It's been five years since the Indians traded future Hall of Famer Robby Alomar to the Mets for a whole bunch of nothing. In his latest, Tony Lastoria takes a look back at that deal, and professes that to this day, it is still Mark Shairpo's biggest feau paux as Tribe GM. All five players recieved in that deal are long gone, and Shapiro also missed an opportunity to plunder David Wright and Jose Reyes away from The Big Apple, instead opting for guys like Billy Traber and Earl Snyder. A great read from Tony this morning.

The 5-year anniversary of the Roberto Alomar trade passed earlier this month.

In what seems like a lifetime ago, it is amazing that it has only been five years since that trade. A trade which changed the image of this franchise, and started the Five Year War between fans on the new direction the team was taking and the true intentions of ownership.

A few months back, I wrote about how the “Brandon Phillips Debacle” cost us a reasonable solution to our 2B needs in 2007 . But, Mark Shapiro's biggest mistake as a General Manager to date still might be his handling of the Robbie Alomar trade.

Back on December 11, 2001, the Indians traded Roberto Alomar, Mike Baczik, and Danny Peoples to the New York Mets for Matt Lawton, Alex Escobar, Billy Traber, Jerrod Riggan, and Earl Snyder. Five years later, none of those players are still with this team. In fact, all of those players were gone within four years. When you trade a sure-fire hall-of-famer who still is productive, and your intent is to get some good, young talent in exchange, to not have one core player come from such a trade is completely unacceptable.

The fact the Indians have nothing to show for the Alomar trade is mind-boggling. Forget that Alomar's career plummeted at a ridiculous rate upon being traded and he really did nothing once he left the Indians. The fact is, at the time of the trade, he was the best 2B in baseball and one of the game's elite players who was still performing at a high level. For players like this, in a trade you usually get tons of talent dumped in your lap, which the Indians (and a lot of us fans) thought happened.

Shapiro's mistake was the double whammy bad move where the prospects he received in return for Alomar bombed, and the major league player he received in the deal, Matt Lawton, was given an unnecessary fat 4-year $27M contract extension. To make matters worse, he piggybacked the trade by signing Ricky Gutierrez to play 2B with a three year deal totaling just short of $12M. In one fell swoop, Shapiro ended up making three mistakes all in one with the players he obtained for Alomar, extending Lawton, and then signing Gutierrez. Ouch.

Now, the idea behind trading Alomar made sense. After the Indians lost over $14M in 2001 with their $92M payroll, owner Larry Dolan required payroll be cut to the high $70Ms. With a payroll cut looming, a rapidly aging team, and a barren cupboard in the minor leagues to replenish needs at the major league level, Shapiro saw an opportunity to address these needs by dealing Alomar. And, his decision to trade Alomar was the correct one.

Before the trade, the Indians farm system was devoid of much talent heading into 2002. Here are the top 12 prospects in the system per Baseball America, prior to the trade:

1. Corey Smith 3B

2. Ryan Drese RHP

3. Dan Denham RHP

4. JD Martin LHP

5. Victor Martinez C

6. David Riske RHP

7. Brian Tallet LHP

8. Alex Herrera LHP

9. Willy Taveras OF

10. Tim Drew RHP

11. John McDonald SS

12. Ryan Church OF

Not a very impressive, eh?

At the time of the trade, Escobar was the Mets #2 prospect and Traber their #5 prospect. That same year, Jose Reyes was the Mets #3 prospect and David Wright their #7 prospect. It goes without saying that for Alomar, the type of prospects we expected in return for him were along the lines of Reyes and Wright. In other words, players that would become very good major

leaguers and core pieces to the team. Geeze, can you imagine either one of those players (both!) on this team today? Makes me sick thinking about it. In fairness to Shapiro, Escobar and Traber were much closer to the major league doorstep, while Reyes and Wright were still very green and in the lower levels of the Mets minor league system.

In dealing for Escobar, Shapiro obtained a player with big-time prospect status as he had been ranked #1 in the Mets system three years in a row from 1999-2001, and was #2 in 2002 before being traded. Escobar was viewed as the top prize acquired in the trade, and a player the Indians viewed as a long-term solution in the outfield. But, Shapiro was really gambling on his durability as when you go through his time in the Mets system there are red flags everywhere regarding his health. From the day he signed, he had health issues. In his first two seasons (1996-1997) in the Mets system, Escobar only played in a total of 60 games and accumulated 184 at bats because of hamstring issues.

