

Money Talks on A Lazy Sunday

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}
Sunday, November 21 2010 10:44 AM -



An absence of activity.

No, I speak not of the news (or lack thereof) that has originated from the corner of Carnegie and Ontario this off-season; rather, I speak of The Reservation here as my brother and his wife picked up the two boys yesterday to give their sleep-deprived parents a night off from parenting. With nearly 24 hours to ourselves in our own house, let me just say that there are watershed moments in the life of an adult that force a self-realization that may not be unexpected, but may be so forceful that it cannot be avoided. That being said, we used the time to hit Pier W's marvelous Happy Hour, then a dinner at Don's Lighthouse...and were home on the couch by 7:30 PM. And we were thrilled about it. Gone is the idea that we need to burn the midnight oil after being given a "free pass" for a night and sitting in our laps is the fact that we are happier about getting 8 to 10 hours of uninterrupted sleep than we are about hitting any new hot spot.

Thus, it truly is a "Lazy" Sunday around these parts as we have slept in (well, 8 AM...but that is "sleeping in") and as I write this, there is not a 3-year-old bouncing a soft Indians' ball off of my head, begging me to see the video of Andy Marte pitching, which makes him laugh harder than any Pixar offering. However, as refreshing as the peace and tranquility is, it's almost TOO quiet and we're already counting down the hours until we can go down to my brother's house and play with them this afternoon.

It's my life...and I wouldn't have it any other way.

Nevertheless, off of the psychiatrist's couch and into the writer's chair, let's get going on a Lazy Sunday, starting off with some appetizers before getting into the main course – the part of the meal when you're checking the prices on the menu...

On the subject of player acquisition, if you remember the whole ["Roadmap for the Off-Season"](#) from a month ago...wow, a month ago, one suggestion was to add some arms that could be available if they were non-tendered, with the Pirates' Zach Duke being the example used. Well, [Zach Duke has been non-tendered in all of his LH glory from the Pirates](#)

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and while the shouts will come from the rooftops that Duke has been non-tendered BY THE PIRATES and had a 5.43 ERA, realize that [his peripheral stats in 2010 were more or less in line with those from his previous two seasons](#), when he posted ERA's of 4.82 and 4.06.

Were the Pirates right not to want to pay Duke the \$5M he would have earned in the arbitration process?

Absolutely, but if the Indians can get him on one of their low-base, incentive-laden deals and let Tim Belcher and company have at it, the Indians' LH options could be upgraded over the likes of Dave Huff and Aaron Laffey.

As for the "Kouzmanoff Watch", since [Terry Pluto has latched onto the idea](#) (a bit over a month from when it was first suggested [here](#)

), let me be clear here on Kouzmanoff, lest anyone think that I'm wearing a cheerleader outfit and holding pom-poms for K2 specifically. The reality is that, after surveying the scene, I simply made the suggestion of K2 because I fail to see a better alternative out there in terms of upgrading the defense over the likes of Nix and Phelps.

Is K2 someone that the Indians should be looking to pencil in on the lineup card for the next 3 years?

No, but that's also not what they're looking for. If they're looking for a stop-gap (and they should be) that provides better defense (and they BETTER be) while not breaking the bank (and that's why I like Kouzmanoff ONLY as a non-tender, not a trade option because the Tribe would be paying him \$4M unnecessarily if they traded for him), then K2 is the best I see out there.

From the pipe dream category of player acquisition, it seems that [the Indians are on Justin Upton's no-trade list](#) ...so

those dreams of turning Huff, Crowe, and Goedert into Upton remain just that – dreams in the sky. As for the notion that the Indians will be able to turn a package like that (and "Huff, Crowe, and Goedert" is just an example), let's realize that the rest of MLB is probably aware of what we – as Indians' fans are – in terms of which of the Indians' prospects are compelling and which are even just "sort of interesting".

To that "sort-of-interesting" end, Adam Van Arsdale rolls on with his terrific prospect series over at the LGT, with an [overview of the pitching prospects](#) and a look at hitters, both [high-performing](#) and ["sort-of-interesting"](#)

coming out and putting some great perspective on the Indians' farm system. Since we're talking prospects, I would be remiss if I didn't mention that the

[Call to the Pen Top 100 piece](#)

that I mentioned a few days ago

[released their Top 10](#)

and...the top Tribe prospect was Jason Knapp as the top ranked prospect at #11, so no Kipnis or Chisenhall in that particular Top 100 list.

