

Plowing Through a Lazy Sunday

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}

Sunday, February 07 2010 12:00 AM - Last Updated Wednesday, February 17 2010 9:07 PM

With winter imposing its snowy will on the North Coast over the weekend and after a Saturday full of shoveling, followed by moving my sister into her new house, finished up with more shoveling, let's get going on a Lazy Sunday before my knees and back give out on me and so I can clear a spot on the couch (next to some Dortmunders) to catch up on as-yet-unwatched episodes of the brilliant "Modern Family" as well as "Band of Brothers" (being re-cast on HBO and in turn, being re-watched by me), if only to avoid the 14 or so hours of Super Bowl coverage offered today prior to the actual game.

And with that and with the Motrin kicking in...we're off:

Another slow news week in terms of Indians' coverage and (while that's not necessarily a bad thing, despite everyone focusing on [who the Indians could still add from the FA scrap heap](#)) the biggest "story" of the week was Grady Sizemore addressing reporters for the first time to discuss the "coffee cup" incident that occurred earlier in the off-season. While the actual story of "The Self-Portrait of the Outfielder as a Young Man" doesn't really interest me all that much, I was astounded at the way that the same press conference of Grady talking to reporters was covered by the local media outlets.

It was fascinating in that the tone of the pieces differed drastically once it was past the discussion of the "Earl Grey-dy" pictures as all of the outlets touched on Sizemore's injury and how he finds himself as the elder statesman on a young team, but the avenue that they took to broach the subject was more than a little telling in terms of media coverage of the Indians these days.

For the way that you would think that the "story" would be covered, the always solid Stephanie Storm of the ABJ (and this is the first time the ABJ makes it's appearance on a Lazy One in over a year after the moratorium on Shelly Ocker's work) [takes a pretty standard angle on Sizemore in terms of his 2009 season and what 2010 looks like for him](#)

as does

[Anthony Castrovince](#)

(unsurprisingly) and you can read both pieces via the links if you are interested to see how a news story is generally approached and how both hit on all the high points while also bringing the context of Grady's 2009 and 2010 into the mix.

Pretty standard stuff in both articles, after dispensing with the pleasantries (or lack thereof) associated with talking to a man about naked pictures of him surfacing on the interwebs...Grady was hurt and it affected his performance and he now finds himself on a very young team, on which he may be asked to assume more of a leadership position.

We know the story, and there was not really any other way to cover the press conference, is there?

Well...check out the opening sentence from [Paul Hoynes' piece on the topic](#) from Friday's paper:

It's good to know Grady Sizemore hasn't been traded.

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No...seriously, and it rolled right on from there:

The Indians have Sizemore, 27, under contract through 2011 with a club option for 2012. □

"I hope there is a long-term future for me here," he said. "I've always enjoyed being an Indian. I'd love to spend my career here and be a part of this organization for as long as I could." □

CC Sabathia, Cliff Lee, Victor Martinez, Casey Blake, Ryan Garko, Rafael Betancourt, Carl Pavano, Paul Byrd, Edward Mujica, Kelly Shoppach, Mark DeRosa and Ben Francisco probably all felt the same at one time. Over the past two years, they were traded in an on-going fire sale that has reduced the roster to a few veterans and a lot of youngsters. □

"I definitely feel like I've been left behind," Sizemore said. "Some of the close friends that you had, that you formed relationships with as friends and teammates, have all been traded and moved on. □

"I definitely think this is a good chance to start over with a new group of guys. I really like the young guys we've got and the veterans that we have. I'm looking forward to starting something new this year."

Let me just clarify here that there is something valid about Grady being "left behind" and about how the team is unquestionably starting over, but don't let your eyes deceive you - the names of Edward Mujica, Ryan Garko (who just got a \$500K deal from the Mariners...which is about \$100K more than the MLB minimum to show you how Garko is regarded around the league), Carl Pavano, Paul Byrd, and Ben Francisco were just included in a sentence bemoaning players who have been traded in an attempt to put the roster turnover of the past few years into context.

The title of that article by the way in the print edition that arrived on my doorstep on Friday morning was "Sizemore apologizes, says pictures on Web were meant to be private" and while I realize that writers have virtually no control over the headline, how about the train of thought for this piece - Grady apologizes for pictures (even if he really didn't), he's coming off of an injury, and (here's the jump into the irrational) he's going to eventually get traded because that's what the Indians do.

Simple as that, the flames are fanned.

Not to be out-done, or allow any amount of research to get in the way of covering the story, Jim Ingraham tops the Hoynes' piece in spades however in [a story so absurd and so patently false](#) that probably should have stirred up some sort of commotion in terms of basing an entire column on a false assumption.

To wit, Ingraham presents his "facts" and opinion thusly:

Despite coming off an injury-plagued 2009 season that resulted in career lows in most offensive categories and not one but two season-ending surgeries (elbow, groin), Sizemore is 27 and

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moving into what should be the prime years of his career.

