

An Off-Season Road-Map on A Lazy Sunday

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}

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The 2011 season is in the books and while the season recaps will continue to pour out, let's cast our gaze forward as the Indians prepare for the most important off-season in recent memory as they attempt to maintain the momentum that their 2011 season got rolling. Additionally, they now find themselves in a position where they're trying to start to line some of these building blocks up to form a foundation that will last through just the end of 2013, perhaps embarking on the extended run of playoff contention that eluded them in the mid-to-late-2000s.

The only thing that is certain at this point is that the Indians' coaching staff will have a decidedly different look as Tim Tolman will not be back as bench coach (as we all wish him the best) and Sandy Alomar moves from the 1st Base Coaching Box to the role of Bench Coach...for now. Certainly Sandy may be up for the White Sox job, but the announcement that Alomar will be promoted to bench coach certainly has the feel of the Indians attempting to let Sandy know how well-thought-of he is within the organization if the White Sox were to come calling with a job offer that wasn't that of the manager. As for who will replace Sandy at 1B, Mike Sarbaugh would figure to be the leading candidate to emerge from the Minor Leagues (where he has dominated...if a Minor League manager can dominate) to work with the group of players that he's won titles with for the last three years. Seriously, Sarbaugh won titles in Akron in 2009 and in Columbus in 2010 and 2011...essentially with a good number of the same players that figure to populate the Indians' roster in 2012 and beyond. So, keeping him in the fold (and adding him to the parent club coaching staff) would be the logical move to provide some continuity for what is still a very young team.

But the Tolman/Alomar/Sarbaugh move is not the big one of the week as Tim Belcher announced that he would not be returning as the Tribe pitching coach in 2012. To me, pitching coaches are always a difficult thing to truly judge as Masterson made HUGE leaps forward and Carrasco and Tomlin showed signs of promise, but Carmona remained an enigma and Huff seemed to regress after spending some time on the parent club. Certainly, the Masterson evolution trumps pretty much everything else and it's more than just a good thing that Belcher

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will remain in the organization, but the Indians now find themselves in need of a pitching coach.

One obvious move would be to promote current bullpen coach Scott Radinsky to the position of pitching coach and bringing Ruben Niebla up from his pitching coach post in Columbus to handle the duties of the bullpen coach for 2012. Just as it would be with keeping Sarbaugh around this young group of players, expanding the roles of Radinsky (who did a GREAT job with the relievers this year) and Niebla would give the players some level of familiarity with the coaches. If the Indians were able to convince the Diamondbacks to allow Charles Nagy (who is Arizona's pitching coach) to make a lateral move because of his ties to Cleveland, he would be another name to consider as he was the Clippers' pitching coach in 2010 and would, again, have a working knowledge of the young Tribe arms. Then again, they could go off the board and bring in somebody completely different and while that would represent a sharp departure from everything that they've ever done, it is not outlandish to think that they could go for someone whose name is not at the front (or back) of anyone's mind right now.

Ultimately, the coaching staff will sort itself out (and talented players have a way of making coaching staffs look good), but with the season behind us, let's take a look at the moves that one man would make in this off-season in an attempt to position the Tribe for contention in 2012 and beyond. Much of this is not new ground if you've been coming around these parts, but I thought I'd put it all in one place, seeing as how talk will now turn to "what the Indians need to do/should do" with the off-season upon us. Again, some of these are ideas that you've seen before, but hang in there as they've been fleshed out a little more and "The Plan" (dare I use that term) builds up from the first suggestion to the last.

Of course, it's easy to say "they need a RH bat at 1B and a veteran starter", but if you've been coming around here for any stretch of time you know that...well, I'm not one to simply deal in these vagaries. Let's get specific and attempt to deal in reality with some of these proposed moves. If you want to call this reality a set of "ground rules", I attempted to stay within that \$70M payroll number that's been predicted for the team and have attempted not to go all "ESPN Trade Machine" with trade suggestions, giving up players of value to net something close to equal value because...well, Luis Valbuena, Mitch Talbot, Trevor Crowe, and Beau Mills aren't attractive to anyone.

Yes, even if you put them in a package.

Nevertheless, here is the off-season "road-map" (if you will) for the Indians heading into 2012:

Pick up Carmona's option, Re-Negotiate Sizemore's option

Apparently, the Indians will have 3 days after the final game of the World Series to make these decisions, but this is something I wrote about not too long ago, so excuse the liberal cut-and-paste, but here's where I come down on each:

Fausto Carmona

For some hard numbers, consider that in 2010, Javier Vazquez posted a 5.32 ERA, a 1.40 WHIP for the Yankees. After that season, he signed a 1-year, \$7M deal with the Marlins for the

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2011 season. Certainly, Vazquez's 2009 with the Braves (2.87 ERA) played a role in the Marlins' decision to ink Vazquez as the Marlins likely thought that Vazquez would benefit from a change in scenery (out of Gotham) and could find his former self, but if Carmona's 2011 option is for \$7M, doesn't it stand to reason that similar demand could exist for Carmona this off-season?

With the embarrassing dearth of starting pitching (particularly starting pitching available on the FA market) league-wide, these players are going to get more money than they're worth. That may not be telling any secrets, but just to keep the examples flying from last off-season, Brad Penny got a \$3M deal last off-season from the Tigers after pitching only 55 innings with the Cards in 2010 and Brandon Webb got \$3M in guaranteed money from Texas last off-season having pitched FOUR MLB innings the previous two seasons.

