

## I'm Not Sold On It, What About Choo?

Written by {ga=edtherevelator}

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The 2012 Indians, as they stand today, is a team so filled with x-factors, it almost seems redundant to single out another one on the club. Despite this, there's a seemingly forgotten man in the Indians outfield, who could be a huge boost to the Indians' playoff dreams. Unfortunately for Cleveland fans looking for something certain this upcoming season, Shin-Shoo Choo is as big of a question mark as any player on the offense, and the Indians desperately need the right fielder to have a bounce-back year. However, the Tribe needs to be cautious and pay Choo according to how much value he brings to the team.

Don't believe that the Indians need Choo to bounce back? From 2008 – 2010, Choo was worth an average of 4.7 wins, according to Fangraphs. For a guy making not much more than the league minimum during that time, that's huge value for any team, but especially a cost-conscious team such as the Tribe. However, Choo is no longer making peanuts, and if having Scott Boras as his agent is any inclination, he's looking to get paid. Choo already received a raise prior to last year, when he went from making \$461,100 to \$3.975 million. Unfortunately, the Indians were more paying for Choo's previous accomplishments than the value he actually provided in 2011.

Choo's season never really got on track last year, in part due to an embarrassing DUI arrest in early May. Although he put on a brave face in the days immediately after the incident, he later admitted during the season that it had been a distraction. Throw in a broken thumb in late June, and an oblique injury that effectively ended his season in September, and it was an all-around disappointing year for Choo, who was finally freed of that nagging Korean military obligation. Choo wasn't worthless (1.4 fWAR), still playing solid defense and he was still getting on base (.344 OBP), but it was obvious something was wrong, and he was only able to play in 84 games the entire season.

Now, in his second arbitration-eligible year, still refusing to sign a multi-year extension with

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Boras at his side, Choo is again due for a raise (although not as substantial as last year's raise). Choo's hampering the Indians' payroll flexibility with these year-to-year shenanigans. I understand it is Choo's right to have arbitration due to his service time, but he's got to start earning his money again.

However, I'd like to caution the Tribe should Choo suddenly show a willingness to a multi-year deal, especially one that would buy out any free agent years. Why? Because Choo likely isn't going to get much better than Indians fans have already seen. Choo's numbers in 2010 were eerily similar to his 2009 statistics. Is a player with a WAR around 5.0 valuable at a reasonable salary? Hell yes. But don't sign Choo to a fat contract and hope he becomes an MVP candidate. It's not going to happen. Choo is a useful and valuable player, but he's not going to turn a team around by himself.

Choo will be 30 this season. I'm all for signing him through his arbitration years and maybe a year of free agency, just so the Indians will know they had Choo in his prime. When you throw in the added uncertainty of the rest of the outfield (Is Michael Brantley an everyday player? Can Sizemore still play?), it becomes apparent how much the Indians need Choo to provide some kind of reliable output in 2012. If the Indians are serious about contending, they need Choo not only to be a steady force in the lineup like he has been in the past, but also an anchor in a suddenly shaky defensive outfield.

But Choo needs to step up this year, from Opening Day onward and prove he's worthy of such a contract. All the distractions are behind him now. It is now all on him to prove that he's as valuable as he apparently wants to be paid.

I just caution the Indians to make him earn it.