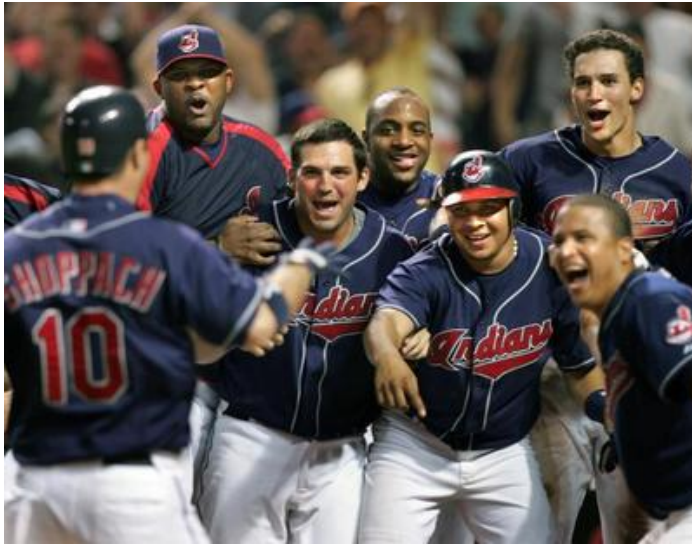


Repeating History on A Lazy Sunday

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}

Sunday, January 23 2011 8:45 AM - Last Updated Sunday, January 23 2011 9:38 AM



As horrible as this off-season has been for Indians fans as we feel like that kid looking out of the window at recess time, watching everyone else have so much fun while we sit quietly away from all of the action, let's attempt to gain some perspective again, if only to combat the pervasive "the Indians are on the cusp of walking through the desert for another 40 years" rhetoric that has become accepted as fact locally and (at least when they mention the Tribe) nationally.

Is it depressing to see three of the four other AL Central teams making prudent, high-upside deals as the Twins retain Pavano and Thome (at reasonable numbers and years) while adding a middle-infield import that should upgrade their team, as decimated as their bullpen has been with departures?

Of course, just like it's painful to acknowledge the fact that the White Sox and Kenny Williams put on their annual rabbit-out-of-the-hat off-season, signing Adam Dunn to the deal that I think most will look back on as the best deal of the off-season, retaining Paul Konerko, replacing Fat Bobby Jenks with Jesse Crain, and keeping what looks like the best rotation in the AL Central intact and potentially healthy?

As much fun as it is to think about everything that could go wrong in Motown (with their perpetual "we'll think about tomorrow some other time" contracts), even the Royals overcame their initial stumble out of the gates (with Francouer and Melky) to add some rotational fodder in Francis and Chen to deals that I wouldn't have minded seeing the Indians taking on?

Even going outside of the AL Central, news that the Rockies signed Joe Crede to a Minor League deal has Tribe fans wondering why Jack Hannahan will be in Goodyear this Spring and not Crede, given the nature of both signing Minor League deals. Forget that I spend some days convinced that Jack Hannahan is going to be the 3B out of Spring Training because everyone

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else who is a candidate there feels like a square peg/round hole situation.

There's plenty of time to get to that though as the season approaches and once the season starts and begins to flesh out as the performances of Francis and Chen will be on display in our division and the paths that Crede and Hannahan take in 2011 will be obvious once April begins. For now, let's get into a Lazy One as I don my little green visor (Google tells me it is a "green eyeshade") and pull out my leather-bound ledger to get off on some Tribe talk and run some numbers and attempt to provide some context for those numbers.

The reason that numbers and calculators come up coincides with the big news of the week of the arbitration signings and how they, in effect, set the 2011 payroll somewhere around \$46M or so, and I'll use the \$46,413,000 that [the IPI salary chart](#) lists.

As I pull my hair out, let me just shriek "OH THE HUMANITY!"...am I doing this right? Kidding aside and thinly-veiled shots at the "DOLANZ R CHEEP" crowd out of the way, take a deeper look at that link to IPI and check the salaries by year for the Tribe, with the last decade looking like this, with the inclusion of 2000 being important because it represents the first full year of Dolan ownership, but also because the 2000 payroll it was the highest payroll in Indians' history...until the next year, when the Dolans would once again preside over the highest payroll in Tribe history. For your enjoyment, here's [an interesting link to an announcement of the sale in November of 1999](#), full of tidbits that I just don't remember.

Nevertheless, here's the payroll by year:

2011: \$46,416,000
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
2000: \$76,500,000

If you want to go back further, you can see that the shining beacon of Cleveland baseball, Mr. Dick Jacobs, presided over a payroll of \$8,236,166 in 1992, which was less than half of the 4th lowest payroll of the Orioles.

Seriously, [check this list out](#) ...

Of course, that 1992 team had guys like Albert Belle, Carlos Baerga, Kenny Lofton, Sandy

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Alomar, Jr., Jim Thome, Charles Nagy, and Jose Mesa on the team that would finish 76-86 and still reek of unrealized potential and with the team's highest paid players being Felix Fermin (\$950K) and Joel Skinner (\$700K)... [no, really](#) .



But wasn't that the "Original Plan" back in the mid-1990s...to assemble a massive amount of young talent, allow the wheat (Thome, Belle, etc.) to separate from the chaff (Glenallen, Whiten, Jack Armstrong, etc.) and sign the players that distinguished themselves to long-term deals?

