

Tampa's Trash is Tribe's Treasure

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

Saturday, July 17 2010 11:53 AM - Last Updated Saturday, July 17 2010 12:03 PM



It happens all the time in baseball: the second chance.

The Indians have been known to not only give many players a second chance, but also third and fourth chances as well. The Tribe has also seen some of their own go on to get a second chance and achieve a good deal of success, which in turn causes a great deal of anguish among fans.

Every team gets burned by players going elsewhere and every once and awhile every team finds someone that can play but no one else wanted. If you want to measure something, measure the rate of chances a team takes on these types of players and how many success stories they can tell.

Deep down, Mark Shapiro must be a caring individual, because he certainly has no problem taking on some of these cases.

Shapiro's latest case, at least up until a few weeks ago with Jayson Nix, has been Mitch Talbot. But he's seen many of his own go on to be other general manager's cases and in a lot of cases, be successful.

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Can you really blame him and the Indians for a situation like say, Ryan Ludwick? A player who even went on to other places after Cleveland and still couldn't break through until he landed with St. Louis in the National League? Maybe a little bit, but if a team gives a player plenty of chances, you can't hold them accountable if the player goes somewhere else and finds success.

That's probably why you can look at a situation like Jeremy Guthrie and shake your head. Guthrie clearly wasn't handled the correct way and it shouldn't have surprised anyone when he latched on with Baltimore and found some success.

Now is he producing like the first round pick that he is? In a lot of other rotations, he would probably be the third, maybe fourth best pitcher on the staff and would be looked upon to produce as much. In Baltimore, they almost expect more because of the talent around him.

Guthrie pitched in 16 total games for Cleveland, and started just one game over a span of three seasons. Guthrie was drafted in 2002 and wasn't wildly successful during his time in the minor leagues, but he showed enough throughout three years to at least be worth more than one start at the major league level.

Coming off a successful 2005 in which they contended for a division crown, the Indians probably felt they could push the envelope in 2006 and perhaps contend again. It gave them ideas to sign a veteran such as Jason Johnson rather than give a youngster like Guthrie an opportunity to win a rotation job.

That of course led to him spending 2006 in Buffalo and eventually being released prior to 2007 due to the fact that they really had no other options. In essence they made Jeremy Guthrie's bed and they're the ones that had to sleep in it with him. It wasn't a great situation for Guthrie, having to try and establish himself with a new club but it was a far better situation than the one he had with Cleveland.

Sometimes that's all the player really needs, a new situation.

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Tampa Bay didn't mishandle Mitch Talbot quite like the Indians did Jeremy Guthrie; their situation was more of an embarrassment of riches. In a way, Talbot's situation was similar to Guthrie's, as Talbot really was going to get squeezed from the rotation and the club couldn't really do anything with him in terms of sending him to the minor leagues.

But the reason Talbot wasn't going to be given an opportunity in Tampa's 2010 rotation was simple: David Price, James Shields, Wade Davis, Matt Garza, and Jeff Niemann. We are talking about a team that had traded Scott Kazmir already, moved Andy Sonnanstine into the bullpen, and has those five pitchers lined up day-after-day.

I could see why they had no need for someone named Mitch Talbot.

A pitcher coming off an elbow injury that limited him to 15 games pitched between Durham and two of the lower levels of the minor leagues? Unappealing compared to four guys with major league experience and another with high-upside, much more than Talbot.

Not to mention, Mitch's best pitch is a changeup and nothing can be more unappealing than a changeup.

Talbot had a Guthrie-like history in the minor leagues as well. His numbers were not eye-popping and he wasn't exactly breaking down the door to get into the major leagues. He repeated Triple-A two times, even after his 2008 was a big improvement from his 2007 in Durham.

Talbot lowered his ERA from 4.53 to 3.69 between those two years in the same amount of innings pitched. He also had the same exact record, 13-9, but he showed better control by cutting down on his walks and upping the strikeout total.

Talbot didn't get a shot in 2009 (his lone MLB-experience prior to Cleveland came at the end of 2008, just three games) so it shouldn't have shocked anyone that Tampa wasn't going to give him one in 2010 after a lost season. So the club shipped him to Cleveland in exchange for getting catcher Kelly Shoppach.

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The clubs essentially traded players that were far more useful to each other. The Indians had no use for Kelly Shoppach (and looking back now, can anyone realistically attack the Indians for trading Shoppach with Smooth Swingin' Santana up and looking good?) and the Rays definitely had no use for Talbot. The Indians were attempting to add any and every arm they could to plug into the rotation and the Rays needed to pair someone with Dioner Navarro behind the dish.

And as they say, the rest at least up until this point, is history.

Where Talbot goes from here is all up to him. Clearly though he's not only become his own redemption story, but Mark Shapiro's as well. He's broken through and into the Tribe's rotation in more than just a "tryout" fashion. Talbot seems to be here to stay for an extended period and manager Manny Acta has declared as much by making Talbot his third starter coming out of the All-Star break.

An 8-8 record with a 3.99 ERA isn't exactly something a championship team looks for in a third starter, but this is the last place Cleveland Indians and right now, that's good enough. If you translate the success Talbot has into a fourth or fifth option over the long haul, then you have something there.

Consistent pitching is hard to find, especially at the back end of the rotation. Ideally this organization would love to have at least three guys ahead of Talbot that are producing better results. Obviously though, you can't fill out the back of a rotation until you fill out the front.

So for now, Talbot will have to provide his consistency in the middle of the rotation. Doubting him would be foolish as his track record of proving the naysayers wrong has been pretty impressive.

Most thought Spring Training was a fluke and that come the regular season, Talbot would face the reality of consistent major league hitting. Most thought that the first few starts was the result of beginners luck and that adjustments would be made by the hitters.

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And now most think that come the second half, Talbot will simply run out of gas.

No one thought the Indians would squeeze anywhere near 12 to 14 wins out of Mitch Talbot, yet that's just what they're likely to do. Baltimore hasn't seen more than 10 out of Jeremy Guthrie.

Shapiro may have screwed up with Guthrie, but he's found a little redemption in Talbot. And Mitch has found a home in Cleveland's rotation.