Put those two factors together, and it means that the clock has already started ticking down toward Sizemore's final game as a member of the Indians. He says he hasn't thought about any potential exit strategy from Cleveland, but he doesn't have to.

That's General Manager Mark Shapiro's job.

These are the facts.

Given their tattered pitching staff, and lack of financial resources to improve it, the Indians, who lost 97 games last year, with a Cy Young Award winner on the team for half the season, may struggle to avoid losing 100 this year.

*Sizemore's contract expires after the 2011 season. He will make \$5.6 million this year and \$7.5 million next year. **There is an option for 2012 for \$10.5 million, which Sizemore can decline and thereby declare his free agency.***

In other words, the Indians have control of Sizemore for just this year and next year. That's the exact same scenario that applied to Lee a year ago at this time. And five months later, the Indians traded Lee to Philadelphia.

The Indians may be facing the same scenario with Sizemore this year. Clearly, Sizemore is going to become a free agent before the Indians get good again.

The Indians, like most teams, almost never are able to re-sign their players once they become free agents, or are within a year of free agency.

The highlighting was done by me as the bolded assertion that serves as the keystone of Jim Ingraham's outrageous argument that the Indians are at the same point with Sizemore as they were with Lee and Martinez were before this season is simply not true. After checking into the matter further on Friday (something Ingraham must not have done), I was informed (after about a 5-minute delay) that his 2012 option is a CLUB OPTION and becomes a player option only if Sizemore is traded prior to the 2012 season.

So, the idea that this is the "exact same scenario that applied to Lee a year ago at this time" is incorrect in a couple of ways:

- 1) The 2012 option is a club option if he is still a member of the Indians
- 2) That 2012 option becomes a player option if he is traded (one that would most certainly be declined given the low number), meaning that if the Indians traded him even next season, the acquiring team would get Grady only for the remainder of the 2011 season as his 2012 option would become his to decline.

Thus, this article by Ingraham comes about two years too early as the Indians wouldn't entertain trading Sizemore even in the 2011 season for the reasons listed above and the idea would be

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that the Indians would be closer to competing going into the 2012 season...much more so than today.

Don't get me wrong, I'm preparing myself and the now-3-year-old DiaperTribe (who sleeps under the security of a Grady blanket every night and only responds to being called "Grady" when we're playing catch) for the very real possibility that Grady doesn't end the 2012 season as a Cleveland Indian...but introducing the topic a solid two years early is nothing short of irresponsible.

Looking forward, going into the 2013 season (the one where he would be a Free Agent), Grady will be 30 going on 31 after the Indians will have paid him less than \$25M for his age 27, 28, and 29 seasons. If the Indians find themselves in a situation in the 2012 season that comes anywhere close to resembling this off-season, what's going on with Grady isn't going to be the only topic of discussion as it's likely that we'll all be talking about the Indians' new General Manager as well.

You're tired of hearing it and I'm tired of harping on it, but if you don't see the agendas at hand for particular "beat writers" that cover the Cleveland Indians and continue to go to those old wells for your news on the Indians, it's no longer on me...that's on you.

If this piece by Ingraham were written by a "some guy sitting in his parents' basement in his pajamas" and not a newspaper writer, the newspapers would jump all over it as inaccurate and incendiary and the reason that access to sports teams by beat reporters is not only important but necessary. While I don't disagree with the idea that access to sports teams by beat reporters is necessary, this particular article was written by an ill-informed rabble-rouser who should have the wherewithal (and contacts) to take the 5 minutes to check to see if the information upon which he based his whole story was true or not. Instead of being dismissed as the rubbish that it is, it will be chalked up as an "oversight" or a "misunderstanding based on ambiguous contract language" instead of for what it really is - a mainstream "journalist" not letting facts get in the way of his obviously slanted perspective (perhaps designed to sell papers by stirring up controversy) and allowing his agenda to be laid bare for all to see.

Reading this kind of drivel from the newspapers this off-season, is anyone else reminded of the old ["Talk Back"](#) sketches on "Saturday Night Live" with Buck Henry playing a hapless show host who introduces the most absurdly provocative topics in an attempt to generate some sort of response with only silent telephones in front of him?

How 'bout this? ☐

"Killing Puppies -- It Doesn't Bother Me"... That's me, Frank Noland, and I LIKE dead puppies!

How is this different from what's been put out in the newspapers this offseason?

Alas, what's frustrating about most of the newspapers' coverage this winter is that this off-season has represented a perfect opportunity to look back at what went wrong and to look forward to imagine what's coming for the organization.

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To that end, I received a brilliant e-mail from reader Joel Shapira (known to some as chitowntribephan), who rejects the notion that the Indians simply don't have any money to spend on the FA market. He doesn't make the assertion that the Indians aren't as financially squeezed as they say to hammer away at the absurd idea that the Indians need to be spending money foolishly in an off-season prior to a "transitional year", but only in an attempt to shed some light on all of these reports that the Indians haven't been active on the Free Agent market because they just don't have any money.

