The thought was to do this as the closer position, but that was actually a month or so ago when there was still the question of whether or not Chris Perez was going to be around this club.

But it would appear as if that Perez is staying. Sure I just ruined half the purpose of you reading this particular Piece by Piece. Well, no I didn't. Just read it, I promise it isn't ruined.

Instead of just focusing on the closer spot, we might as well just take the bullpen as a whole because of the fact that the closer position in turn impacts every other spot in the bullpen. Plus every reliever would eventually like to be 'the guy' and the one who finishes games out. Of course maybe some really don't, but most do because they get paid the most money.

However they are under the most pressure. Heck, give me Joe Smith's job. I'll make a few million a year to come in every so often to pitch to 2-4 batters a game. With a good percentage of those not being real high-level situations.

I'm not dogging Joe Smith at all, he's important and he certainly has pressure. But if you blow one game, you're the worst ever. Just ask Perez.

The closer went through the grinder last year every time he blew a save, even though he saved way more than he blew and even went on a streak that spanned a little under half of a season without blowing one. Perhaps blowing the first game of the year, playing for Cleveland, and routinely being the outspoken one on the ball club is the perfect storm for that to happen, but it happened.

Which is why many thought Perez would be on his way out. But that's not the case, so the Indians are not only returning their All-Star game saver, they've got the guy who could replace him at any day right behind him and much more depth to explore and utilize in different ways.

[ORGANIZATIONAL OUTLOOK]

The depth that the club has built up in relievers over the past few years has certainly been used. How well it has been used is another question, but perhaps what the Indians used, hasn't really hurt them. It hasn't really helped them of course.

Of course we'll all point to the inclusion of Tony Sipp in the Choo deal, but that was more or less spare parts and the moving of someone who as kind of been broke for a few years. Instead of trying to fix him and pay him more than $1 million to do it, the Indians got a few better arms in his place.

More notably though the Indians have moved arms like Cory Burns, Zach Putnam, and Esmil Rogers over the past few seasons. Burns netted them Aaron Cunningham. Gone. Putnam netted them Kevin Slowey. Gone. Rogers was used this offseason to pick up Mike Aviles, which on the surface looks far better than trading for a potential fifth starter or a fourth outfielder. The other two were largely unproven and Rogers meanwhile had a bit of major league success last season.

Still they turned a season and a half of a reliever they picked up off the scrap pile into a high-quality bench player who could start for some teams, but serves his best value as a guy off the bench.

The Indians also parted ways with Rafael Perez this offseason, choosing to non-tender the long-time rubber-armed left-handed reliever. I just used three dashed-word-combos in a row, how about that? Perez had his first year of displaying a complete lack of durability as he was hurt and barely pitched, and with youngsters like Hagadone and Barnes on the way up the ladder, Sipp and Perez needed moved.

Not to mention other guys that we'll talk about in a few sections.

So the depth has been used up a little, but some of the real players are still around. Most of them are in the Major League arena that we'll talk about, but there are still some real key pieces that could make an impact rather soon or down the road.

Starting towards the top is the one who's had a lot of attention this offseason. From pitching well in the Arizona Fall League as well as the Aero's title run, to getting rostered, Trey Haley is on the radar. He's a high-round pick out of high school who has slowly come along, but is still rather young. He was supposed to be a starter, but for now, he's doing really well as a reliever and could turn into a real impact arm at the back end when all is said and done.

If not for an injury, we may be talking about CC Lee a little more. However after five games Lee needed Tommy John surgery. There's not telling how he'll bounce back, but after striking out 99 hitters in 71 inning between Akron and Columbus in 2011, you heard me, he'll be one to watch.

You may also want to count the Akron trio of Preston Guilmet (closer), Rob Bryson, and Bryce Stowell as potential arms. They all have the stuff, with Guilmet being the one of the three who does not have injury issues. He's taken the Pestano route, quietly moving up each rank as his team's closer doing a real good job. Bryson and Stowell are one in the same, with big talent and good stuff, but injury roadblocks that have stalled them from getting beyond Akron for quite some time.

