



Being the General Manager of a professional sports team can't be an easy job. There are a lot of sleepless nights. To a lot of people, you're only as good as the last move you made. You have more numbers thrown in front of you than the people who calculated pi for the first time. You're an idiot one minute and a genius the next. The rate of success expected from a GM is staggering, whether your hands are tied or whether you have an owner that's willing to write a seven-figure check at the drop of a hat.

Chris Antonetti's job sucks. Let's be honest about it. Yeah, it'd be great to work in sports. There's no denying that, on the surface, it seems like one of the best jobs in the world. There are a lot of perks, for sure. But, those perks are outweighed several times over by the endless hardships of the job. Fan scrutiny. Media scrutiny. Constant pressure.

The Indians win on Thursday night against Justin Verlander and the Detroit Tigers made Antonetti's job exponentially harder for the next five days. Had the Indians lost and fallen five games back, Antonetti could have sat on his hands. He could have even traded away some of the Major Leaguers to help replenish a depleted farm system if the market was there for what he made available. One inning changed all of the expectations for Antonetti and probably turned the Indians into a buyer as opposed to an observer or seller. The loss against the Twins hurt, particularly because the White Sox, but also because it turned a big momentum swing into a game the Indians just gave back.

Far too often in this "What have you done for me, lately?" society, the good things are forgotten as soon as something unfavorable happens. Overall, there are a lot of good things that Antonetti has done. Hell, he poached Thursday starter Zach McAllister, who went punch-for-punch with Verlander, from the Yankees for the corpse of Austin Kearns. Joe Smith,

who got the crucial double play ground ball from Miguel Cabrera, was acquired for Franklin Gutierrez and Luis Valbuena, neither of whom have done much of anything since leaving Cleveland. Thursday's closer, Chris Perez, was acquired for Mark DeRosa. Remember that guy? Those three players have been critical to the Indians this season, and Perez and Smith played big roles last year as well. They were acquired for spare parts.

But, what do people remember about Antonetti? They remember the guy who traded Alex White and Drew Pomeranz for Ubaldo Jimenez. Pomeranz has a 5.11 ERA in 13 starts. White has given up 71 runs in 17 starts. That part is left out when people talk about how bad (more accurately, inconsistent) Jimenez has been. The anti-Antonetti crowd is so transfixed with the "potential" that Pomeranz and White still possess that they forget the purpose of the trade. The purpose was to get somebody to help the Indians immediately. Jimenez, warts and all, has been more of a help than White and Pomeranz would have been. In that respect, Antonetti did his job. Certainly the trade can be second-guessed, and should be second-guessed, considering that the Indians probably could have gotten somebody different with those two players. But, the overall objective was to help the ballclub now. That's what Jimenez has done.

Now, as the 2012 Trade Deadline approaches, Antonetti is in the unenviable position of trying to improve the ballclub with a depleted farm system, a low supply-high demand market, and a limited amount of financial resources available. Discontent has grown among Indians fans because the White Sox went out and got Kevin Youkilis and Brett Myers. The Tigers went and got Anibal Sanchez and Omar Infante. They have owners who can reach into their pocket and pay cash for acquisitions. To hate the Dolans because they can't do that is just unfair.

The purpose of this week's View from the Porch isn't to make excuses for Antonetti. I think there are upgrades out there that the Indians should be pursuing. I have faith that Antonetti is pursuing some of the same players that I'm thinking of. I don't think he's afraid to take chances. It doesn't really get fancier than Ubaldo Jimenez. I also think that Antonetti is fair game if the only move the Indians make is to acquire Brent Lillibridge, a 25<sup>th</sup> man on *maybe* half the rosters in the league.

Too many people have a misconception about how baseball trades work. They are far from cut and dry. Not only do you have to find a player you want to acquire, but you have to come up with a package of players that is better than the other offers on the table. Then, you have to go back and forth with the GM as he gets counter-proposals, as players get included and excluded, as other teams enter the mix. Then, if you get lucky enough to agree to a deal, you have to approach your ownership and make sure that the finances work out. Some of these transactions take weeks or even months of planning to get all of the pieces and parts in order.

With the Indians situation, Antonetti has probably had to change his philosophy 10 or more times regarding if he should buy, sell, stand pat, or wait and see. That makes trading incredibly hard. Antonetti knows that the Indians, in their current state, are not a World Series contender and probably not a playoff contender. Even if they somehow made it to the playoffs, their rotation is not good enough to match up against the lineups of Texas, New York, or Anaheim. Furthermore, he's also aware that one player probably doesn't change the dynamic enough to matter. A rental player who is a free agent after the season is a waste of an asset, whether it's a minor league or simple cash. That player or money is gone. It cannot be used at another time when the Indians might need it more. Prospects improve all the time and enhance their trade value. You'd hate to deal a kid who suddenly figures it out and you don't have his increased value available for no reason.

