

How Do You Want It?

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}

Thursday, December 09 2010 11:00 AM - Last Updated Thursday, December 09 2010 12:48 AM



The Hot Stove is allegedly on, though you wouldn't know it on the North Coast with the combination of the icy wind off of Lake Erie and the lack of warmth coming from the Winter Meetings in Orlando. Thus, as the rest of MLB lines up to overpay (in most instances) the FA baseball players on the open market, we are left in Cleveland to parse through talk of Jeff Francoeur (now thankfully a Royal) and whether he was self-aware enough to be useful for the Tribe (in that he is only useful to face LHP...but is deluded enough to think that he's worthy of an every day spot) and think about Louie the Fifth (who I'm curious as to where he'd play in 2011 if he remains in the Tribe organization with Donald at 2B in Cleveland and Kipnis at 2B in Columbus) perhaps going back to Seattle. With all of this "news" emerging for the Tribe at the Winter Meetings, I keep coming back to something in this boring off-season for the Indians and their fans - what should the Indians be doing this off-season?

An [urban poet asked that question](#) in different terms a number of years ago but I think that it's instructive to review the question that he posed. And while his...ahem, thrust may have been different in posing the query, in all seriousness, "How Do You Want It" this off-season if you're talking about the Indians?

Watching mid-level FA come off the board with high numbers associated with their signings and with top(pish) FA going for absurd rates, do you want the Indians – as they currently stand – to get involved in the spinning-out-of-control world of MLB FA?

Given the names and the numbers that we've seen so far this off-season, do you prefer the

How Do You Want It?

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}

Thursday, December 09 2010 11:00 AM - Last Updated Thursday, December 09 2010 12:48 AM

Indians throwing money at bad players to pacify the masses and watching guys like Tejada or Uribe or Peralta cashing in \$5M to \$6M next year while making the steady decline to obscurity or is looking for little pieces like they did with Austin Kearns last year and squirreling money away to be spent on going overslot in the draft and earmarking money for the talent currently on the roster when they're due pay raises the more prudent strategy?

Supposing an argument could be made that the Indians should be doing both – being active on the FA market to improve the team in the here and now AND paying draftees overslot money to improve the team in the future – isn't it fairly apparent that overpaying on the FA market simply isn't a path the team should be exploring, particularly right now?

Do we all not remember Dellucci and Michaels and how paying FA veterans the “going” rate (which is to say “too much”) on the FA market is akin to throwing money away when suitable alternatives can be found and have been found by this team in years past?

Are these FA “out of their price range” or are they simply not worthy of the contracts that are being awarded to them?

Is Jeff Francoeur worth the \$2.5M the Royals are going to pay him in 2010 or would you like to see Matt Diaz added with a two-year deal worth \$4.25M? Given that less expensive alternatives (who may be more productive) probably exist, were Frenchy and Diaz really “too expensive” for the Indians or can the Indians find comparable production from a RH bat at a lower cost?

To bring this into the topic that everyone in town is discussing (and it isn't the Indians), people are begging for the Cavaliers to blow it up in the wake of last Thursday's debacle and the ensuing slide into the NBA gutter. The most common refrain among those in the know (and [count Brian Windhorst among them at the end of this interview](#)) is that the worst place to be is an organization stuck in neutral, close to .500 year after year, getting no better or worse. The refrain for the Cavs that keeps emerging is that they should trade their useful pieces for youngsters or draft picks and get into the lottery, which is the only way that a team in Cleveland is going to compete is by getting lucky in the draft and by developing their own. Needless to say, it will be interesting to see if an impetuous owner like Dan Gilbert is going to do in an attempt to build a contender on the fly or if he's going to make the hard – and correct – decision for the long-term health of the franchise.

How Do You Want It?

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}

Thursday, December 09 2010 11:00 AM - Last Updated Thursday, December 09 2010 12:48 AM

That being said, does this “hard decision” sound familiar? Isn’t the hard decision that is staring the Cavs in the face the same one that the Indians were looking at when CC was traded in 2008 and when Clifton Phifer and El Capitan were traded in 2009?

Does the effect of “The Decision” come into play here and did the Indians make mistakes from the end of 2007 to where we sit today...no question. That’s why the demise (or coming demise) of both franchises isn’t that easily compared as a homicide and a self-inflicted wound are two entirely different manners of death or near-death.

But isn’t the conventional wisdom about the Cavs that they should start from scratch and that the only way that they’re going to be competitive again is to do what the Thunder or the Blazers or the Hornets have done, by drafting wisely and trading shrewdly after effectively tearing it down.

Is this not the same path that the Indians took in 2002, then again over the last 2 ½ years? By no means am I here to assert that they have drafted wisely and traded shrewdly in the last 2 ½ years as we have no idea about too many of these guys...but that IS what they did from 2003 to 2007, did they not?

Lest anyone forget, the 2003 team went 68-94, “good” for 4th place in the Central. For context here (in case you’ve forgotten), the 2010 team was 69-93, again “good” for 4th place in the Central. After the 2003 team went 68-94, the 2004 team went 80-82 and was 63-55 on August 14th, just 1 Game Back in the AL Central, only to fall apart down the stretch but with the building blocks in place for a 93-win season in 2005 and, eventually, a division crown in 2007.