In support of his assertion, he examined the spending of the Indians and the attendance figures for the Indians in the context of what teams similarly sized markets (Tampa Bay, Oakland and Milwaukee), close to Cleveland in geographical proximity (Cincinnati, Toronto, Pittsburgh and Detroit), as well as including the other divisional rivals (Minnesota and Kansas City) in the exercise.

The results, which can be seen [here on a Google Spreadsheet](#) support Joel's idea in that the Indians' attendance over the last three years has been greater than Cincinnati and their payrolls have been generally on par with each other over those three years. Yet the Reds (just to use an example which works because of the similarities in attendance, geography, and market size) are projected to have a payroll about \$8M higher than the Indians' 2010 payroll.

Again, the exercise was meant to debunk the idea that the coffers are completely empty and that the Indians aren't spending money because they don't have it. It's easy to see that they probably do have some money in reserve (and [Ken Rosenthal's tweet](#) that the Indians were actually the high bidder on Orlando Hudson for 2-years, \$10M with a lot of the money backloaded would support that idea), it's just that they don't feel the need to spend it on players that aren't going to be contributors in 2011 or 2012 just so they can win an extra 3-4 games this year.

No question that the financial situation is deeper and possessing more layers than just looking at attendance, market size, and geographical location, but I'm with Joel in that I don't blindly accept the idea that the Indians don't have money to spend and are likely using as a crutch to deflect noise from agents or just because they don't see the value in throwing around the type of contracts that this team doesn't need. It is important to remember that the Dolans reportedly told the Front Office that they could keep Lee and Martinez for the 2010 season, but couldn't make any more additions this off-season.

We all know that the FO decided to punt on 2010 by trading the two of them and while the idea that the Indians were willing to swim in the deep financial waters of red ink to make another run at it in 2010 is a noble assertion, the truth is probably closer to the notion that the total that Victor and Lee would've earned in 2010 (\$16M in club options) was too much to spend on the payroll (add that \$16M to the \$62 in projected salaries from Joel's spreadsheet and see how it compares against the other organizations' payrolls) of a team that wasn't able to contend with Lee and Martinez contributing and the rebuild/reload/whatever started in earnest when looking at the larger number.

That being said, I think that the team will still spend some money this off-season, but it won't be

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on the FA market as I can easily see them attempting to reach deals with both Cabrera and Choo during Spring Training or just after, which could be where this money (that they "don't have") is being reserved for. If that's the case and money is being "saved" to extend Asdrubal and The BLC, anyone have a problem with that strategy?

Going back to [Joel's spreadsheet](#) , I thought it was interesting to see the build-up of the team's salary from 2004 to last year (an increase from \$34M in 2004 to \$81M last year), in that the team increased their spending as their "window" of possible contention opened with a 24% increase in payroll after the 2005 season and a 22% increase in payroll after the 2007 season. After the team showed the most promise (the near-breakthrough in 2005 and the ALCS in 2007), the payroll jumped accordingly as the Indians increased spending in an attempt to lengthen their stay at or near the top of the AL Central.

What else is interesting about Joel's spreadsheet?

How about the fact that the year after the 2005 push for the playoffs (and yes, the Indians did come up short), the payroll increased by 24% but the attendance FELL from 2005 to 2006. Yes, it was a nominal drop (2,013,763 in 2005 to 1,997,995 in 2006) that was less than a 1% percent drop, but if the Indians "spent when the time was right", where were the fans who claimed that they would return when the team would start winning again. Even more glaring is the fact that, after the 2007 season the Indians payroll jumped 22% after their ALCS run for the 2008 season. Guess what the attendance number did in 2008? It dropped again (2,275,916 in 2007 to 2,169,760 in 2008) and while the drop again was small (almost 5%), remember that was the year following 2007, when the team was one game away from going to the World Series. Again, the payroll increased when the Indians saw contention as a possibility while the attendance didn't just remain flat...it fell.

Take all of that for what you will, but now that we're back to square 1 in Rebuild v2.0 and the payroll is going to drop accordingly again. The interesting development to watch in light of this exercise is to see what happens in Tampa (who, like Cleveland didn't get the attendance bump after their contention) or what happens in Milwaukee (who are living in the "Land of 455" these days) if the next couple of years for the Rays and Brewers go like 2008 and 2009 did for the Indians. That is, the Brewers and Rays are current poster children for all that is right in mid-market baseball, but their ability to win consistently AND continue to draw out fans to supplement the payroll will determine whether they can avoid the fate that befell the Tribe.

What 2010 holds for attendance and what it means for payroll in 2011 (when Westbrook, Wood, and likely Peralta) will no longer be in the books is a topic for another day, but it's a lot to ponder (thanks to Joel Shapira's diligence on the spreadsheet) on a day when most eyes will be focused on the game Miami...or at least the commercials.

Regardless of what happens in Miami today, the sun in South Florida serves as a nice segue to remind you that the equipment truck leaves tomorrow morning for Goodyear...which can only mean one thing - despite the snow coming down in waves from the sky on the North Coast, Spring Training and the eternal optimism that accompanies it are not far away.

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On a cold February morning, that should be enough to warm your bones...