

Tommy Lee

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}
Tuesday, December 15 2009 7:00 PM -

While North Coast is busy trying to make sense of Mike Holmgren and why a Miami Dolphins jet was seen at Burke Lakefront Airport on Tuesday morning, a little trade went down in MLB with a particular Arkansan that you may remember...middle name of Phifer. With the BIG trade (step aside, Granderson) finally consummated, let's bring in Paulie "soon to be a father of two" Cousineau to shoot off some quick tomahawks on what it took to get Lee to the Pacific Northwest, among other topics.



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Obviously, most of the focus nationally on the Halladay-Lee trade is on...well, Halladay and Lee, but the most fascinating aspect of the deal for me is what Seattle gave up for one season of Lee...or rather what they didn't give up. The M's parted with Phillipe Aumont, Tyson Gillies, and JC Ramirez to net Lee from the Phillies and going over to Dave Cameron from USS Mariner, here's [how he first reacted to the news of including those three players from the Seattle organization](#) :

Aumont is a good relief prospect. He could be in the majors this year, and he's got all-star closer upside. Gillies is a potential high OBP center fielder with speed. Ramirez has the best

arm in the system. They're all prospects. And the whole lot of them aren't worth three months of Cliff Lee, much less an entire season.

--snip--

The Mariners are getting a Cy Young caliber pitcher for some decent-but-not-great prospects. They aren't giving up Morrow. They aren't giving up Saunders. They aren't even giving up Triunfel. And yet, they walk away with one of the five or six best pitchers in baseball.

Before exploring that further, let's just say that [the logic for all three teams in the deal makes a lot of sense](#) as this all played out because the Phillies approached CP Lee about an extension and, seeing that he had no interest in doing one, moved back onto Halladay with the idea that they could reach a contract extension with Halladay, which they now have. However, since the aspect of this whole deal of interest to Tribe fans is that Lee has now been dealt a second time in the last five months, let's examine that portion of the trade in terms of what it took to get him to the Emerald City. In essence, the Mariners got Lee and, using the idea that they're that "lucky team" that Rosenthal referenced in [his piece on Sunday](#) (when he absolutely nailed this exact scenario, if not the particulars/prospects), what did they give up?

Using Dave Cameron's words here, that would be "a good relief prospect with all-star closer upside" in Aumont, a "potential high OBP center fielder with speed" in Gillies and a RHP who entered the season as the M's #5 prospect who is a 21-year-old who just completed a season in High-A ball and was added to the 40-man roster this off-season in Ramirez. To provide some perspective as to how far off these prospects are from legitimately contributing, that would be [a 20-year-old "potential closer" who has yet to throw a pitch above A-ball](#) , [a 21-year-old toolsy outfielder who has yet to see a pitch above A-ball](#) , and [a 21-year-old with a MiLB career K/9 rate of 7.9](#) (Dave Huff's MiLB career K rate is 8.1) who has yet to throw a pitch above A-ball for one season of CP Lee at the top of their rotation.

Maybe Aumont gets fast-tracked to help out a Philadelphia bullpen in need of it (despite the fact that he's never even been exposed to AA hitters), but that's 3 players who have never played above A-ball (or the Kinston equivalent in the Indians' farm system) for one year of Lee. You could say that the prospects that all traded hands included the likes of Kyle Drabek and Mike Taylor, but those three players are what the M's gave up to get one year of Cliff Lee.

Remember how Shapiro was panned for not getting enough for 1 1/2 seasons of Lee at an affordable salary and even questioned for not approaching Lee about an extension past the 2010 season? It would seem that the worm has turned (to some extent) as the Phillies couldn't convince Lee to talk extension (those tightwads!) and now have those three youngsters to show for Lee in terms of prospects.

Compare that Seattle threesome to just the pitchers that the Indians netted for Lee - a

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21-year-old Carlos Carrasco (Carrasco doesn't turn 22 until next March) who has already thrown 193 1/3 innings at AAA (with a cumulative 1.26 WHIP and a 8.0 K/9 rate at AAA) and a 19-year-old Jayson Knapp who figures in at the A-level this year with a K/9 rate of 11.3 (albeit in a limited amount of innings). Carrasco figures into the 2011 season at the very latest and the other two players (Donald and Marson) acquired in the deal from the Phillies are guys who figure onto the Indians' 25-man roster (and probably their starting lineup this year). Suddenly, the Lee deal to Philly doesn't feel as deflating as it previously did, particularly when you consider how young and advanced Carrasco is compared to those two arms departing Seattle.

Will the Lee deal eventually be looked upon as a success or a failure from a Cleveland standpoint?