So what, you may ask, happened between 2003 and 2004 that allowed the team to improve that dramatically?

Well...after the Indians had 5 players selected in the 2003 Rule 5 Draft, they signed Ronnie Belliard as a place-holder 2B and Lou Merloni as a veteran utility player, they traded for or signed retread/injury risk relievers like Bobby Howry, Jose Jimenez, Scott Stewart, and Matt Miller, and they added Jeff D’Amico to their starting rotation.

Those were the off-season moves that “catapulted” the team to 17 more wins...no, really.

How Do You Want It?

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}

Thursday, December 09 2010 11:00 AM - Last Updated Thursday, December 09 2010 12:48 AM

With those “moves” listed, it’s fairly obvious that their improvement from 2003 to 2004 had nothing to do with pieces added or money spent in December of 2003 or January of 2004 as the development of the young players (Martinez and Hafner) and young pitchers (CC and Jake) is what allowed the team to improve appreciably, with the likes of Lee, Sizemore, and Peralta still struggling in 2004.

Is the 2011 team going to contend in August as the 2004 team did?

You’re not going to find me out on that limb just yet, but it speaks to how more interest should be paid this off-season to what can reasonably be expected of those acquired in-house options like Matt LaPorta ([the subject of the latest “Jon & Paul Plus Baseball”](#) , which is worth a look), Carlos Carrasco, and Justin Masterson and how the long-term success of the Indians’ organization is tied much more closely to the development of those players than it is to the addition of a couple of marginal FA.

I know, I know...that discussion about internal options is not interesting and that doesn’t warm anyone on the Hot Stove and in this Brave New World of Twitter and MLB Trade Rumors, where any mention of the Indians is dissected to the smallest detail and where roster machinations that once occupied a line in a “Transactions” column in the local fishwraps cause more consternation than humanly possible.

To wit, every time they are linked to Nick Punto or CM Wang or Adam Everett, the bleats that they’re not spending any money are deafening and while that may come from a very vocal portion of the fans, they’re not helped when the hometown paper runs a headline that says, “Cleveland Indians looking for (surprise) bargains at winter meetings” with that snarky parenthetical thrown in for no other reason than for more clicks (which I won’t provide as no link is contained there...and, trust me, it’s with your best interest in mind) and more rabble-rousing in an attempt to maintain relevancy...for the paper, not the team.

To get back to the inactivity of the off-season, isn’t it obvious to most that the team already did make their moves from July of 2008 to August of 2010 to add the young players that are being counted upon to lead the team back into contention? Aren’t they supposed to be building from within and stockpiling as much young talent as possible (by any means necessary) in an attempt to recreate the 2004 to 2007 “window” WHILE keeping it open for a period longer than

How Do You Want It?

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}

Thursday, December 09 2010 11:00 AM - Last Updated Thursday, December 09 2010 12:48 AM

four seasons?

Once these youngsters reveal themselves more fully in 2010, perhaps it will present the opportunity for the Indians to add a piece like they did prior to 2005, when they added Millwood, but now simply isn't the time...as poorly as the Indians have articulated that fact. Thinking about Millwood, even he was seen as "dumpster diving" and the only time that they've dipped their toe in the big kid's pool was when they they...wait for it...overpaid on the FA market for the services of Kerry Wood, adding a closer a year too late.

If you want to argue that the Indians failed in adding pieces when they needed to after the 2005 season and prior to the 2008 season in an attempt to capitalize on the momentum created in 2005 and 2007 (that was promptly put to an end)...have at it, there's certainly an argument there to make.

However, if we're talking strictly in the here and now – shouldn't the focus be on seeing what the team has and using money on the draft, as they did last year?

Maybe what comes out as a result and certainly the strategy of building through spending in the draft is not going to bear any immediate fruit, but what does adding an Aaron Harang for \$6.5M (and he would have wanted more to come to Cleveland as he took that number from his hometown Padres) do for the 2011 Indians?

More to the point, what satiates the fan base with moves that are going to be made on the FA market this Winter?

Last off-season, they turned Kelly Shoppach into Unleash the Fury and signed a bunch of castoffs (Kearns, Duncan, Redmond, and Brnayan) to deals that for the most part worked out even if they did little to generate any excitement, with more optimism being generated by a couple of months of Santana or the second half of Perez than anything they did in acquiring pieces last Winter.

If you're looking that developments that would generate interest among the fanbase, it has

How Do You Want It?

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}

Thursday, December 09 2010 11:00 AM - Last Updated Thursday, December 09 2010 12:48 AM

nothing to do with adding a Matt Diaz or a Jeff Francoeur or a DJ Carrasco in December (all of whom have now signed elsewhere) as we're talking about ancillary pieces and depth that probably isn't going to be around the next time the Indians find themselves in contention.

Rather, if you're wondering what would generate the interest once more among Tribe fans, you have to wait until the events on the field in April and May as it bears asking whether anything that would be done this off-season would reverse the current feelings on the Tribe and the perception that has pervaded the team?

The only thing that is going to make people feel better about the Dolans and Antonetti is going to come from performance on the field and no contract signed in Orlando at the Winter Meetings or later in the off-season is going to change that fact.

The way that the Indians achieve relevance and interest once more is by winning on the field in 2011...a fact that is easily forgotten in the "boring" off-season that we find ourselves in the midst of.