Other names include Bryan Price, Eric Berger, Matt Langwell and Kye Landis. They're all names. Berger may very well be a left-handed Josh Tomlin, someone who can pitch out of the pen or start and if he gets some breaks could find his way onto the major league squad, but is very much that guy that needs to catch breaks.

Shawn Armstrong had a particularly nice year, throwing 67 innings, claiming a 1.60 ERA and striking out 78 hitters. He was nails in Akron with a 0.89 ERA in 17 games and should be a force in Akron's pen to start the 2013 season.

There's a little bit of talent still hanging around that the Indians should be excited about. They've not really utilized their depth for anything big, but you trade a reliever here, a reliever here for spare parts, you just have to hope it works out. You won't get much for Zach Putnam on his own, but included it might help you net something bigger. The Indians needed a starter though, so you deal from your strengths. They certainly didn't hit on Slowey, but they certainly won't miss Putnam.

[MLB OUTLOOK]

Bullpens are funny. They're the most volatile thing on a year-to-year basis in baseball. Just when you think you have a good pen, the bottom may fall out. When you think you might have some pieces, but it isn't anything special, things just come together.

The one thing that solidifies things is a closer. If you have a closer, you can piece things together. If you have one that is elite, you've got a good thing going. The Yankees have never really had a dominant bullpen every year that Mariano Rivera has been there. But knowing that the ninth inning is covered, they can really just piece things together behind him.

Of course if you have five starting pitchers who can give you six innings more often than not, things become even more easier.

Right now, it would appear that team's have their closer's lined up. Washington just spent a cockamamie amount of money on Rafael Soriano, and that's already with guys like Drew Storen (injury concerns) and Tyler Clippard (full-time closing concerns) in the fold. Talk about a loaded pen.

Roles have to fit though. Chris Perez makes it a lot easier because you know he's the guy and you know that Vinnie Pestano can be that eighth inning guy. The game is shortened by two innings. Piece together seven other ones, you're made in the shade.

If the Nationals have just shortened the game by three innings more often than not, with their rotation, lights out NL East.

I have to wonder out loud what the Detroit Tigers are planning on doing. Bruce Rondon? Yeah okay go for it. Jose Valverde completely fell apart last year, a year after having saved every stinkin' game he got the chance to. How much of a worry do you think this club will be in if Rondon can't get it done? Phil Coke? Joaquin Benoit? Octavio Dotel? The latter two have (minimal) closing experience, but when you have questions about your bullpen, you automatically have problems. The White Sox probably pulled of as a successful of a "rotation" as a team could do.

Guys like Brian Wilson, Matt Capps, and Valverde himself are still out there. Wilson is on his way back from Tommy John surgery and had he not had that happen in 2012, he'd probably still be anchoring things in San Francisco. But after winning the World Series without him and finding options in his place, why spend the money on the uncertainty?

Most teams are going to piece their closer situation together if they don't have a guy. Bruce Rondon might blow up in Detroit's faces, but you have to at least credit them with picking a guy and going forward without the uncertainty of "Who's gonna be the guy?"

Also, for not picking Jose Veras as "their guy", which is exactly what the Houston Astros have done. Good luck with that.

[FREE AGENTS]

Relievers can be a dime a dozen. I mean, the Indians plucking Rogers off of waivers and turning him into something decent is just an example. There's some reliable ones out there that will always get jobs while others who will always bounce around. You have your guys in the prime that will get good deals, like Mike Adams got with the Phillies while others who will try and just live off the one-year deal.

The Dodgers three year deal with Brandon League is rather, brave. As brave as the Nationals

were with Soriano. If you need the closer, you can do that. The Indians did it once, it didn't really work out too well.

Most relievers though will get minor league deals. The Indians added a few that way and will probably add a few more before spring is up. But really, their adds have come through trades and their bullpen will be mostly made up of those gentlemen and current, in-system guys.

[THE TRIBE'S GUY]

And there are quite a few of those guys. Beyond Chris Perez being the closer, and Vinnie Pestano being the guy setting him up, the Indians have some options. The emergence of Cody Allen has also been a huge step forward for the bullpen as he has quickly come up and put himself in position to be a key piece. Joe Smith is back, giving the Indians a solid core of four guys to rely on. Throw in trade acquisition of Matt Albers and you are already five deep in reliable guys.

