



Sunny skies and temperatures creeping toward eighty have me missing Indians baseball already. It didn't take long. I can't say it has me missing baseball enough to watch the MLB Playoffs, but the last couple days in Northeast Ohio have had nicer weather than the majority of summer days when I attended Tribe games.

Before I get to the gist of this week's VftP, I must address something. Earlier this week, TCF head baseball writer Paul Cousineau announced that he was taking a leave of absence from his DiaTribe blog and taking a little break from writing to spend more time with his family. It is a well deserved respite for the best Indians writer in Ohio. I can't imagine a world where Paul Hoynes and Terry Pluto have to actually come up with their own ideas to write about, but Cousineau's hiatus will force them to do that. If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, consider Paulie C flattered.

I have met Paul just a couple of times, but he is a very humble, easy-to-approach guy with a wealth of baseball knowledge atop his shoulders. The amount of time and effort he puts in to his weekly, and sometimes daily, columns is incredible for someone not paid to do that for a living. It takes someone who truly cares about Cleveland Indians baseball to do what he does and to have such in-depth information in every piece he writes. Most of them contain snippets from other writers and they are always given the mention they deserve.

I know Paul will be back and will go back to writing as frequently as he can. He deserves an offseason too. But, I also know that I will miss his writing and look forward to the day where one of the few quality Indians writers is back on the beat. Enjoy your time off, Mr. Cousineau. You've earned it.

Anyway, let's close the book on this season and look forward to one of the most important offseasons in recent memory. I know we keep saying that, but it's actually true this year. The team showed that they can compete and announced through the trading of Drew Pomeranz and Alex White that now it their window of competitiveness.

All the chatter early on will focus on what to do with Grady Sizemore and Fausto Carmona. These are not as cut and dry as it may seem. Clearly, you could make a very strong case for keeping them both or jettisoning both. We come to find out this past week that Sizemore underwent yet another knee operation with Dr. Steadman in Colorado. This one was an arthroscopic procedure, which isn't as intensive as the microfracture surgery, but still a giant red flag.



Personally, I don't want Grady back at all. I don't even want him here on the pretense of an incentive-based contract. Let's focus on filling the position full-time rather than mess around with a player who will never be healthy again. I hope Grady has success in his future endeavors. I can't see it happening in Cleveland. What's the best case scenario in an incentive-based deal? What can we expect at the high end? What are we more likely to get? Will he even agree to such a deal when he might be offered more guaranteed money with a team who can take a chance on him?

There's no reward to me. With his health issues, the only thing we do is take up a roster spot for a guy who might be able to play 100 games. Then, we have a tough sell to get a good free agent in here because he will come to Cleveland knowing that we are committed to giving Sizemore a chance to re-prove himself. We tried the three day a week approach with Hafner. It didn't work out either.



Then there's Carmona. He has a multi-million dollar arm and a ten cent head. It's a shame. His mechanical problems are a big issue with pitching coach Tim Belcher stepping down. But, his option must be picked up. The starting pitching depth is pretty weak now with the Jimenez trade and Carmona is still a workhorse. To this point, he has had no arm troubles and takes the ball every fifth day.

In this market, you cannot let a Carmona just go by the wayside. He still has a lot of upside, even though the window of opportunity to get him put together is closing. The Indians backed themselves into a corner where they have no choice but to accept his option.

In terms of coaching, the Indians have to replace Tim Belcher. Triple-A pitching coach Ruben Niebla or bullpen coach Scott Radinsky are the front-runners. Either man should do well. Sandy Alomar has replaced Tim Tolman as the bench coach leaving a first base coaching vacancy.

People have begun to get nostalgic about the idea of Kenny Lofton coming back to the Indians to be the first base coach after Manny Acta said he wanted somebody to help with outfield instruction and base stealing. Seems like Kenny Lofton's resume fits that bill. Someone actually [asked Kenny Lofton on Twitter and his answer was that his options were always open](#). Shelley Duncan retweeted the post.

Another candidate for this would be Rick Manning. I have no idea how Manning would be with the players, but he was an outfield instructor during Spring Training for a while. He clearly has ties to the organization, was a center fielder, and constantly talks about baserunning while in the booth.

I think both guys would be a little difficult for the players to reach and may not be the most approachable. Manning would probably do better because he's used to traveling with the team and probably already has his brain picked by certain players. Lofton, on the other hand, owns an entertainment company and may not want to go back the on-the-road lifestyle he left behind after 2007.

Regardless of what happens with these decisions, the most important decisions will come later in the offseason. As a small market team, selecting the free agents who fit the best is crucial. Money is not readily available and any spending decision must be correct. See Dellucci, David as an example of an incorrect decision. GM Chris Antonetti has told the Cleveland media that the payroll will increase. That has to be music to any fan's ears. It's not enough to throw money at the problem and hope it works itself out. The spending decisions have to be well thought out and researched. If they need to go out of their comfort zone to acquire a better player than one whose demands are within their comfort zone, it must be done. Add an extra year of financial security.

Despite the Tigers win over the Yankees in the playoffs, this is still a winnable division. They'll be another year older next year and probably will have the same postseason hangover that the Indians had in 2008. The time is now.

And finally, I'd like to thank everybody who takes the time to read my column. It's an honor to write for TheClevelandFan and the people I've met through the website are all outstanding individuals. I may put together a VftP post depending on any big transactions made by the team, but, for now, if you like my writing enough, you can check out my weekly Blue Jackets columns.

It's been a joy to write for all of you and VftP will be back on its regular schedule when the Indians head for Goodyear. Stay safe everybody.