Even after Escobar exploded onto the scene in 1998 in the South Atlantic League (SAL), he still was hampered by nagging injuries all year as he only managed to play 112 games. Still, his SAL season in 1998 was very impressive: .310 avg, 27 HRs, 91 RBIs, and 49 stolen bases. He was tabbed the league's best prospect, and was starting to be compared to a young Vladimir Guerrero.

Then came 1999. Escobar managed to play in only 3 games because he spent the first half of the season recovering from a lower back injury, then shortly after he returned, he separated his shoulder on a home run swing. Escobar stayed healthy in 2000 and 2001, managing to play in 122 and 119 games respectively. Also, he put together two okay seasons, hitting .288 with 16 HRs, 67 RBIs, and 24 steals at Double-A in 2000, and then hitting .267 with 12 HRs, 52 RBIs, and 18 steals at Triple-A in 2001.

But, while healthy, the numbers in 2000 and 2001 were very ordinary. Looking at the drop in production it looks as if the injuries not only took away from his talent some as his speed and power dropped significantly, but also affected his development. When Escobar went crashing into the center-field wall in Spring Training in 2002 and tore his ACL, it pretty much ended his days as a high-level prospect. A little over two years later, Escobar was released late in the 2004 season.

The other highlight in the deal was soft-tossing left-handed pitcher Billy Traber. Traber was selected by the Mets in the first round of the 2000 Amateur Draft, and was the first lefty taken off the board (16th overall). However, like Escobar, injury concerns quickly surfaced with Traber. Traber was set to sign a $1.7M signing bonus pending completion of a physical, and when completed an MRI revealed abnormalities in his pitching elbow which pointed to possible damage to the medial collateral ligament (MCL) of his pitching elbow. As a result, he still signed, but had to settle for a $400K bonus and ended up signing a 2001 contract thereby shutting him down for the 2000 minor league season.

In 2001, he was healthy and pitched like a man on a mission. He started the year in High-A and advanced three levels all the way to Triple-A compiling a 10-9 record and 3.09 ERA in 27

starts (151.1 IP). But, reportedly, scouts were still concerned about the elbow.

Upon joining the Indians, Traber pitched very well in 2002 at Akron and Buffalo going a combined 16-5 with a 2.94 ERA in 27 starts (162.2 IP). Traber also pitched well in 2003 with the Indians, including a magnificent complete game 1-hit shutout of the Yankees that year. It looked like the Indians may have found a gem, but the injury concerns surrounding him soon surfaced late in 2003 when he went down with an arm injury that required Tommy John surgery. He missed all of 2004, returned to the Indians in 2005 and was never the same and was gone after the season.

Jerrod Riggan was not a top prospect at the time of the trade, although he did rank in the teens in the 2002 Mets prospect rankings. But, Riggan was viewed more as a player who could probably help the organization in the short term. Riggan had some experience as a major league reliever as he posted a 3-3 record and 3.40 ERA in 35 appearances out of the Mets bullpen in 2001. After the trade, in 2002, Riggan pitched well in Buffalo going 4-1 with a 2.38 ERA in 28 games before he was called up to Cleveland. But, Riggan never found himself, and struggled going 2-1 with a 7.64 ERA in 29 appearances in Cleveland. Riggan stuck around for half the season in 2003, before the Indians released him. Riggan is now out of baseball.

As for Earl Snyder, he was a throw-in, and pretty much has become a career 4A player in Triple-A, bouncing around from team to team. He was out of the Indians organization after the 2002 season.

In hindsight, the Alomar trade turned out to be, as Donald Trump would say, a complete disaster. Shapiro's mistake was not the fact he traded Alomar, because he actually traded him at the most opportune time when his value was very high. But the prospect choices Shapiro made were awful, and to top it off, the trade saddled us with some horrible contracts for Lawton and Gutierrez that we really did not get out from under until last year.

Yes. This was Shapiro's worst move as a GM. And, an anniversary you would never get in trouble forgetting about.