You have to give the Indians some credit. They've struck really early the past few offseasons, making trades right off the bat when they know who they want. Last year it was Derek Lowe, now it is Mike Aviles, who has just been traded twice in a matter of days.

There is another statement that the Indians are making with the early move that they've made to acquire utility man Mike Aviles, who they traded reliever Esmil Rogers for this past weekend. They're making a bold statement that they're ready to compete for the AL Central.

Sure they did that last year too when they acquired Derek Lowe, but there was an expectation to. After two straight collapses of disappointing years, a fired manager, and the upcoming contract statuses of several players, there is a belief that trying to contend is the wrong move.

But the Indians are going for it and something as simple as acquiring a utility player tells us just that.

So let's look at the trade that has ignited a fire to this offseason and, at least in my opinion, has got the Indians off to the right start, if they do in fact decide to go for it.

**[SWAPPING PIECES]**

**Mike Aviles** was traded not long ago, in fact it was on October 21st when he went from Boston to Toronto in the John Farrell to Boston move. He's a former Royal and has really carved out a niche as a utility infielder that can play more than the average backup and play at several spots. He was a guy who started a lot for the Royals, but as we've come to see with his time in Boston, he's best served as a guy who fills in. He could start on some teams, but he's that much better as a backup.

A few years ago the Indians signed Jamey Carroll to be a bench player and honestly, he worked out really well for the team. He was a guy who could fill in every day if needed at any infield spot. Now they have a guy who is perhaps a little bit better in Aviles and along with that, they have someone who is right-handed. you heard me. A right-handed option off the bench that can do a little of everything will be a nice addition to this team.

But perhaps the biggest motivating factor for the Indians in this trade was their shortstop who is currently the starter. The Indians have effectively ended any and all speculation that Asdrubal Cabrera will be going anywhere because the acquisition of Aviles does not say they're intending on shopping Cabrera around, but that they are keeping Cabrera for the foreseeable future.

*"That was part of our motivation," Indians general manager Chris Antonetti said. "The last couple of years, when Asdrubal has either gone down for injury or wasn't available for some reason, or we wanted to rest him, unfortunately, we didn't have that reliable shortstop alternative to turn to. With Mike, we clearly now have that."*

This is always happening! Just as I put out a piece that examines the shortstop position this past weekend, meant to examine not just what the Indians should do this offseason, but where they stand as an organization, this happens. If this Aviles thing comes out a little earlier or I decide to wait on shortstop, then well, it is a lot more boring piece of course, but it does add some definitiveness.

So if you want me to influence what happens, just give me something to influence. I did it last year with routine consistency, penning an opinion and then seeing it destroyed almost instantly before it gets to marinate in your mind.

Next, I probably should talk about left field, maybe then the Indians will do something there instead of ignoring it for years.

Okay, maybe I've digressed a little. But here we are now, with not only a starting shortstop but a really really good backup. You remember there was times that Manny Acta was almost forced to play his battered up shortstop despite injuries, nicks, cuts, bruises, what have you. Now Cabrera can sit and not be forced into the lineup every single day. He can get breathers and if the Indians see him get something that should take him out of the lineup for a few days, they can easily place Aviles in there for a stretch and not worry about a sudden drop off that cripples the lineup.

Brent Lillibridge would have been a horrible option for that and it is clear Jason Donald isn't quite ready for it.

Instead of forcing Cabrera out there to perhaps play and hurt himself further, the Indians have themselves a safety net and a relief option.

Oh speaking of relief, that is exactly what the Indians used to get Aviles, a reliever. A reliever they picked up off the scrap heap in **Esmil Rogers**, got a half of a decent season out of and then traded away for a useful piece.

To me, that's brilliant. You picked up this guy for nothing and turned him into a utility player that could be a significant piece to a team. Not that Rogers couldn't have been a significant piece, but the Indians have a lot of depth in their bullpen in terms of young arms. And who's to say that his half a season with a 3.06 ERA (and even that isn't incredibly spectacular for half a season from a reliever) will be duplicated in anyway?

This is a big win for the Indians, considering what they gave up and what they got. And I haven't

even touched up on the fact that they also added a player in **Yan Gomes** (not to be confused with Ian Gomez
), that could be a rather interesting sub-plot to the Indians spring training drama.

He's a guy with some more versatility, a little pop and still young and untested at the major league level. He can play the corner spots on the infield but is mainly a catcher. And if you ask me, could be another feather in the Indians hat in regards to this trade. The Indians plan is to keep him behind the plate and they love what he brings to the table, with new coach Kevin Cash (who was a scout for Toronto in 2012) giving him an endorsement too.

*"[Gomes] has spent most of his career behind the plate," Antonetti said. "Toronto is an organization that is very deep, not only at the Major League level, but at the upper levels of the Minor Leagues, in catching. So Gomes did not have an opportunity to be a everyday catcher at every level. He had to earn his playing time and earn his at-bats, and he's done that."*

And because Aviles is a guy who can backup virtually all your infield spots, and Gomes could play there too, the Indians can not only have them both, but play around with their other backup spots. They have a DH spot open, they have some flexibility and they still don't know who their starting first baseman is. So really, Gomes is a sound add considering he could play any role you need him to. At worst he's the third catcher that plays first and third when you need him to. At best, he could be the backup, you can start Marson a lot and play Santana at first.

I don't know, on the surface, this deal looks like a potential steal in several ways and one that can fundamentally add good pieces to this club at a really small price. Aviles will be arbitration eligible and he earned over a million playing for Boston, but he should increase too much and with a lot of space open, the increase should be peanuts.

