

## Recap: Paul Dolan Talks With Les Levine

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Tuesday, January 09 2007 8:00 PM -

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Indians President Paul Dolan was on "More Sports With Les Levine" last night, and talked at great length for over an hour with Les about the state of the team. Dolan hit on Manny Ramirez, what he thought of the teams off-season, payroll, fan criticism, Mark Mulder, and Sportstime Ohio as well as other topics. Website Consigliere Tony Lastoria took the time to hammer out a detailed recap for us. Thanks T!



Indians President Paul Dolan was on Les Levine's "More Sports and Les Levine" show last night, and talked at great length for an hour about the Indians. Here is an in-depth recap of what Paul Dolan had to say.

**On their off-season goals:** They have filled the needs that going into the off-season they felt needed to be addressed. Their two main priorities this off-season were to revamp the bullpen and find a long-term solution at 2B, and he feels they accomplished these two goals given what was available.

**On how much control Shapiro has:** Indians GM Mark Shapiro has the freedom to sign the players he wants, and he ultimately tells ownership what he is going to do and then does it. When Shapiro wants a player, he doesn't have to prove the player's worth to the Dolans with video tape, stats or computer analysis. Before the off-season starts, Shapiro sits down with his assistants and analyzes the trade and free agent market, and then prioritizes his list of free agents and also players they will target in a trade. Once these lists are finalized, Shapiro will start calling the agents of the players he is looking to sign in free agency, and also will start to call teams and ask them if a guy on his trade list is available.

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**On bringing back Manny Ramirez:** It was very tempting to make a Manny deal, and the rumor in the media on how interested the Indians were and who we would have had to give up was fairly accurate. Manny is arguably the best right-handed bat in the game, and would have been exciting to get him back in an Indians uniform. Had Boston put him on waivers like they did a few years ago, we would have surely claimed him, as would most other teams. The bottom line is we didn't make the trade for him because Boston wanted too much (which is also why no other team made a trade as well, Boston was asking for the moon). As an organization, we weren't ready to give up so much of our future for two guaranteed years of Manny. We were in line to pick up all of the remaining salary, which was not a problem. Whether the option years on his deal would have been picked up or a contract extension would have been possible is not known because things never got to that stage in the trade discussions. Also, while the general thought from fans is a Manny trade would boost ticket sales, Dolan did make the comment that acquiring Manny's "\$20M" salary would require at least a million extra ticket sales to make up for that contract. The Indians weren't really worried about that, but Dolan was asked by Les Levine if the Indians considered what type of attendance boost Manny would bring.

**On whether or not he listens to the fans on talkshows:** Yes. Initially, in the infancy of their ownership he took everything to heart and wanted to respond to all comments, good or bad, but has found it easier not to respond so emotionally to the negative and positive feedback fans express on talkshows. Dolan did mention that he doesn't feel that sports talkshows represent the average fan, and that talkshow callers are a much more passionate piece of the fanbase, so things tend to go to the extreme one way or the other.

**On how often he attends Indians games:** He does not attend every game, roughly 50-60 games a year and mostly the home games. He has two sons playing baseball in the summer, and attending their games takes up a lot of his time to watch the team at Jacob's Field. Every night they are at a game, be it an Indians game or one of his sons' games. That said, even when he doesn't attend or watch an Indians game, he is connected in some way or another.

**On what they learned from last off-season:** They learned from last off-season that they cannot wait on players or just go down their list of priorities in order and try to sign Player A first, then Player B, etc. Instead, they have to move quickly at times on players they are focused on so as to not let other opportunities slip by, because what ultimately could happen is they could lose out on the guy they were focused on AND lose out on any alternatives. When talking with agents now, Shapiro puts the pressure on the agents that we need to know an answer quickly so we can explore possible alternatives. This new approach has led to some deals, but also led to others going away.

**More on what they learned from last-offseason:** To add to the point in the previous paragraph, this new approach stems from how the Bob Howry discussions went down last year. The Indians wanted to retain Bob Howry, and viewed him as a potential closer candidate, but they had other players listed higher on the priority list they pursued first. BJ Ryan was first on the list, and then Trevor Hoffman, and both of these players led to long drawn out talks, particularly Hoffman. By the time the Ryan and Hoffman situations played out, Howry had already signed with the Chicago Cubs. In hindsight, if the Indians could go back and do things differently, they would have talked to Howry more and discussed a deal with him while they were also targeting Ryan and Hoffman.