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Other than the acquisition speculation (much of it user-generated) and the 40-man decisions (which always seem overblown to me as we're talking about the fringes of the roster and given the fact that the Indians have been WILDLY successful in protecting the "right" players to prevent major losses), the big news of the week remains The BLC likely earning his military exemption by leading South Korea to an Asian Games championship.



While his performance probably merits more than just that cursory mention, the most exciting thing to me about his tenure as a player for South Korea is his jersey. If I may make a suggestion, can we have the Tribe #17 jersey PLEASE read "SS CHOO" on the back starting next year?

Admitting that I have no idea as to whatever language reasons exist for the "SS CHOO" to appear on the back of his South Korean jersey, if I wore a 2X (and two of me wouldn't), [this](#) would be on my Christmas list.

Of course, since Clevelanders are never content to simply take good news as just that (and can we get this guy to the post-season if that's how he performs under pressure), news that Choo's military exemption was likely to be waived resulted not in happiness or relief from most corners. No, it prompted the obligatory, "well, now the Indians can trade him" and "that will increase his trade value" from what seems to be the growing voice of discontent this off-season as it pertains to the Indians.

If you think that the discontent is overblown by some or simply a vocal minority, consider the requisite firestorm that was set off (and it should have come to no surprise to anyone) by the payroll discussion with Paul Dolan, as [his unfortunate comments to the PD](#) basically provided a few million gallons of gas to the flaming madness among the cle.commer crowd. In case you missed the comments (and I can't imagine that you did), Dolan's exact comments were as follows:

"It's not the right time to spend. No question about that. It's not the right time to spend in the cycle of this franchise. The spending is deficit spending. When New York and Boston spend, they're spending from their profits. It's a riskier proposition for clubs like us to spend. We're taking a far greater financial risk than whatever it is a large-market club spends on a large free agent. It's the unfortunate nature of our game."

Oof.

For an Indians' organization, that has "consultants" for everything down to what kind of relish to offer, somebody's coming up with "talking points" here if Dolan's going to sit down with the PD

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on payroll in an attempt to mollify the masses. That being the case, I'm not sure who's laying out the talking points for Dolan, but they should be fired as this talk of "cycles" and size of clubs has run it's course over the last two years.

People get that the Indians are attempting to build back up and that they can't (and shouldn't) compete with the Yankees and the Red Sox, particularly on FA. Every time they bring up this inequality in MLB (which is valid, to a degree), the critics point to the Twins or the Rays or whatever small-market team (and Minnesota isn't small-market anymore with Target Field) is currently thriving in MLB. The problem is how they're framing it, and how they've been framing it...to no measure of success.

Every time the Indians open their mouths on this payroll situation, the problem is exacerbated because they're coming out with the same lines that we've heard since Lee and Martinez were traded and all of it deals in very vague concepts and comes off sounding desperate and defeated. They must agree to these interviews thinking that they'll be able to clarify why they're not going to spend on FA or why they're not going to be involved in major player acquisition this off-season, only to watch the flames of public opinion get fanned to the point that they get engulfed further in the inferno.

Let me be clear as I'm not blaming the PD for taking this absolute softball thrown at them by the Indians (and the PD did hit it out of the park in terms of how it was framed), because the blame doesn't rest in a writer like Hoynes for passing along this old, tired, ill-conceived bit of salesmanship that keeps coming from the corner of Carnegie and Ontario.

If it's not clear enough, the Indians have a MAJOR public relations issue and their endless circular explanations that, as I said, come off as "desperate" and "defeated" do nothing to change the issue as their messages feel like they're talking down to fans and are so defensive against further criticism that it only CREATES more opportunity for criticism.

If Dolan is going to say "it's not the right time to spend", how about using the rationale that there aren't options on the FA market that they feel represent a significant upgrade over their internal talent? Remember [last week](#) when I linked [the Royals' GM comment on Kansas City's approach to FA](#) ?
*"Our stance on potentially adding something (major through free agency) "is it would really have to fit long term. That guy doesn't exist right now, and I don't know who that would be."
"We're not just going to add somebody to make our payroll higher for one year."*

Never would I suggest that the Indians should look to the Royals (who have had THREE winning records since 1990 and the highest win total among those THREE winning seasons is 84 in 1993) for advice on how to run their franchise or manage the public's perception of it – but compare those two statements as one puts off a defensive and desperate and tell me which one sounds like they have confidence in their internal players and smacks of logic?

Remember the whole ["Flipping the Script" idea](#) from a couple of weeks ago, when it was suggested here that they should be trumpeting this young talent?
Use the bully pulpit from the corner of Carnegie and Ontario again to move away from the talk

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that "this is a rebuilding year again" and say that young in-house talent are unequivocally the players that are going to lead the Indians to their next appearance in the playoffs. If the Front Office TRULY believes it, come out and declare that the assembled young talent at all levels will prevent the team from going into this valley again.