What we've got here is a situation where Antonetti's possible trade targets are incredibly limited and so is the amount of teams who have players like this available. The checklist for Antonetti would include: manageable contract, signed past this season, at a position of need (3B/LF/SP/1B), and cost-effective to acquire. By "cost-effective to acquire", I mean that the player the Indians are getting would have to produce enough to make his salary worth it and also not cost the Indians a high price in terms of what they give up to acquire.

It's not as simple as seeing Hanley Ramirez available and saying, "I want that guy! I'm going to get him!" It can't be. Hanley Ramirez has hit around .240 for the last two seasons, is guaranteed \$31M for the next two seasons, plus whatever his pro-rated contract was for 2012. A \$15M contract would account for somewhere between 20-25% of the Indians payroll. Would Hanley improve the Indians? Absolutely. He fills a position of need, he's a right handed bat, and he's signed past this season. But, is he cost-effective? Paying Hanley what you could pay two players to fill two holes, and then considering that he's regressing as a ballplayer, makes him, for lack of a better term, cost-ineffective.

It's a gamble that you cannot get wrong. The best way I can describe it is this. Imagine the Indians as a guy standing at a craps table. The table has a \$5 minimum bet and the man walks up to the table with \$20. He looks down and is fixated by some of the exotic bets (30/1 for rolling a 12, 30/1 for rolling snake eyes). He plops down the first of his four \$5 chips on 30/1 for a 12. He looks down in his hands, getting all excited about turning his meager \$5 into \$150 on one roll of the dice. The dice are thrown. The die closest to him lands on a six. A smile appears on his face. He jerks his neck upward to look at the second die. It's a one. The bet is a loser.

Dejectedly, the man puts another \$5 bet down on an exotic, this time, 11. The roll of an 11 pays 15/1. Two fours are rolled. Another bet down the drain. Looking around the table for something to just get his money back, the man spots the “Field” section, where a 2, 3, 4, 9, 10, 11, 12 are all winners. Thinking this has a great chance of happening, he throws his remaining \$10 on it. The dice get thrown into the air. A four and a two land on the table making six. The gambling man lost \$20 in three rolls of the dice.

On the other side of the table, another man who got \$20 worth of chips is patiently playing the “Pass Line” (a bet generally made before the first roll where a 7 or 11 are automatic winners, a 2, 3, or 12 is a loser, and any other number is the “point”; if the point is subsequently rolled before a 7, the bet wins, if a 7 is rolled before the point, the bet loses). He won \$5 on his first bet when a seven came up on the first roll. His second bet was neither a winner, nor a loser because an eight was rolled. The next number was a six, so the bet remains in play. He’s still at the table because of his conservative approach to the game. He’s only up \$5, but it’s better than being down \$20.

For anyone who has never played craps, that may be a hard analogy to follow. The overriding point is this. A gambler will occasionally win, as a 12 has a 1.39% chance of happening. An 11 has a 2.78% chance of happening. The “Field” section has 16 dice combinations that are winners out of 36 possible combinations, giving that a 44.4% chance of happening. All of those bets give an enormous advantage to the house. Betting the “Pass Line” gives the house a .42% edge. Its chance of happening is dependent on what number is rolled on the first turn.

It’s fine to be a gambler if you have the bankroll to support the chances that you take. If the man betting the high-risk, high-reward exotics had more money, he would eventually hit one of those bets and win back his money, and possibly some profit. But, he didn’t have that luxury. He had four minimum bets available. He chose to go for the home run instead of build his bankroll one hit at a time. He struck out. The other guy singled and has fouled off a couple of pitches. He’s still in the game.

A lot of starting pitchers aren’t really options either because they’re rental players. In an open, free market, the Indians cannot compete with big-market franchises. A lot of guys would easily make the Indians rotation exponentially better. But, they’re gone after the season. Not only do you have to give up a lot to get them, you get them for two-and-a-half months. If you don’t make the playoffs, it looks like a gigantic waste, and rightfully so. That’s just not the way to operate when you can’t take blank checks and fill in the required amount.

Will I be upset on Wednesday if Antonetti has done nothing to improve the team? Admittedly, I can't say yes until I see what happens with the entire weekend series against Minnesota, but, if the Indians are in the same spot they are now, I would be upset. There are enough upgrades out there that make the team a win or two better. That win or two could be the difference in the Central. Despite the Tigers and White Sox each getting hot at different times, they're still mediocre teams that have lived off their one hot streak.

No matter what happens, I firmly believe that Antonetti tried as hard as he could to improve the ballclub. Even though a deal may not get done, it's ludicrous to think that Antonetti didn't even try. His job is not easy. There are so many factors in play for him in any trade negotiation that he probably gets just as frustrated as all of us do.

The expression "stuck between a rock and a hard place" couldn't be more appropriate for the situation Antonetti is in.