Going further, given some of the concerns about Fausto's conditioning, it could probably be argued that picking up this option may not be the best idea, in terms of motivation for Carmona, but looking at the [other options on the FA SP market](#) (is Edwin Jackson or Bruce Chen or Jeff Francis much more appealing...and what kind of money/years does it take to get those guys?) this off-season and with the idea that the Indians probably shouldn't count on Gomez/Huff/McAllister to take up TWO spots in the rotation, the Indians are best served turning their head, pinching their nose, and picking up Carmona's option for 2012, given that it's basically a one-year deal and the final year that these options for Carmona aren't patently outrageous (it's \$9M next year and \$12M in 2014) in terms of guaranteed money.

Grady Sizemore

Though I've been floating the idea of renegotiating Sizemore's deal [for](#) some [time](#), Pluto says in his piece a couple of weekends ago that he would "offer Sizemore a contract with a \$3 million base and lots of incentives. It can even be hooked into a lucrative long-term deal if he plays 120 games, or some other indication of durability." Let's use this as a starting point and get a little creative with a possible solution that allows the Indians to minimize some risk, keep Sizemore on the team with reachable incentives that become lucrative for Grady, and find some common ground here.

As a starting point, the Indians would guarantee Sizemore's \$9M option, but make it payable over 3 years with those games-played-based incentives that Pluto suggested built in so Sizemore (if healthy) could earn a salary at a rate commensurate with what a healthy Sizemore would earn on the open market. Remember, they did this with Pavano a couple of years ago, with incentives tied to innings pitched building upon a base salary as Pavano's health was in question and the Indians' creativity is what brought Pavano onto The Reservation.

Regardless, follow me on this:

2012 - \$3M guaranteed, potential for additional \$6M for 140 games played

\$3M guaranteed base

Additional \$1.5M for 80 games played

Another additional \$1.5M for 100 games played

Another additional \$1.5M for 120 games played

A final additional \$1.5M for 140 games played

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In this scenario, he's guaranteed \$3M in 2012 and could earn up to the \$9M if he plays in 140 games, earning healthy bumps in pay as he plays in games throughout the season.

2013 - \$3M guaranteed, potential for additional \$8M for 140 games played

\$3M guaranteed base

Additional \$2M for 80 games played

Another additional \$2M for 100 games played

Another additional \$2M for 120 games played

A final additional \$2M for 140 games played

Again, Sizemore has that \$3M guaranteed with the ability to earn \$11M if he hits that 140 game plateau.



2014 - \$3M guaranteed, potential for additional \$10M for 140 games played

\$3M guaranteed base

Additional \$2.5M for 80 games played

Another additional \$2.5M for 100 games played

Another additional \$2.5M for 120 games played

A final additional \$2.5M for 140 games played

You're getting the point here, as Grady will still get the \$3M guaranteed (the final 1/3 of that \$9M club option) in 2014 with the possibility that he could earn \$13M if he stayed healthy enough to play in 140 games.

Again, you can read [the whole piece](#) again as I'm truthfully just cutting-and-pasting here as I'll stand by these thoughts on both Carmona and Sizemore, whose club options in their extensions once seemed like such a deal.

Speaking of club options in extensions (that hopefully the team doesn't regret) for young players...

Extend Asdrubal Cabrera & Justin Masterson

Again, this is a topic that I hit on very recently (last week), but these are the offers I'm putting

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on the table to these two, with the rationale behind each extension offer contained in [the linked piece](#)

and the deals looking a little something like this:

Asdrubal Carrera Contract Extension

2012 - \$5.5M

2013 - \$8.5M

2014 - \$10M

2015 - \$12M club option (\$1M buyout)

2016 - \$13M club option (\$2M buyout)

Justin Masterson Contract Extension

2012 - \$3.5M

2013 - \$5.5M

2014 - \$7.7M

2015 - \$12M

2016 - \$13M club option (\$0.245M buyout)

2017 - \$13.5M club option (\$0.5M buyout)

All of the rationale for the years and the numbers above are in [this piece](#) ...but really the first two “topics” on Carmona/Sizemore and Cabrera/Masterson are really just handling internal business and nothing new around these parts.

As for augmenting the roster externally, how about a solution for that 1B problem?

Trade Chris Perez to the Marlins for Gaby Sanchez

This is something that’s been [alluded to in the past](#) , but with Prince Fielder and Albert Pujols hitting the FA market this off-season and with the Red Sox and the Yankees not really in the market for a 1B, the final destinations for Prince and Pujols could be fairly interesting. While neither will land at the corner of Carnegie and Ontario, the idea that the team that they sign with could have an “extra” 1B to use as trade bait is the rationale for Gaby Sanchez even being available. Again, the rationale for this trade idea can be found here, but Fielder and Pujols are essentially an upgrade over ANY team’s current 1B situation and there is always one team in MLB that’s ready to make that “splash” in FA that nobody sees coming. For whatever reason, [the inclusion of the Marlins in rumors about Prince/Pujols](#)

reminds me of the Nationals’ pursuit of Jayson Werth last year and with the Marlins moving to a new stadium, with a new manager, and a new name (yep, they’re the Miami Marlins now), it is not outside the realm of possibility that one of them...um, takes his talent to South Beach.

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