

Quick Thoughts About The Deadline Deals

Written by {ga=consigliere}

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The Indians ended up being a lot busier than many expected them to be at the trade deadline yesterday as they finished off the veteran purge of 2010 by trading right-handed pitcher Jake Westbrook to the St. Louis Cardinals and right-handed reliever Kerry Wood to the New York Yankees.

With the trade of Westbrook and Wood yesterday, along with outfielder Austin Kearns being shipped out on Friday, infielder Jhonny Peralta on Tuesday, and first baseman Russell Branyan about five weeks ago, it is now full speed ahead with the youth movement as after designated hitter Travis Hafner the next oldest player on the Indians roster as far as service time goes is right-handed starting pitcher Fausto Carmona, and only three players on the 40-man roster have guaranteed contracts: Hafner, Carmona and Sizemore.

Here are some quick thoughts on the two trades from yesterday as well as the Kearns trade from Friday:

- First off, it should be no surprise that any of these guys were dealt. All three were free agents at the end of the year, and all three were not coming back. The only real player here that will be missed is Westbrook as he obviously has much deeper ties to the organization and fans and is

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also still a pretty good starting pitcher when healthy. The Indians are happy to move on from Wood, and Kearns was just a stop gap anyway and replaceable. While it is unfortunate that the Indians have to keep clearing the decks like this, this hardly compares to the fire sales of recent seasons.

- Speaking of clearing the decks, the Indians have pretty much gutted the roster to where we should no longer see anymore veteran-for-prospect deals for awhile. The youth movement is now officially in effect, and the roster will not start to stabilize over the next year or so. There is still a lot of uncertainty with many of the positions on this team in the near and long term future, but names will start to become more familiar going forward as this team gets a chance to gel and sort itself out with who the core guys are for the next half decade or so.

- In the case of Westbrook, the Indians did not need to trade him to save money. They wanted to keep him and would have loved to bring him back next year if they could make it work. Even though he has been traded he could still come back next year as it doesn't affect in any way his potential re-signing with the Indians in the offseason. But let's be realistic. It was a long shot before the trade, and is still the same long shot after it that the Indians can resign Westbrook. No matter how much he says he would like to come back, the bottom line is the Indians very likely will not be in the market this offseason to dole out many (if any) multi-year contracts. They will instead probably be looking to add veterans on one year deals, similar to what they did with Kevin Millwood in 2005. Considering the way Westbrook has pitched this season, if he just finishes healthy and does a solid job he could be in for at least a two or three year deal from someone this offseason which will likely not fit into the Indians plans this offseason.

- Considering the rotation is a huge question mark the rest of the season and the options to start are arguably limited, this was one of the reasons the Indians were reluctant to make any Westbrook trade. In addition to that he is an excellent role model for all the young pitchers on the staff. The Indians had been talking to the St. Louis Cardinals for some time, but the Cardinals did not have the upper level starting pitching prospect that the Indians craved and the Cardinals were reluctant to take on so much of his contract, which is why a deal never got done earlier. It was clear St. Louis wanted Westbrook, and eventually they found a trading partner in San Diego where they could use them to give the Indians the pitching prospect they needed and also shed some payroll (Ryan Ludwick) so they could absorb enough of Westbrook's contract that would be to the Indians liking.

- It is amazing how quickly things have changed in a week as far as the starting rotation goes. In less than a week, left-hander Aaron Laffey and right-hander Mitch Talbot went on the disabled list and then Westbrook was traded. Three-fifths of the rotation, 60%, wiped out in a

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week. The Indians probably never envisioned having to fill three spots in such a short period of time, but for now right-handed starters Josh Tomlin and Jeanmar Gomez look to be a part of the rotation for at least the immediate future. They will need another starter on Tuesday and it will probably be one of left-hander David Huff or right-hander Carlos Carrasco. Since Carrasco has been hampered by a right forearm injury and had his start skipped over the weekend, Huff looks like the favorite to get that start at the moment. But as with anything these days, these things are fluid and can change at any moment.

- The exact savings in the Westbrook deal are unknown, but from what I understand the Indians sent both the Padres and Cardinals some money in order to help balance out the salaries of the two veterans traded in the deal. The Indians essentially are picking up Westbrook's negotiated down trade escalators and in turn the Cardinals are paying most of (if not all) of Westbrook's base salary the rest of the season (about \$3.9M).

- In the case of Wood, the trade was done to dump as much of what was remaining on his contract as the Indians could, but it was also to create a roster opening for other young players they want to get a look at in the bullpen. His exit will allow right-handed reliever Chris Perez a shot to take over closing duties full time as well as get a look at several other relievers in various roles in the bullpen. Also, a young bullpen arm like Josh Judy or Vinnie Pestano may now get a look.

- In the Wood trade, the Yankees sent \$1.5M in cash to the Indians to cover some of the approximate \$3.7M left on his salary. That amount can increase up to another \$500K if Wood stays healthy the rest of the year, so the Yankees could end up sending back up to \$2.0M total in cash to the Indians. The Indians have until October 15th to accept the additional cash or a player to be named later.

- As for Kearns, he was not a salary dump as the cash savings on his salary are minimal (a couple \$100K at most) since he was a near Major League minimum veteran salary guy at \$750K this year. Since they were not motivated to dump him for salary reasons, they were more inclined to get a prospect in the deal rather than cash and they feel the player to be named later in the trade will have a chance to be a part of the big league team in the future. Their decision to take the player or cash must be made on or before August 20th. Just who the short list of players they have to choose from at this time is unknown, but it looks like the Indians will surely settle for the player rather than the cash.

