

With Andy Marte waiting in the wings to play third base, and brutal defense from Jhonny Peralta having more and more people speculate he may be moved to second base, Indians fans seem to think it's a given that Ronnie Belliard will not be back with the Tribe next season. And that, says Jarad Regano, would be a mistake.



Belliard Signing Should Be A Top Priority For The Tribe

I say it was Mark Shapiro's fault. You say it's Eric Wedge's fault. Tom-AY-to, Tom-AH-to. No matter who gets the blame on giving away cheap talent, the arbitration ineligible .300 hitting Brandon Phillips is out of our system. And into our system is a giant question mark at second base for the foreseeable future.

No matter how "happy" the front office tells us they are for Brandon Phillips' success, executives must be fuming. The mouth watering thought of having a solid player for below market value for years to come is the foundation of baseball in the Larry Dolan era.

As far as **production** though, the Indians are not in bad shape. Ronnie Belliard, now in his third season as our stop gap two bagger, has been a model of consistency. Belliard has hit .282, .284 and a current .293 in his three year stint, all while earning his keep defensively. He has been a doubles machine during his tenure here, and he will hit for adequate power in a position that Mark Shapiro likes offense from.

So what is with all the “Ronnie’s Gone” talk? The first step towards a competitive 2007 should be signing Belliard to his first multi-year deal as a Cleveland Indian. Not only could you fill a void for the next two to three years with a ridiculously consistent player, you can put to rest many of the Brandon Phillips issues. Hell, this would tell the fan base you simply prefer Belliard to Phillips!

While Ronnie will not come cheap, he certainly will fit the Dolan profile. Not too much money. Not too many years. A two-year deal may even get it done. Shelling out \$10-13 million over two years would be worth it, both on the field and for public relations.

Going the alternate route could blow up in management’s face. Letting Belliard test the market, then making offers that do not pan out to the Julio Lugo’s of the world could be a realistic turn of events next offseason. Mark Shapiro should know that he is one bad December from having Adam Kennedy as his everyday second baseman. Ughhhh.

The Indians usually will not be in a position to buy their way out of their mistakes. This time, however, they can.