (if ill-executed) plan to rely on starting pitching as the pillar of the team.

Obviously, if you've been paying attention, you know who fits the very profile that I'm describing as he's the name that's been constantly attached to the Indians' managerial post from the time the embers grew hot under Wedge's seat - John Farrell.

But wait, you say, doesn't Farrell have a clause in his contract that precludes him from interviewing for a managerial position until after the 2010 season?

Technically, yes...but [there's this from the Boston Globe](#) :

*There's been much-ado about a clause in Farrell's contract that prohibits him from taking a managerial job before 2011, as first reported by Foxsports.com. Is it really a big deal? "All it does is create a compensation opportunity for the Red Sox," said one league official. In other words it's very much like a player with a no-trade clause. It's negotiable. Farrell has been loyal to the Red Sox and reportedly agreed to have this clause included in his revamped deal that makes him, according to one industry source, the "highest-paid or tied with the highest-paid" pitching coach in baseball (with St. Louis's Dave Duncan). Farrell is likely to stay. However, if Cleveland fires manager Eric Wedge, the Indians are likely to gauge interest by Farrell, who lives in Cleveland. The Cleveland option could be appealing to Farrell, who has had some serious family issues recently, and the Sox are not likely to stand in his way. As part of Farrell's deal, the Sox are in a good position to receive a player as compensation if Farrell leaves. Sox GM Theo Epstein will not discuss Farrell's deal, but he did indicate that no team has*

*approached the Sox about employing one of their coaches*

True - it says, &quot;Farrell is likely to stay&quot;...but... [you're telling me there's a chance](#) !

Obviously I'm kidding and not content to simply place all of my managerial eggs in one basket, although I do like the idea of a pitching coach of a successful team who is familiar with the Indians' organization (former Farm Director), but a few years removed from being IN it with the idea that he would bring a &quot;fresh&quot; set of old eyes to a situation in need of more than a kick start.

However, this is not a one-horse race (I think) and if we're not boxed into looking only at Farrell, what are the Indians really looking for?

Is it really just something different or somebody that's not Eric Wedge?

The prevailing sense that fresh blood is needed to reinvigorate the team (and the fan base) seems to be the overwhelming sentiment here, particularly from a Front Office that may or may not be convinced that firing Wedge is the right strategic move. If that is the case, that logic would seem to preclude the promotion of current minor-league managers Torey Lovullo or Mike Sarbaugh, whose ascent to the captain's wheel would basically be construed as the idea that nothing is wrong with the organization, per se, and that promoting from within is a way to continue on with business as usual at the corner of Carnegie and Ontario...just with a new name on the back of the manager's jersey.

Given the comments of the Dolans and the groundswell of negativity currently surrounding the regime (some of it brought on by sticking with Wedge, and others, too long), I can't imagine that anything resembling a continuation of the status quo is going to find much footing.

But it raises an interesting question as to why exactly a move is being made - is that the Dolans are simply trying to pacify the fan base?

If they are, maybe the hires for manager and the coaching staff would just be to add Sandy Alomar as Manager, Omar Vizquel as First Base Coach, Tony Pena as Bench Coach, Charles Nagy as Pitching Coach, and so on and so forth to see if people will buy tickets to cheer for Sandy when he comes out to change pitchers or cheer Omar when he runs out to the First Base Coach box.

Is the nostalgia for the 1990's that great and that pervasive that anyone really thinks that the best candidates for the job are such because they played on an unquestionably great team in this town 15 years ago?

Is PR the greatest factor?

While it may be for some, putting names in the dugout from the 1990's does not exactly bring the 1990's back and, at a certain point, the novelty of it wears off as nostalgia and goodwill certainly factor in as tickets need to be sold and public perception plays a role here, but shouldn't a track record of player development and finding a person perfectly suited for this particular situation play a role here?

To that end, finding the person perfectly suited for this particular situation, reader Richard Sheir has made the compelling argument to me that Mike Hargrove should be handed the reins to this runaway stagecoach, with the idea that the goodwill that his hiring would bring to the team would buy them some time to mature into a contender as Grover is both accustomed to the local media and adored by them, if for no other reason than the fact that he represents the halcyon days of the "Era of Champions". His argument continues that Hargrove's experience with shepherding the teams of the 1990's from the developmental stage to their AL Central domination will give the Indians' organization what it needs most from the fanbase - patience - with his track record of presiding over a winner in Cleveland allowing people to buy back into what the Indians are selling.

As I said, it's about the best argument that I've seen for Hargrove being considered to take up his place again in the Indians' dugout, but a question quickly arises. That is, if Grover is going to get the job, shouldn't it be because he's ready for such a challenge, based on the on-the-field circumstances as the first criteria with any goodwill and nostalgia being just icing on the cake? To me, the relevance of what Grover did AFTER he left Cleveland has more bearing on what he did in Cleveland as he was brought into both Baltimore and Seattle to accomplish what he did in Cleveland, and what he would be asked to do again in Cleveland, to develop a group of young players into a perennial contender.

That development did not occur in Baltimore or Seattle under Hargrove:

2000 Orioles: 74-88

2001 Orioles: 63-98

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2002 Orioles: 67-95

2003 Orioles: 71-91

2005 Mariners: 69-93

2006 Mariners: 78-84

2007 Mariners: 45-33

Of course, the other relevant factor with Hargrove is the circumstances of him leaving the Mariners in 2007 in the middle of the season because of what he called "losing his fire", which could be code for a myriad of reasons for him to step down. But in a game like baseball, where quitting in any fashion and for any reason is never forgotten (fair or not), Hargrove's exit calls into question (again, fair or not) about his purported readiness to lead men once again and likely moves him out of reasonable contention for the managerial position...as does his 467-582 record since leaving the Indians, tasked with exactly the job that the Indians are looking to accomplish starting in 2010 at both of those stops.