**On the possible acquisition of Mark Mulder:** Dolan expressed that “we are done” as far as the off-season goes addressing needs for 2007, but the Mulder scenario is a “unique opportunity to improve the 2008 club and possibly the 2007 club.” A Mulder signing is clearly viewed as helping this team in 2008 (author’s note: to insure them from a potential loss of Jake Westbrook in free agency next year and/or one of the young kids Fausto Carmona or Adam Miller not being ready in Spring 2008 for a rotation spot?).

**On acquiring a big right-handed bat:** The Indians were in on Manny this off-season, and were very aggressive on trying to acquire Gary Sheffield from the Yankees. Both deals didn’t work out. The Indians also tried to sign Moises Alou as a free agent, and offered him a superior contract to the one he signed for with the New York Mets. Dolan agrees that a big right-handed bat would be a great addition to the club, but does not believe it was the most important need this off-season as the bullpen and 2B issues were priorities 1A and 1B.

**On Ryan Garko:** While fans have voiced concern over how Garko maybe is not being given a fair opportunity to make this team, Dolan notes that Garko certainly will be given a chance to be on the team. Dolan feels that the fact someone as accomplished as Garko may have limited opportunities or that he has competition for his spot is great for the organization and shows they have some depth. When asked about why Andy Marte is guaranteed a spot, yet Garko is not, Dolan noted that Marte is a significant upgrade to the team defensively and that he is also expected to produce offensively this season. Will Marte produce to the level offensively Garko already has? Dolan doesn’t know. But, the Indians feel that the defense Casey Blake will provide at 1B as well as the offense he is capable of is an improvement over having Garko

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there for now. As good as Garko was last year in August and September, it still was only two months. You can't just go into a new season and expect that kind of production again, especially after what Dolan saw in 2002 from Karim Garcia the last few months of that season and how he fared after that. Garko is a part of the Indians long-term future, but whether he is in the Indians starting lineup in 2007 is not known at this time.

**On the looming free agency of Jake Westbrook, CC Sabathia, and Travis Hafner:** Westbrook can become a free agent after the 2007 season, while Sabathia and Hafner could hit free agency after the 2008 season. The Indians will make a preemptive strike in trying to resign all three players, and such talks will get under way soon. Their strategy in trying to resign these players has taken a hit somewhat after deals this past off-season to the likes of Gil Meche and Ted Lilly distorted the marketplace, but that's just the way it is. The Indians have every intention to talk with these players before they hit free agency and try to extend them. Dolan does note that approaching a player about a contract extension is always not a sure thing, since the player has to be willing to agree to a deal now for more long-term security rather than wait a year or two to hit the open market and potentially get a much larger deal in free agency. A lot of current players want to remain Indians and feel an allegiance to the team, and two of note are Sabathia and Hafner.

**On the naming rights of Jacob's Field:** The naming rights to Jacob's Field ended in 2006, but the rumor that the Jacob's Group renewed their contract to keep the naming rights through 2014 is not correct, and at this time there is no deal in place. Currently, the Indians are in discussions with numerous groups for the naming rights to the ballpark, but there are no deals close to being completed. It is possible that a new deal may not be struck for another one or two years.

**On the move to Arizona:** The only factor that worked against a move to Arizona was the logistics of such a move. This factor was certainly the biggest one considered, as the Indians realize that it is much easier for the fans to get to Spring Training in Florida than Arizona. That said, when logistics were taken out of the equation, the move to Arizona is right in every way for this organization. The opportunity to train and setup operations in Arizona is phenomenal, and the area provides the largest collection of teams training in one area, so travel from site to site is easier. Also, Arizona has become a favorite area to live and train for MLB players, so this will help the Indians in future years when trying to sign free agents or even retain their own players. Dolan feels that the biggest reason why we lost out on our pursuit of Eric Gagne was because Texas trains in Arizona and we currently do not.

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**On the payroll:** Payroll is currently just under \$70M, to which Dolan said it is currently “\$69M something” for next season (note, they are going by the 40-man payroll, which adds roughly \$2-4M to the 25-man payroll. