

Shapiro 10/25 Radio Interview Recap

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Wednesday, October 25 2006 7:00 PM -

In his most recent radio interview, Indians GM Mark Shapiro was as candid as ever as he touched on what he is doing right now, what he learned from last season, Farm Director John Farrell leaving, the Wickman trade, and more. He also even openly expresses how tough it is for him to watch the Tigers in the World Series, and how bitter he is about it.



In a surprise interview late last night, WTAM 1100's Kevin Keane spoke with Indians General Manager Mark Shapiro for about 15 minutes on several topics related to the Indians. While some of what Shapiro said is re-hashed GM-speak from previous interviews, there were some new interesting insights provided by him. Here is a comprehensive rundown of what was talked about, and what Shapiro said.

On what Shapiro is doing right now: Two days after the season ended, he went to the Florida Instructional League to get the lowdown on some of the players up for roster protection this off-season as well as players in the mix to make the team next year. After that, he returned to his offices at Jacob's Field and talked with scouts to evaluate the team's 2006 performance, and also get a feeling of what these players can provide in 2007 and beyond. Currently, he is getting ready to sit down with Eric Wedge and other decision makers in the front office to formulate their off-season plan on what players to try to obtain via free agency, trade or internationally. Once this plan is finalized, they will submit it to the Dolan's so they can determine a firm number on what will be available dollars-wise.

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On what he learned this year: What happened this year just rings home his belief that there is so much volatility in bullpens and they are the toughest position to project and fill with reliable players. In the past, Shapiro tended to look for value in some of the free agent position players he signed, but when doing that he tended to undervalue the importance of defense with those players. Going forward, the organization will make a greater attempt to emphasize the importance of sound defense.

On Farrell leaving: Shapiro mentioned that he was not expecting Farrell to leave the organization. Farrell not only directed the Indians minor league operations, but he also was a strong voice in the front office. What Shapiro will probably miss most is what Farrell brought to the decision making dynamic with the team. Even so, after his sudden departure, the system will survive. Ross Atkins is ready to assume Farrell's role, and is someone they always felt highly on in regard to being a Farm Director someday. It just happened sooner rather than later.

On the change in the dynamic of the team: If a positive can be taken from 2006, Shapiro mentioned the biggest was how the core players stepped up and showed they are ready to take on a leadership role with the team. With the core of the team getting older, for the most part they are now the veterans of this team that can be relied upon to lead and influence young players. It no longer is necessary to add veterans to the team to provide leadership. With this change in dynamics of the team, Shapiro stated that this now opens the door for a whole new group of players he can pursue in free agency and trades.

On some of last year's roster decisions: Shapiro was asked about the thought process that went into some of the decisions where the Indians decided to go with veterans Jason Johnson, Danny Graves, and Ramon Vazquez over some of their young kids like Jeremy Sowers, Fausto Carmona, Jason Davis and Brandon Phillips. Shapiro responded by stating every situation is

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unique, and the goal always is to win as many games as possible. With young players, Shapiro feels there is a lot of volatility (this is Shapiro's favorite word by the way), and they are very unpredictable. With the veterans, they have a track record and are more predictable in their expected performance and reliable. In the end, when the goal is winning, they tended to lean on the veterans more than the young players to start the season. The thought was to go with the veterans, but upgrade as you go in the season after you see what you have.

On the handling of young players: Shapiro was asked if there was some hesitancy to play the kids. Shapiro responded that there are no guarantees with young players, even with the ones who came up late last year and performed well. You always want to promote your own, but you also have to always look at the situation from every possible angle. When the Indians make certain roster decisions, the Indians will balance where a young player is better suited for the team than an external player. Shapiro did mention one caveat in regard to the success some of the players called up late in the year had. While it was good to see the players perform, he also understands that at the end of the year things are much different than on April 1st. While the young players did perform well, there also was no pressure and they were able to play very loose because post-season aspirations were no longer possible. There is a lot more pressure to perform when you are expected to win on April 1st than when you are out of contention late in the year and the pressure to meet expectations are pretty much gone.

On fixing some of the problems from last year: Shapiro acknowledged that we all want players who are perfect in that they hit for power, average, play great defense, and have good speed. But, it just is not possible to have a collection or perfect players on your team, so you need to pick your warts so to speak. This team can live with some imperfections, but he also feels when you have a group of players with like imperfections (for example, the infield defense last year), those imperfections can be exploited.

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On the Wickman trade: Even if the Indians knew he was coming back for another year, he is still uncertain he would not have still made the deal. The Indians felt they needed to find out about Carmona as a closer, so that impacted the decision. Also, at the time of the trade, the Indians had every indication that Wickman was retiring at season's end. For whatever unexplained reason, Wickman picked up 3-4 MPH velocity on his fastball with the Braves, and this combined with his success in Atlanta probably lead to him wanting to pitch another year.

On the search for a closer: The closer role for 2007 will have to be filled creatively, which is nothing new as the organization was able to find closer's creatively in the 90s (Jose Mesa and Mike Jackson). Shapiro was asked about trying to do a Joe Nathan-type deal that the Twins did a few years ago, but Shapiro remarked that he and several other teams are trying to do the same thing. The Indians are scouting the Pacific Rim for talent, and could really go any route in finding a closer, whether it be an international signing, a free agent, or by trade.

On the makeup of the team: Shapiro did admit that there was a sense of swagger and confidence missing a lot last season; however, he felt the resiliency of the club was outstanding. The team suffered many tough losses last year, but always came back the next night ready to play and win. Also, while the team appeared to play well the last few months as a direct result of the influx of youth on the team, it isn't as cut and dry that the reason the team improved its play was a result of the youth.

On the MLB playoffs: Shapiro has watched some of the post-season action, mostly the National League games. He mentioned it is tough to watch Detroit, as he harbors some bitterness that they are in the playoffs and the Indians are not (he really seemed to be coming

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across as feeling “it should be us, not them, but I blew it”). Also, when watching the National League clubs, Shapiro felt they all were not very good and that 8-9 AL teams were better. Definitely an opportunity missed, and he said it stings.