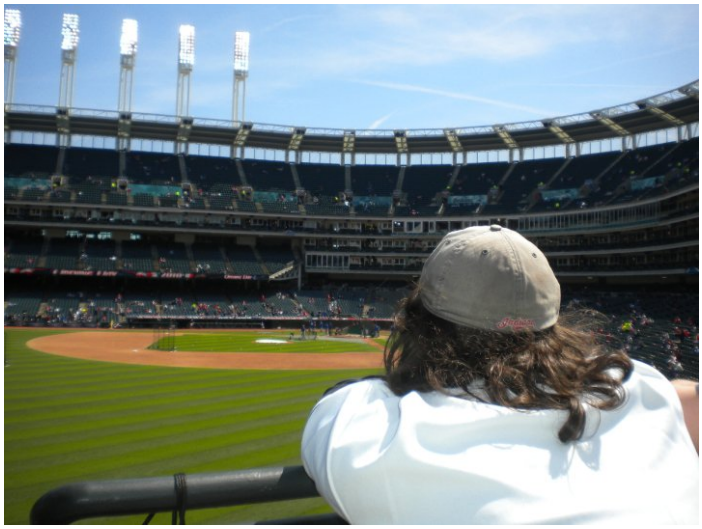

Chris Antonetti wants the Indians to be in contention in 2013. That's the only explanation for the free agent signings that the team has made. This Indians team, which looked like it would struggle to avoid 90 losses again, has been filling holes left and right with free agents and could find a way to sneak into contention if they keep adding to the roster. Antonetti has shown no signs of slowing down this offseason.

The Dolans appear to be willing to spend some money, possibly due to the sale of SportsTime Ohio to Fox Sports and the additional money they will receive on a yearly basis for the rights to broadcast the Indians. The interesting thing about the free agent signings is that, outside of Swisher, these are all very short-term deals and a lack of talent at the top levels of the Indians' farm system will create the same holes at the start of 2014.

But, is it going to be enough? Can the Indians patch enough holes to keep the boat afloat into late September and be a factor in the Central Division? Whether or not they can depends on the answers to a lot of questions. On Tuesday, we finally closed the book on 2012, ending one of the worst calendar years in franchise history. Even though the planning for the 2013 season has gone on for quite a while at the corner of Carnegie and Ontario, the calendar officially turning over has to be a welcomed sight.

The slate has been wiped clean. Terry Francona is the new manager. The roster looks a hell of a lot different than it looked on October 3. The financial handcuffs seem to temporarily be removed. Things are definitely looking up for the Tribe, but doing things on paper is never enough. The players that were signed via free agency and acquired via trade, as well as the players who have stayed, need to produce.

With that in mind, this week's View from the Porch will pose a lot of questions that we won't know the answers to for quite some time. Since baseball is based off of nines, here are the top nine questions of 2013.

1. How do the Indians handle Trevor Bauer?

Trevor Bauer comes to the Indians with a lot of promise and a lot of raw talent. In the Diamondbacks organization, Bauer was fast-tracked to the Show, pitching just 162 minor league innings. At the Major League level, in his brief four-start stint, Bauer lacked command and maturity. As I discussed back in mid-December, Bauer is under a lot of pressure to be "the guy" on this pitching staff and he must deliver.

It's important for the Indians to seriously evaluate Bauer during Spring Training and to figure out what the best course of action is to take. Starting Bauer in Triple-A wouldn't be the worst thing in the world. Unpopular? Absolutely. The right move? Maybe.

His development is paramount to the Indians success over the next few years. In other words, they can't screw him up. I wouldn't be the slightest bit disappointed to see him make 10 or 12 starts in Columbus before coming up.

2. Who is Justin Masterson?

With no affordable aces in the free agent market, the de facto #1 starter tag gets firmly planted on the lanky right hander. We all thought Masterson had figured it out in 2011, posting a 3.21 ERA, cutting his walks to 2.71 per nine innings, and allowed just 11 home runs in 216 innings. This past season made us do a 180-degree turn.

Masterson was not good in 2012, walking 23 more guys in 10 less innings, struggling terribly with lefties, who had a .376 OBP against and a .450 SLG against (up from .331 and .415, respectively), and posting a 4.93 ERA.

The news is not all bad for Masterson, though. His SIERA (skill-interactive ERA) checked in at 4.17 and his tERA (true ERA), a metric that produces ERA based on “batted ball types” was 4.37. These two stats indicate that Masterson should improve on his 2012 numbers going forward. The walks were the worst thing for Masterson, as his strikeout rate was similar, in spite of a velocity drop. Reuniting with Terry Francona, who should know Masterson well from their days in the Red Sox organization, should be helpful.

3. Can Cabrera and Kipnis produce all year?

Asdrubal Cabrera has often been criticized for his fitness level. Jason Kipnis found out how much of a grind the MLB season really is. Through the month of June, Cabrera was batting .297 with 11 home runs and 40 RBI in 272 at bats. Like Cabrera, Kipnis was very productive in the first half of 2012, posting a .765 OPS in his first full season in the bigs. He also had 20 stolen bases by the All-Star Break.

