

In his end of the season presser yesterday, Mark Shapiro sarcastically downplayed any thoughts of adding another big bat to this lineup next season. And that, says Erik Cassano, is flawed thinking. With an incredibly weak class of free agent relievers set to hit the market, and with the Indians financial limitations, Papa Cass argues that ignoring any means of potentially upgrading the roster is a mistake. Especially heading into a make or break year for Shapiro and the team.



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Just so we're clear, Indians GM **Mark Shapiro** thinks his team has enough offense for next year.

In an [Plain Dealer article](#) Wednesday, Shapiro basically scoffed at the idea of adding a big bat to the lineup.

"So that would mean we'd finish first in the big leagues in runs instead of second?" he sarcastically asked reporters.

Any wet dreams you had about Gary Sheffield or Alfonso Soriano donning the Wahoo next year can be quickly put to bed. The Indians aren't looking for sticks. And to me, that's flawed thinking by Shapiro.

Is rebuilding the bullpen the number one priority? Of course, and Shapiro is right to jump on that the instant the World Series ends. But if you focus solely on the bullpen and neglect other areas of the team, it's going to become a repeat of last offseason. Shapiro and his crew are going to head into the winter with the best of intentions and come out with a team that is worse for the wear.

The ability of Shapiro to improve the bullpen is going to be extremely limited this winter, as will be the case for every GM in baseball. The well might quickly run dry.

This year's free agent class of relievers is downright sad. There isn't a Bob Wickman in the bunch, let alone a Trevor Hoffman or B.J. Ryan. All the big-name relievers like Eric Gagne, Keith Foulke and Dustin Hermanson come with major injury caveats. Beyond that is a long list

of has-beens and never-will-be's.

There are always trades, but what are the odds that any team that has a reliever worth acquiring is going to want to trade him?

Look at it this way: if the infinitely-endowed Yankees are trotting out Scott Proctor and Kyle Farnsworth in playoff games, you know the bullpen situation is bleak throughout baseball.

So while the Indians are busy grasping at straws, trying to find veteran relievers to stabilize the bullpen, a far stronger class of hitters and starting pitchers will pass them by.

If you can't really address a weakness the way you want to, strengthen the strengths of your team. It all adds up to the net sum of improving the team. Unfortunately, it doesn't appear that Shapiro is thinking that way.

If the Indians approach next season with the same offense, the same starting rotation and a markedly improved bullpen, I'll be happy. But if Shapiro doesn't widen his scope of thinking, it is highly likely that the Indians will approach next season with the same offense, the same starting rotation, and Octavio Dotel (or worse) as the closer. I have a big problem with that.

If you can't pull the bullpen entirely out of the mud, and the free agency and trade landscape says you won't, at least add to the offense and starting pitching so they can mask your weakness, and try to do some more tinkering with the 'pen early in the season.

This is a make-or-break year for Shapiro. He is a free agent GM next fall. If he wants to cash in with elite GM bucks, either here or elsewhere, he can ill-afford to sit on his hands this winter. GMs of 78-84 teams generally don't cash in. And that's what Shapiro is right now.