The payrolls increased slowly ([1993 - \\$15.72M, third lowest in MLB](#) for a team that would go 76-86 again; [1994 -](#)

[\\$28.49M, 10th lowest in ML](#)

B in strike-shortened season and so on) as the players that the Indians identified as "core" players accumulated service time and were paid at higher rates (usually with long-term deals that gave them up-front money while buying out FA years) as the years progressed. As much as everyone remembers the Indians of the late-1990s, with John Hart wheeling and dealing and the Indians being major players on the FA market (thanks to the revenue stream provided by a new ballpark), the way that the Renaissance of baseball in Cleveland started was the accumulation of young near-MLB-ready talent and the identification of certain players as a "core" to build around.

As I remember, it worked out pretty well from those humble beginnings, essentially rescuing baseball in Cleveland and setting the stage for the "Golden Age" of the franchise. Not to continue to bore you with history as I'm sure you're aware of all of this, stay with me here and take a look at what happened after the Indians started anew in the early-to-mid-2000s, after the

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roster had been purged and the majority of high priced “talent” found themselves elsewhere. Remember that whole idea that the optimistic view of the 2011 season would be to duplicate the performance of the 2004 team (80-82), with certain young players stepping forward with significant production?

Well, since most of the criticism of the Indians is that their roster consists of veteran question marks, a couple of players who are underpaid (by virtue of service time) and league-minimum fodder, check this:

[2004 payroll - \\$34,319,300](#)

Here's the list of players on that 2004 team that DIDN'T simply make the league minimum:

Matt Lawton - \$7.25M

Omar Vizquel - \$6.25M

Bob Wickman - \$6M

CC Sabathia - \$2.7M

Ronnie Belliard - \$1.1M

David Riske - \$1.025M

Jake Westbrook - \$925K

Lou Merloni - \$560K

Scott Elarton - \$480K

Tim Laker - \$450K

Every other player on the team made \$352K or less, including Hafner, Victor, Clifton Phifer and Blake.

What about the following year, for the team that won 93 games?

[2005 payroll - \\$41,502,500](#)

Again, here is the list of players on the 2005 team that made more than the league minimum:

Kevin Millwood - \$7M

CC Sabathia - \$5.25M

Arthur Rhodes - \$3.7M

Aaron Boone - \$3M

Jake Westbrook - \$2.9M

Bob Wickman - \$2.75M

Ronnie Belliard - \$2.5M

Casey Blake - \$2.25M

Jose Hernandez - \$1.8M

David Riske - \$1.425M

Alex Cora - \$1.3M

Bob Howry - \$900K

Scott Elarton - \$850K

Victor Martinez - \$700K

Juan Gonzalez - \$600K

Scott Sauerbeck - \$500K

As a quick aside here, do you notice where a lot of the money is spent on that 2005 team – in an attempt to construct a bullpen because of a lack of internal options? There is \$9.25M on that list being paid to relievers (only one of which was “homegrown” in Riske), meaning that 22% of the payroll was tied up in 4 relievers as the Indians attempted to cobble together a bullpen,

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perhaps providing a glimpse at what would be the Achilles' heel of the team for the next few years...if not 2005 specifically. To that end (and I know I've hit on this before as have others), the Indians certainly seem to be putting much more of an emphasis on that "homegrown" bullpen, with [Jordan Bastian hitting on a couple of relevant names with some great information in this piece](#) that lends some credence to the idea that a lesson was at least learned in terms of bullpen construction in the mid-2000s to what we see today.

Nevertheless, back to that 2005 payroll, realize that (again) Hafner and Lee find themselves below the names on list above, now joined by Sizemore and Peralta, among others on that 2005 team as players being paid league minimum on a 93-win team that had a \$41.5M payroll.

What was that 2011 payroll looking like...\$46M or so?

Compare the lists above to [the one provided by Bastian](#) of players on the 2011 Indians that will be pulling in paychecks above league minimum:

2011 payroll - \$46,416,000

Again, these are the players that will be paid salaries higher than the league minimum:

Travis Hafner - \$13M

Grady Sizemore - \$7.5M

Fausto Carmona - \$6.1M

Shin-Soo Choo - \$3.975M

Chris Perez - \$2.225M

Asdrubal Cabrera - \$2.025M

Rafael Perez - \$1.33M

Austin Kearns - \$1.3M

Joe Smith - \$870,000

Jensen Lewis - \$650,000

Anyone else notice that the number here (10) is the same number on the 2004 team that was paid above league-minimum salary?

Probably not, but I think you understand where this is attempting to go in providing some context with the last two "rebuilding" processes that the Indians undertook at the beginning of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s.

While the success of those two rebuilds is public record (and the sustenance of the rebuilds is the main separator, though not the only one), so is the salaries associated with the players that keyed those rebuilds and the manner in which the team built a team from the bottom up. Whether what we're currently experiencing is going to replicate the "success" (as lasting or as fleeting as that may be) will be ultimately be determined by the talent on hand or just beneath the surface.

Ultimately, it's on the young minimum-salary players to prove that they're "core" players just like those linchpins of the 1990s did and the way that the players that we just said goodbye to did in the mid-2000s.

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