The truth is that the Indians SHOULD NOT be spending on the FA that are going to be the mid-level FA available in this market and they should be leaning on the development of their young players, the way they did in 1991 and in 2003 to build something that could be sustainable. Wouldn't the suggestion above go hand-in-hand with the hands-off approach that they are taking (and should be taking) on this FA market?

As mind-numbingly absurd as the "payroll message" from the Indians is, it's not even the most frustrating aspect of this whole endeavor though, as the wailers and the teeth-gnashers are going to do just that, regardless of what comes out of anyone's mouth whose place of "business" is at the corner of Carnegie and Ontario.

No, what gets lost in the "woe-is-me-in-MLB" tripe or the assertion that the Indians are "taking a far greater financial risk than whatever it is a large-market club spends on a large free agent" (because, you know, we get that idea when Travis Hafner lumbers to the plate 4 out of every 5 games) are the actual numbers that are in play here. By that I mean that if you take the time to read [the entire PD piece regarding payroll](#), it proclaims that the Indians are only going to be spending between \$50M and \$59M on the team.

Harrumph, harrumph...I didn't get a harrumph out of that guy, right?

Well, they spent \$61.5M on the team last year and no longer count Wood, Westbrook, and Peralta (most notably) on their ledger...so, the payroll will drop between \$2.5M and \$11.5M despite the fact that those three aforementioned players (who "earned" \$26.35M in 2010) will not be Indians next year.

Let me put that out there again, the Indians' payroll was \$61.5M last year and \$26.35M was for Westbrook, Wood, and Peralta. Those three players are no longer Indians and the payroll looks to be dropping between \$2.5M and \$11.5M.

Is the "\$50M to \$59M" payroll number light years away from the \$81.5 that they spent in 2009? Of course, but that \$81.5M number in 2009 also represented \$17M that the team ADDED from the 2008 payroll when they acquired Wood, DeRosa, and Hot Carl Pavano in an attempt to keep that team (with Lee, Martinez, Sizemore, etc) in contention for a couple of more years...or at least that year.

Fans in Cleveland know all too well about the best-laid plans going awry in hindsight, but (and I don't know the psychology of this) they LOVE the idea of a winner being built. The Indians should be exploiting this oddity of the psyche of the average Clevelander and should be pointing out that the Giants won the World Series because of home-grown pitchers and that the Indians are attempting to create a similar situation, one that they already did when they went into the mid-to-late 2000s with two players who would win the Cy Young Award.

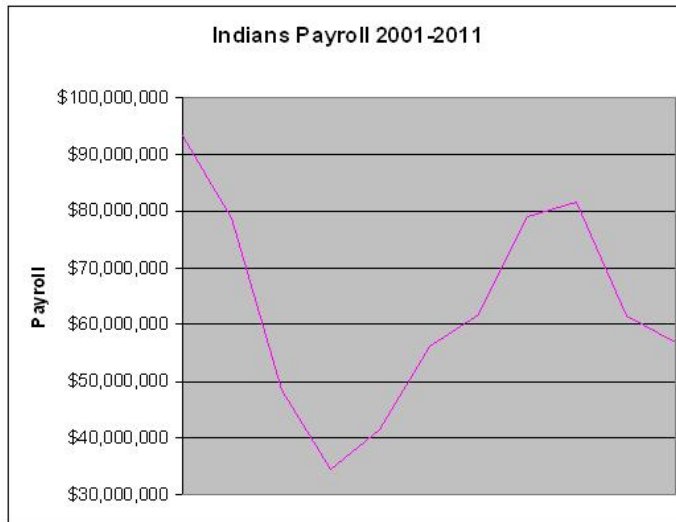
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Instead, the Indians put on this wall, and maybe that has something to do with the idea that they're afraid of being wrong, but if the team REALLY wants to put forth the idea of "cycles", maybe they should point to the same sequential listing of payrolls that I know I've referred to far too many times as it is instructive:

2011: \$ 56,900,000



2010: \$ 61,453,967

2009: \$ 81,579,166

2008: \$ 78,970,066

2007: \$ 61,673,267

2006: \$ 56,031,500

2005: \$ 41,502,500

2004: \$ 34,319,300

2003: \$ 48,584,834

2002: \$ 78,909,499

2001: \$ 93,360,000

If you're wondering where I'm coming up with that 2011 number, it comes courtesy of the [fabulous breakdown of the Indians' payroll commitments for the next few years at Baseball Reference](#)

..and while you're there, take a look at those projected payrolls for the next few years, bumped by increasing salaries, options and arbitration.