Bryan Shaw is an interesting add, someone who will probably be a match up guy and someone you can throw out when you are not winning, but still very much in the game. Those guys will all likely be in the bullpen to start the year with spots already locked up.

From there, it gets interesting. The Indians need a left-hander in the pen as none of those guys throw from that side of the mound. Perez and Sipp's exits leave open the door for Nick Hagadone to take that step, but it won't be as easy after how his season ended last year, hurting himself in a little hissy fit.

All signs point to him being able to do that however and if he can't, the Indians also have Scott Barnes, who they'd probably like to see take that step as well. If the Indians can get both Barnes and Hagadone into the mix this year, they have to feel really good about the seven guys they can trot out there all year, because that's a great starting point.

Behind them there are guys like Frank Herrmann, who is still around and on the 40-man roster, but may not survive spring training cuts if he doesn't make the team. David Huff could play into

the bullpen battle as he is left-handed and seemingly worn out his chances of being a starter with this club, at least for now. And there is also Blake Wood, who was acquired over the offseason when the Indians claimed him off waivers. He will be stashed and likely even put on the 60-day disabled list as he won't pitch right away, but he is someone who could come into play at some point later in the year, almost like the Indians did with Esmil Rogers.

[WHERE TO GO?]

The big question is and has been, do the Indians deal Chris Perez? Do they deal from the top part of their strengths and get something that could help them. We talked about trading guys like Putnam and Burns, but there is not much that comes from that.

If you deal Perez, you get the most value you can possibly get from a reliever. Many teams would like a closer like Perez and you could actually obtain something of high value for him. Of course you don't just trade Perez because you can get value from him, there has to be plenty of reasoning as to why. Sure it starts with the outspokenness, but it appears the Indians and Chris have ironed things out and there is a mutual understanding and respect.

Chris seems on-board with Terry Francona as his manager and also was telling Nick Swisher (who is actually his neighbor, who knew!) all about coming to Cleveland. So if anything, it would appear as if Perez is on board.

The Indians could have traded him this winter. There were plenty of teams out there that were looking for a closer. Boston dealt for Joel Hanrahan, the Dodgers signed League, the Angels signed Ryan Madson. Would you have been able to pull in your highest value for Perez this winter?

That's the other big thing. Maybe Chris Antonetti felt he couldn't. Sure Chris Perez is going to make over $7 million this year to be your closer and next year that number will only go up. But if things go south this year early and you are not doing anything in July, there is nothing wrong with dealing Perez at that point. You may even get more value at that time for someone like Perez as teams are a little more desperate when they need something like a closer.

In the winter, there are more choices and it may be tougher to trade certain players or certain positions depending on the market. Hanrahan made out at a salary very similar to Perez's in the arbitration process. The Pirates landed a package of four in return for Hanrahan. Other than that, where the other teams out there looking to pay that price for a closer? Debatable.

It is assumed that Vinnie Pestano will be the closer of the Cleveland Indians at some point. He's under team control longer than Perez is and it is difficult to see the Indians giving Perez an extension when they could insert Pestano into the same role and get what they would assume is the same results. For now, it is a luxury to have both guys as both of them are not requiring a long-term contract that could end-up handcuffing the club.

If your closer goes south, that is a bad investment. Sure Kerry Wood's contract wasn't that long, but they paid him a lot of money to close out games and when he was not doing that, it was not money well spent.

Aside from that, Perez's status makes the rest of the bullpen fall in line. A bullpen is less volatile when it has pieces in place and most of the pieces know their roles. Joe Smith and Matt Albers are going to know their roles and Francona can expect to always use them in certain situations. Removing the unknown makes things a lot easier for relievers as they can prepare and fall in to a certain routine.

So if anything, the Indians bullpen is in good shape this year and down the road, there are a few impact guys who could come in and make it easier to lose someone like Chris Perez. And heck, when you are dealing with such a position, it's great to have as many options as possible, which is certainly something the Indians are set up to have for the foreseeable future.

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Nino, willing to remove the "I Hate Nick Swisher" line from his Facebook profile is also on The Tribe Daily, his own Indians blog. As long as JoAnna Garcia-Swisher's "Better With You" gets another shot on television.

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