Cabrera battled nagging injuries all season long and it showed. In July, Cabrera batted just .228 with one home run. In August, he hit .239 with two home runs. In that two-month span, Cabrera struck out 45 times and walked just 11. Kipnis, who hit 11 home runs in the first half, hit just three in the second half. In August, he hit .180 over 24 games.

The addition of Mike Aviles will allow Francona to give Kipnis and Cabrera more days off, and the possibility of a rotating designated hitter could help both players. These two are critical for the Indians lineup. Cabrera will hit in the top third of the batting order, while Kipnis could hit second or third, but could also hit sixth or seventh. Either way, both players should get RBI chances on a regular basis and they’ll need to cash in.

4. Who will get lefties out?

With the trade of Tony Sipp and the decision to let Rafael Perez go, the Indians are left with two unproven southpaws in the bullpen and, so far, do not have a lefty in the rotation. In 2012, left handed batters posted an OPS of .811 off of Indians righties. Nick Hagadone and Scott Barnes will enter Spring Training as the favorites to be the matchup lefties in the bullpen, though the

Indians are likely looking for a proven lefty in free agency or trade.

5. What will the four corners do?

Three of the four most potent offensive positions are the corner spots – right field, first base, and third base. Left field is on par with center field in terms of average offensive output, but the benefit of an average left fielder is noticeable. The Indians have essentially four new players at those spots, or three if Drew Stubbs plays center field, moving Michael Brantley to left. In any event, with Nick Swisher, Mark Reynolds, and Lonnie Chisenhall manning three of the most important offensive positions, the Indians need production from those guys.

Swisher was brought in to replace Shin-Soo Choo's production with some additional power. He's been a very consistent performer in his career, save for his one bad year in Chicago, so there shouldn't be much to worry about there. Mark Reynolds is what he is, a low average, high strikeout, powerful hitter who will give the Indians a dimension of power that they have not really had. Chisenhall is the big one.

There are two enormous concerns with Chisenhall. One is his bat against left handed pitching. In 88 MLB at bats, Chisenhall has struck out 23 times against just two walks, with a .227 average against southpaws. The other is Chisenhall's inability to walk. He showed the ability to walk in the minors, but it has yet to translate to the big leagues. With an above average shortstop and a promising second baseman, the Indians don't need a lot of production from Chisenhall, but it wouldn't hurt.

6. Is Ubaldo Jimenez beyond repair?

The biggest gamble of Chris Antonetti's tenure has been a major failure. In 42 starts for the Indians, Jimenez is 13-21 with a 5.32 ERA and 122 walks in 242 innings. If Jimenez can return to anything near what he was in Colorado, he can be an asset to this rotation. It seems plausible that Jimenez would be penciled into the #4 or #5 spot in the rotation, which would take some pressure off of him and give him some more favorable matchups against the back end of other teams' rotations.

Perhaps the scariest thing about Jimenez is that his HR/9 rate in Cleveland has been higher than his HR/9 rate in Colorado. Couple that with his walks and solo home runs suddenly count for two or three runs. Last season, Jimenez's ground ball rate dropped to a disturbingly low 38.4%. His previous low, in a full season, was 46.4%. Bad things happen when the ball gets hit into the air.

Can Francona and pitching coach Mickey Callaway find a way to fix Ubaldo? It would be a huge help and, in a sense, would be like a free agent pickup.

7. Will this be the year Carlos Santana breaks out?

Carlos Santana was a monster in the second half of 2012. After struggling in the first half to the tune of a .675 OPS, Santana erupted in the second half with a .887 OPS. Not only did Santana walk more than he struck out, but he batted .281. His power returned, crushing 13 home runs, after hitting just five in the first half.

We seem to forget that Santana is just 344 games and 1200 at bats into his Major League career and also had to miss precious development time with a serious knee injury. The additions of Reynolds and Swisher could give Santana some better lineup production.

This truly could be the year that we see Santana become a bona fide star.

8. How does Terry Francona impact the team?

The Indians would not appear to be attractive to a high-profile manager. They operate under tight financial restrictions, don't attract free agents, and tend to underachieve more often than not. Yet, Terry Francona is ready for the challenge. Some people discredit the impact that a manager has on a game. Others likely overvalue what a manager does. A lot of times, the true impact of a manager is behind closed doors, with video study and psychology.

Francona gives the team a very respected manager, who seems to be liked by his players. He also has a lot of respect for the Indians organization, which definitely gives him a special connection to the team.

Francona seems to have his hand in the player acquisition department as well, which has definitely worked out so far.

9. What will attendance look like?

Attendance is driven by results. Though the Indians have made a lot of moves this offseason, with mixed reactions from the fan base, the people will show up when you win. The Indians have a lot to prove this season and advance ticket sales are probably horrible. Skepticism, cynicism, and outright apathy seem to dominate the fan base and it will take a lot to win people back.

No matter what people say about the Dolans, revenue, and available financial resources, ownership definitely has more money to spend when attendance is better. The team has focused on putting a better product on the field and should be applauded for that. I don't expect people to rush out and buy tickets, but I certainly hope that they climb back on the bandwagon if the team is winning.

For the Indians to contend, a lot of things have to go perfectly to plan. Stranger things have happened, and the team is decidedly better than it was for Game 162 of the 2012 season. There are always more questions than answers in Cleveland. Let's hope that those answers are the right ones.