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- In the Kearns trade the Yankees pick up the rest of his small salary, so the savings are minimal especially after you consider that the Indians have to call up a minimum salary player to fill his spot on the roster. At most, the Indians probably saved \$100K by trading Kearns. The trade allows more at bats and focus to be placed on some of the young outfielders such as Michael Brantley, Jordan Brown, and maybe even Nick Weglarz in September.

- As far as payroll savings go in these deals, the Indians paid all of Peralta's remaining contract this year except the pro-rated portion of the major league minimum. Since the Indians had to call up a minimum salary player to replace Peralta, the net result is no savings in the trade other than the \$250K they are no longer on the hook for next year had they declined Peralta's club option. Considering the approximate savings from the other deals with Kearns (\$100K), Wood (\$1.5M), and Westbrook (\$3.9M), when you take out the money that will now have to go to the minimum salary guys to replace them all the Indians saved about \$3-5M in the deals (depending on how much cash the Indians sent to the Padres/Cardinals). What the Indians will do with that money is unknown, but they made it a point to publicly say that they did not need to make these trades for payroll reasons.

- One thing the saved money can help with is the signing of some of their [2010 Draft picks that are still unsigned](#)

The Indians have always intended to sign several of their high profile picks close to the August 16th trade deadline, but it is very possible that the payroll savings could be pumped right into the 2010 Draft signing budget or International signing budget. We saw this exact thing happen in 2008 when the Indians traded Paul Byrd to the Red Sox in August that year literally days before the signing deadline, and then they went out and signed the likes of T.J. House, Zach Putnam, Bryce Stowell, and a few others just before the deadline. My understanding in talking to people is the Indians indeed did use some (if not all) of the money saved in the Byrd trade to sign some otherwise unsignable picks.

- As for the players received in the trades, they are mostly an unknown because in both the Wood and Kearns trade it was for the infamous "player to be named later". As mentioned above, the Indians will likely opt for the additional cash in the Wood trade as the two prospects the Indians have to choose from are supposedly of mid-level variety. The Kearns trade on the other hand supposedly offers up a better listing of players to choose from which the Indians will scout over the next three weeks before making a final decision on who to select.

- The identity of the one player the Indians got that we do know about is that of right-handed pitcher Corey Kluber who is coming over from San Diego's system. Kluber has had a breakout

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season, and one that had put him at the top (or near it) of the pitchers in the Padres system. He turned 24-years old right at the start of the season, and to date was 6-6 with a 3.45 ERA and in 122.1 innings had allowed 121 hits, 40 walks, and had 136 strikeouts in 22 games. He currently leads the Texas League in strikeouts (136), strikeouts per 9.0IP (9.98 K/9) and is 2nd in innings pitched (122.2IP). Over his last four starts he is 3-0 with a 1.73 ERA (26.0 IP, 18 H, 5R, 8 BB, 30 K) and was recently named the Player of the Week in the Texas League. From a performance perspective, it has been a breakout year indeed.

- While Kluber has certainly seen a spike in his actual performance, he has also seen a significant jump with the quality of his stuff and his overall standing as a pitcher. His velocity with his fastball has jumped up several MPH this year where he easily pitches at 88-92 MPH but he has been up to 95 MPH, and his slider is a plus offering that is a true swing and miss pitch at the Major League level. His changeup needs some work and will be the key to him staying in the rotation, something the Indians will likely focus on with him the rest of this season, the offseason and early next year. He is around the plate with all three of his pitches and works well down in the zone. He has a good feel for pitching, is very durable, and is a bulldog on the mound. He also is a very smart pitcher who combined with an excellent work ethic and very good makeup helps him get the most out of his abilities.

- Once considered just middle relief depth and maybe a swing starter, Kluber is now considered a legit innings eating workhorse who probably settles in at the back of a big league rotation but has some the ceiling to be a solid middle of the rotation starter. The Indians feel that he can definitely be a starter and will work him into the starting rotation probably by this time next year, if not sooner. He won't be flashy, but he has the potential to be a solid member of the big league rotation for the next several years. If things go south on the starting front, they can always move him to the bullpen where his stuff may play up in shorter spurts, especially if he cannot improve his changeup.

- Kluber will report to Akron in the coming days. With so many starters in Columbus having to move up to Cleveland recently, his arrival will help what is likely to be a depleted Akron staff after promotions are announced there to fill spots in Columbus (whose roster has been pillaged). It is possible that once Kluber is activated that 2009 first round pick right-hander Alex White is promoted and sent to Columbus. If things go well after a few starts and he settles in at Akron, Kluber is expected to quickly be promoted to Columbus as well. He is up for roster protection at the end of the season (he will be added to the 40-man), so there is an outside chance he is a September callup, though considering his high innings workload already this season he probably will be shutdown when the minor league season ends.

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- In the end, looking at the activity at the trade deadline around the league this year, we saw an unusual amount of cash being sent to cover the contracts of players dealt in just about every trade. This is a big change from previous years where teams were often able to dump contracts at the deadline and still get back good prospects in return. Also, very few highly regarded prospect exchanged hands. All of this makes you wonder if the game is starting to reach a breaking point with the bloated contracts in the game, and the financial disparity between teams. I mean, even the Yankees were not willing to take on salary. So many teams claimed to have no financial flexibility to add on additional payroll, which is quite odd since three to five years ago teams did it so willingly. Is this just more prudent spending by clubs, or is there something else brewing beneath the surface with regard to the true financial health of the league? Time will tell I guess.

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