Regardless of how quickly everyone wants to make a snap judgment on it, the deal is still only 5 months old (and 2 of those months did not involve baseball being played) and still needs some time for these players to reveal themselves more fully for a sufficient analysis to be done. That being said, the comparable package of what a team had to give up for one season of Lee is now out there and it's entirely possible that the comparable package of what a team would have to give up for 1/2 of a season with Lee could be coming in July if things go completely off the rails for the Mariners to start out 2010.

As for the other factor in the whole equation, Lee presumably now goes to Seattle to chase another Cy Young (in a giant ballpark) and waits for his chance to join his big buddy in the Bronx after the year, when Andy Pettitte's contract comes off of the books (again) to get his 4 to 5 year deal worth \$18M to \$20M annually and sit behind CC and Burnett in the Yankees' rotation.



The other news to come out this week happens to center on CP Lee's old battery-mate as [Anthony Castrovine has reported that the PTBNL in the Kelly Shoppach deal has been narrowed down to two options, Mitch Talbot and Joseph Cruz](#)

. The Indians, who have until December 20th to choose between the two, should have no trouble deciding between the two and the fact that they're waiting to make the selection is about the only confusing aspect of the deal.

The reason that the decision should be easy becomes clear once you realize that Mitch Talbot is 26 year-old RH changeup artist who has struggled to make the transition to MLB after spending TWO FULL years in AAA in 2007 and 2008 with a career AAA resume that includes a 4.23 ERA, a 1.36 WHIP, and a 2.82 K/BB over 67 starts in AAA. Sound like anything already in the Tribe organization that needs to get filtered through this year?

Not to be overly dismissive here, but to use a line from "The Bizarro Jerry" episode,

"we already have a 'George'".

Adding Talbot to the mix of arms, with only Jeremy Sowers older than him (by a whopping 5 months), after he's now spent a good amount of time at AAA without doing anything special simply doesn't make sense. Throw in the fact that Talbot is out of options, meaning we'd have to carry him out of Spring Training and for the whole season in a season where the arms figure to be moving back and forth from Cleveland to Columbus pretty frequently, and his inclusion on this list mystifies even further.

What would make sense would be to add the other name purported to be on the list, which is Joseph Cruz, a 21 year old prospect who averages more than a K an inning and sports a career K/BB rate of 4.05. If you've been following the Indians' acquisitions over the last 6 months, you realize that the Indians are stacking up these high-ceiling, high K-rate arms with the idea that the sheer quantity of talent will offset the attrition rate that proved to be the undoing of the first idea that arms would simply emerge from the Minors to fill holes on the parent club seamlessly and effectively.

Would Cruz project as a starter or as a reliever?

At this point, it wouldn't really matter as he'd simply join this growing army of hard-throwing pitchers with the idea that if about ¼ of them ever make a resounding impact that the net result is better than the mediocrity that seems to be the alternative.

For what it's worth, [RaysProspects.com lists Cruz as the Rays's 24th best prospect and Talbot as the Rays's 25th best prospect](#), which is certainly not all that compelling despite the knowledge that the Rays' farm system is obviously stacked. While that ranking system may or may not be relevant, the fact that the Indians seem to be looking at a lower-tier prospect is disappointing only because activity on the open market has dictated that there were a number of teams looking for a catcher. On the FA market alone we've seen dreadful signings like Jason Kendall to KC and Pudge to Washington, as well as fair-to-middling signings of Gregg Zaun to Milwaukee, Brian Schneider to Philadelphia and John Buck and Miguel Castro to Toronto. That's 4 teams that looked to be in the market for a catcher (with other teams like the Mets still looking) and, while Kelly Shoppach's value may never truly be known, the fact that the likes of KC, WAS, and PHI were willing to commit 2-year deals for what would seem to be lesser talents certainly lends credence to the idea that the Indians should have been able to extract more than Talbot or Cruz from Tampa...and it should be Cruz.



Finally, just as a little parting shot for the argument that the Indians should the Indians be spending money to fill holes and to make themselves more competitive for the 2010 season in which they figure to be rebuilding/reloading/whatever, [here's a brilliant sentence from Joe](#)

[Sheehan at Baseball Prospectus](#) :

The key mistake that continues to be made-and we've seen it with Kendall and the Royals, Ivan Rodriguez and the Nationals, Brandon Lyon and the Astros-is money wasted in dlibs and drabs on players who are fungible by teams that have no reason to chase wins.

The Indians made their mistakes spending "dlibs and drabs on players who are fungible" (Dellichaels, anyone?) and the fact that they're NOT making the same mistake represents some sort of lesson learned and some sort of shift in organizational thinking, doesn't it?

It may not be much, but in a system in which 6 to 7 teams make the majority of the off-season moves and the rest of the teams sit on the sidelines and use "hope" as a strategy, I'd prefer the idea that the Indians are positioning themselves for making a run when they're ready to make a run and not just "chasing wins";.