See that incremental rise up from 2004 (\$34,319,300) to the peak of 2009 (\$81,579,166)?

That's what the Indians are probably going to do for a while and if 2011 represents the lowest "valley" in that landscape, how about pointing out that the 2011 "valley" is about \$25M higher than the one in 2004, the year that laid the groundwork for the 2007 AL Central Flag?

Don't mistake this as a defense for the Dolans as they have made glaring errors in terms of promoting mediocrity and allowing the status quo to persist when the status quo is unproductive in terms of the Amateur Draft, but this prevailing notion that they should have just spent money in order to have just kept the 2007 team together, or at least the team that started 2008 ignores the whole idea of how contracts and FA works.

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To wit, want to know what the team that started the 2008 season will earn in 2011 from their various (and prospective) employers?

CC - \$23M

Lee - \$21M

Westbrook - \$8M

Carmona - \$6.1M

[Fangraphs' crowdsourcing has CP making \\$21M per year](#) (and I think that's probably pretty conservative)...so, that's \$58.1M that the top four in the 2008 Opening Day rotation will earn in 2011.

While most fans view Pavano as a "lucky hit" for 2009, if you want to throw Pavano in there, [crowdsourcing put a guess on Pavano at \\$9M per year](#), so if you add that guess for Pavano (and that number for Lee is a guess) to the numbers that are firm and you're talking about a rotation that would cost \$67.1M, which is a higher number than the estimated payrolls (as per B-Ref) for NINE teams in MLB in 2011.

Regardless, we'll keep it just to the 2008 team and say that the top four in the 2008 Opening Day rotation will earn around \$60M in 2011...

Want to keep going?

How about adding the salaries for the players that essentially started the 2008 season as Indians and how the payroll for that team would look:

Shoppach - \$3M

Martinez - \$12M

Cabrera - \$2M

Peralta - \$5.25M

Blake - \$5.25M

Choo - \$3.5M

Sizemore - \$7.5M

Gutierrez - \$4M

Hafner - \$13M

The Cabrera guess is off of [what Erick Aybar received in his first year of arbitration eligibility](#), the

[Choo number comes from a comp to what Ryan Ludwick received a couple of years ago](#) and the

[Victor guess comes via Fangraphs' crowdsourcing](#)

If you're keeping score at home (and if you really are...we may need to talk), that lineup comes with a \$55.5M price tag. Add that \$55.5M for the 2008 lineup today with the \$58.1M for the top four in the 2008 rotation (that's without Pavano) and that's \$113.6M for your 2008 Indians in 2011...minus a 5th starter, a bullpen, and a bench.

Hefty numbers, no doubt, but let's all remember that THOSE players compiled a record of

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37-51 (14 GB) in 2008 when CC was traded and 45-58 (14 GB) when Lacey Cake was dealt...those two players will earn \$28.5M this year.

The Tribe lost CC and Blake in 2008 and added Wood, DeRosa, and Pavano before 2009 and THOSE players compiled a record of 43-60 (11 GB) in 2009 when CP Lee and El Capitan exited stage right and were 47-62 (11.5 GB) when Pavano became a Twin...and those three players could earn \$42M this year.

With the majority of those 2008 and 2009 teams out the door (and Gutz and ShopVac were off-season deals), the Indians were 42-59 (14.5 GB) last year when they dealt Peralta and were 43-61 (15.5 GB) a couple of days later when Westbrook made his way to St. Louis...those players will earn \$13.25M this year.

As much as “keeping the band together” from Opening Day of 2008 may look like it was a certain recipe for consistent contention, there was never a “White Flag” deal done as the Indians made trades when they were more than 10 games back of the division leader.

While this is all sobering to analyze in the downswing of where the Indians are, if you’re going back to look at those payrolls though and looking at the build-up from 2011 to whenever (2016?) the same way that it increased from 2004 to 2009 – because the Indians’ young players are developing and have earned bigger paychecks – THAT is what the Dolans should be out in front touting, the development of their own players and the resulting money that will be spent as this group of youngsters congeals and matures.

Despite the fact that those SHOULD be the “talking points”, the Indians are reticent (or unaware) of how to manage the public perception nightmare that they have on their hand. As a result, short of them rattling off a sudden and consistent winner on the field for the next few years that energizes their fans in spite of their feelings toward ownership or the Front Office, if they’re continually reading those “talking points” out of the same book from which they’ve been reading in an attempt to engage their fan base...the end of the story is going to remain the same, with apathy and an empty ballpark being the result.