And if I could add in one more stellar point to the Aviles addition that I hinted at earlier. He's right-handed and not just right-handed, but right-handed with a history of hitting left-handed pitching. You can be right-handed, but if you can't hit lefties, you are not helping one thing that ailed this team last year and that was hitting against the lefties.

Aviles is a career .295 hitter against lefties, which is pretty respectable in 574 at-bats. That's a season's worth there and to me, is enough to prove that is something he can do consistently.

Last year it was a .286 average with five home runs, but he still hit .236 with eight homers in 388 at-bats against righties. So he's a guy who not only will backup, but play against left-handers a lot, which is nice in regards to having an option to give Chisenhall a break against the tough ones.

So now that I've gushed as much as I could about a trade involving spare parts, or anyone could, I'll just leave it at this... The Indians appeared to have made a real minor move that could end up playing major dividends in small but significant ways. There's a lot of positives in this trade and there appears to be little risk involved. Sure Rogers could go on and be electric for Toronto, but there are plenty of guys to replace him and the Indians are dealing from a position of strength, dealing someone who they picked up and turned around. They turned nothing into something.

**[OUTSIDE OPINION FROM AN INSIDER]**

One of the few people at ESPN that I can tolerate is Buster Olney. One of the others is Tim Kurkijan, but they don't give him nearly the time that he deserves. But Olney is a centerpiece to the ESPN reporting stable and one of the best in baseball when it comes to finding out news.

His opinion, is usually based off what he hears and someone as close to the game as he is, can offer something that one should really look at and consider.

In response to the Indians adding Aviles, he actually took the opposite direction as one would . Because Antonetti said one thing, we are lead to believe that Aviles' addition is to help **Asdrubal Cabrera** , not replace him. My first gut instinct was that it was to help him too, not replace him.

But Olney, on his insider account on ESPN (so you can't read it unless you are an ESPN Insider), said that the Indians should take advantage of Aviles addition and trade Cabrera. He says teams like Oakland, Seattle, Boston, or even the Yankees who could use him as a super utility player could be interested.

First off, only the Yankees could acquire someone else's All-Star shortstop and use him as a utility player. Granted they don't know what is happening with Cano in the future, Derek Jeter and A-Rod are both old and Jeter is coming off a broken ankle, and there could be room to play a lot (more than a utility player), but that's just, that's just insulting in a way.

Anyway, the Indians could do that as well as trade everyone else from Cabrera to Perez to Choo, even guys like Brantley and Kipnis. If they wanted to really rebuild, they could do that and really improve their farm system for years to come. But I don't think that is the most sound idea ever. The Indians have Aviles now and that move says they intend on keeping Cabrera, at least to start the year. They used their bullpen depth to trade for Aviles and could use it further in trading Chris Perez.

But a complete rebuild, having just signed Terry Francona to manage especially, seems like a bad idea.

**[RANDOM RUNDOWN]**

To kind of wrap up the talk about the Indians coaching staff is Terry Pluto's inside notes , even though he called Kevin Cash, "Keith", he seems to have some small details no one else does.

Pluto notes that it was Sandy Alomar Jr. who pushed hard for **Mike Sarbaugh** to be on the staff, which is fantastic and it also shows you that the Indians front office didn't really pressure Francona, but that the guys he wanted, Alomar and Brad Mills, were the ones pushing him most to hire certain guys.

The other candidate for the pitching coach job was Kirk Champion, a former Francona mate when Tito was the manager of Double-A Birmingham. He's bee in the White Sox organization, but he lost out to the Indians Callaway, who Francona says could be a star and was actually targeted because he had "limited" experience and could probably bring a new approach.

The old star the Indians had was Tim Belcher but of course he took a back seat to be an adviser and he was actually helping with the staff interviews.

The trade for Aviles wasn't the only move the Indians made that impacted their 40-man roster. Essentially replacing Rogers will be right-hander **Blake Wood**, who was jettisoned from the Royals and claimed off waivers. Wood was out in 2012 due to Tommy John surgery. He won't be around to start the season or in spring because his surgery took place in May and we know how long that takes. He'll essentially be someone the Indians stash until he's ready.

But he does have more of a live arm, being able to hit the mid-90s with his fastball before surgery. So maybe he could be an effective scrap heap pick-up down the road. Otherwise, who cares.

The Indians added their three injured pitchers, Carlos Carrasco, Josh Tomlin, and Rafael Perez to the 40-man roster. Tomlin will go back on the 60-day disabled list when that is allowed and you have to think Wood will join him. The 40-man number is now at 39 with the additions and you have to think that with the Indians needing to add Rule V guys, some cuts are probably going to have to happen at some point.

The Indians had a pair represent the team in the Arizona League Rising Stars game out in Arizona last week. **Trey Haley** got an out but also walked a hitter and gave up a hit. A scout said that his command is all over the place and a bad arm action. The East beat the West and **Alex Mosalve** went 0-for-1 as the backup catcher.

I know a lot of people are excited about the Angels letting Dan Haren lose, but I wouldn't. It would be a lot for the Indians to get him and simply too many teams that will be knocking on his door. He had a down year thanks to some injuries but should be back, I would count on that, as would most teams.

Congratulations to Michael Brantley for winning the second annual and final Manny Acta Golden Fedora of Greatness. Brantley had the slight edge over Vinnie Pestano and won the August monthly award. I'd say that is a fair pick given that Brantley was the most consistent player from start to finish and had a good season for the Indians.

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*Nino can be found with glue and scissors and pictures of Vinnie Pestano and himself on The Tribe Daily, his own Indians blog. Hearts may or may not be invovled.*

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