Now, some of Grover's struggles in Baltimore and Seattle can be traced to the players that he was hired to manage...but that double-edged sword can be wielded just as easily when you point to his success in Cleveland, when he was asked to handle a lineup full of likely Hall of Famers and potential Hall of Famers.

That gets down to the next point of looking for this new manager as you have to wonder what past results really indicate in terms of what can be expected from a manager. Who would have thought that the 2001 Indians' organization would boast back-to-back World Series managers by the end of the decade in Terry Francona (Special Assistant to the GM in 2001) and 2001 Tribe Manager Charlie Manuel?

Certainly neither manager's first stint indicated wild future success as Francona's first stint as a manager in Philly ended disastrously, never finishing above .500 in four years and with Ol' Cholly...well, I'm not going to say he "quit" as manager in Cleveland.

Is past MLB success a necessity to succeed again in the Bigs, or is it really just a matter of finding the right voice at the right time...with some great players to go along with the situation?

The landscape is filled with names that we've all heard of that have won in some

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fashion or another and find themselves on the outside looking in on the 30 spots to manage an MLB team. The names get thrown around every off-season, with additions made every year after the batch of after the season firings. We're going to hear them in connection to any and all job openings - Bob Brenly, Clint Hurdle, Davey Johnson, Willie Randolph, Larry Bowa, Phil Garner, etc. There's a list that even has Indians' ties in one way or another - Buddy Bell, Buck Showalter, Grady Little, Tony Pena, Jim Riggleman, etc.

Any of those names legitimately get your blood moving?

All of them have had successes and failures and have managed MLB teams...but does that mean that any of them are ready to move into the Indians' specific situation and succeed?

Nobody knows, just like nobody knows if that list of guys actually in coaching who have not been MLB managers, but have Indians' ties falls under that umbrella of being the "right guy" for the job. Do the likes of Travis Fryman, Ellis Burks, Robby Thompson, Sal Fasano, Joey Cora, Chris Chambliss, or Dave Clark (all former Tribe players thought to be "manager material" at one point or another...without even mentioning Sandy and Omar) really get you excited? Throw out the necessity to be an ex-Indian and guys like Ron Roenicke (the Angels' bench coach) jump out with the idea that the Indians can find the next Joe Maddon - somebody who is NOT that "yes" man, who does not represent a continuation of the status quo...the one that we "enjoyed" from June to today.

There you have 21 names that could be the next Indians' manager or could just as easily never even hit the Indians' radar. Unfortunately for us, there is not the "hot NFL assistant" coach pool in MLB, with the idea that particular coaches prove themselves ready for the next step through success of their particular unit, or former coaches sitting on the sidelines waiting for right opportunity. In baseball, it remains a crapshoot...where Bobby Cox and Tony LaRussa remain the exceptions to the rule and not the rule.

With all of that in mind, if you're asking me and twisting my arm for an answer, I'd like to see some combination of freshness and stability (if that's even possible), by realizing the situation that this organization is in very clearly in that they have a good number of talented, but young, players who need to develop as a group to shorten the "re-build", "re-load", whatever timeframe. If

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you've been following along at all, I think it's pretty obvious that the "freshness" that I speak of then goes along with the idea that Farrell represents the best option for manager in that he's a known quantity in the Indians' Front Office who has now spent a sufficient amount of time away from Cleveland in one of the most successful organizations to lend insight to his old stomping grounds. His familiarity with players from his days as Farm Director, and as an opposing pitching coach could lend invaluable insight as he could bring in new ideas without asserting himself too strongly into the organization, with the built-in respect from the Front Office that no other candidate would offer.

That "stability" could come from the coaching staff and, realizing that the construction of a coaching staff is often a manager's task and the input of the organization in filling out a coaching staff remains to be seen, an important aspect of that development should come from filling out the coaching staff with guys like Mike Sarbaugh, who has proven himself to be effective with many of these young players ( [making the playoffs in 5 of his 6 years as a MiLB manager](#) , winning his respective league in three of those years) and Scott Radinsky, who has plied his trade on young pitchers for a few years now, often fixing problems that the parent club has been unable to correct.

Beyond the likes of Sarbaugh and Radinsky and even Lovullo (Farrell's teammate on the 1993 California Angels), he could bring new voices, if not new eyes, with people already in the organization like Ellis Burks or Travis Fryman lending their insight to players they're familiar, but not exposed to on an everyday basis. The way it breaks down looks something like this:

Manager - John Farrell  
Bench Coach - Travis Fryman  
Hitting Coach - Ellis Burks  
Pitching Coach - Scott Radinsky  
1B Coach - Mike Sarbaugh  
3B Coach - Torey Lovullo  
Bullpen Coach - Sal Fasano

Regardless of who the Indians' manager figures to be (and if it's true that Bud Black was their first choice in the winter of 2002, you see that the pattern could be there for them to hit on the pitching coach to become manager this time...assuming the price is right), 2010 is a rebuilding year that ideally serves as the jumping off point for the next stage of this franchise's history. The young talent

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in place needs to developed by coaches used to handling and developing young talent and not adverse to the growing pains associated with that development.

With the idea that pitching is the key to the success of the next incarnation of the Indians and with the concept that Farrell's long history with the Indians and recent history with the Red Sox make him ideally suited to helm the development of the Indians in 2010 and beyond.