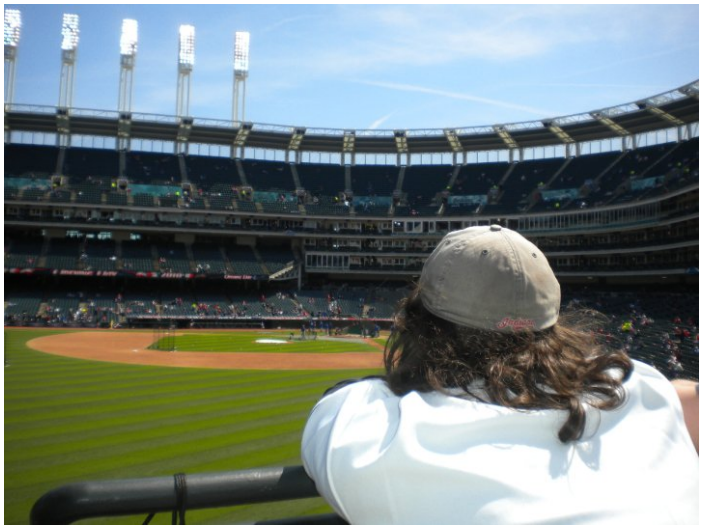

We found out a lot about the Indians this week at the Winter Meetings. They were one of the most aggressive ballclubs in Nashville, TN, looking into several free agent outfielders and meeting with several teams regarding an Asdrubal Cabrera trade. After all of that, General Manager Chris Antonetti left the Winter Meetings with a roster no better (or worse) than he had when he left Cleveland. The Indians created several lines of communication, were active in the bidding process for several free agents, and have given off the impression that they have money to spend. In that regard, the week was a success.

However, the week had to be considered a bit of a disappointment for Chris Antonetti. The detractors always argue that the Indians are a victim of their tight financial resources, not having enough money to be seriously considered by free agents. This week, they offered Shane Victorino a four-year, $44M deal and he turned them down for more annual money, but less total money, from the Boston Red Sox. We don't know Antonetti's final offer to Jason Bay, but he took a $1M base salary plus incentives from the Mariners. Bay lives in Seattle, his wife's hometown, so the Indians were behind the eight-ball there anyway. The Indians are waiting for a response from Kevin Youkilis, after a reported offer of two years, $18M. The Yankees, who will be without Alex Rodriguez until after mid-season, have offered one year at $12M. Despite being a former Red Sock, and husband to New England Patriots QB Tom Brady's sister, Youk continues to weigh his options. Nick Swisher is contemplating an offer from the Indians, reportedly in the four-year, $48M range. Swisher, a Columbus native and Ohio State alum, didn't jump at the chance to play in his home state right away.

These are **very** competitive offers from the Indians, who certainly have the reputation of being short on funds and settling for free agents that are past their prime. Even with competitive offers, the Indians are still playing the role of the bridesmaid. Athletes are often viewed as greedy, money-hungry individuals who seemingly can't have enough Benjamins. The Indians spent this past week offering more total money to players they were interested in, but still lost

out. Why? Because players still want to win.

The Indians have not won in a long time and they haven't won consistently in almost a decade and a half. Players that become too rich for the ownership's blood are shipped off to other places. Cleveland is not an ideal place to raise a family. Fan support is wishy-washy at best. The weather sucks. Cleveland is a very difficult sell for free agents, even when the Indians do step up to the plate financially.

None of this is breaking news. This past week served as another reminder of why it's so difficult to be a small-to-mid-market team. If odds were set on a free agent bidding war, the Indians would probably be the biggest underdog. Instead of taking the doom and gloom approach, I want to be more philosophical about what we saw and heard this week. The Indians' actions provided a lot of context and a lot of things to talk about. Frankly, I was extremely surprised with what transpired throughout the week, and it was nearly the polar opposite from what I wrote about in last week's View from the Porch.

Last week, I cautioned fans that this would be a very difficult offseason and that the only Indians news we'd get out of the Winter Meetings was the potential trades of Shin-Soo Choo and Asdrubal Cabrera. We heard very little about Choo. Cabrera was talked about at length by national media and nothing ever came of every rumor we heard. What I didn't anticipate was the level of activity that the Indians had in the free agent market. Frankly, the reason it shocked me is because I felt the Indians have far too many needs to address given their projected payroll and I expect the Indians to struggle mightily to be near .500 in 2013.

Realistically, I have to applaud Antonetti and his staff for actively trying to improve the ballclub with players who still have a few years of production left in them. It's a refreshing change of pace, considering what we've grown accustomed to. That being said, I'm not sure it's the right course of action to take. I don't have a problem with trying to get better and I think that's what Antonetti is thinking. I'll use a baseball analogy to explain what I mean.

Think of it this way: Antonetti is standing at the plate with a 3-1 count. He gets a free swing to give it a rip and see what happens. Nobody expects the Indians to be a contender this season and nobody expected this to be the time that the Indians were noteworthy players in free agency. If he swings and misses, he's still at the plate with a 3-2 count. If he connects, he might hit a double in the gap, knock one out of the park, or simply ground out. It's hard to fault a player for taking a healthy cut with a 3-1 count, so long as they're being selective. Antonetti is being

very selective. He's attacking two of the Indians' biggest weaknesses, first base and left field, head on. If he swings at a bad pitch and misses, at least he took a chance.

What cannot happen is that Antonetti is standing there with a 3-2 count and takes strike three. Basically, the worst thing he could do is do nothing. Negotiating with free agents is great. Not signing them is disappointing, but not the end of the world. If the count goes to 3-2, the best move for Antonetti is simply to take his walk – a free pass. If he trades Cabrera for pitching, or trades Choo, Perez, Masterson, Jimenez, etc., nobody views that as a negative. The team will have a more promising future.

Again, the worst thing that Antonetti can do is sit on his hands. If he misses out on the free agent targets they have set their sights on, he has to move to Plan B. Plan B would be the route that includes trading Cabrera and whoever else teams are asking about. The goal is to improve for 2013 and beyond. Whether that means signing Kevin Youkilis for two years, Nick Swisher for four years, and adding pitching or trading the assets that we have, I'll be content with either scenario, so long as we improve.

As for my personal thoughts on Youkilis and Swisher, I fully support both moves. Youkilis's value goes up quite a bit by being a full-time first baseman and it should help him produce offensively. Swisher would be a great addition to the ballclub. One word I've seen regarding Swisher has been "douche". I think he's just misunderstood. He's a free spirit and it did not fit in at all with the Yankees and their ideals. Even with the Yankees trying to lasso Swisher, and him not being the most popular player in the clubhouse, he put that aside and produced three straight years of an OPS above .800. Like I told fellow TCF colleague Tom Moore, "He's a douche until he's your douche." Sort of like Albert Belle, minus the roid rage. Belle was definitely an abrasive, unlikable prick. But, when he was our prick, we loved him.

I'll be curious to see what happens next week. If Youkilis and/or Swisher sign, I want to see what the next step is. I want to know what free agent pitchers they're interested in. If Youkilis and/or Swisher don't sign, how do they compensate? If one signs, do they try to address the need that didn't get filled right away? Do they start opening up more trade negotiations? Ironically, I think that's what Youkilis and Swisher both want to know and why they're waiting so long to make their decisions.

I was pleasantly surprised by Antonetti and his staff this week and I hope that trend continues throughout the offseason. They have made their demands very clear for any Asdrubal Cabrera

trade and they've shown a willingness to offer good money to improve the roster. If the rest of the offseason goes like this, the future should look pretty bright by the time Spring Training rolls around.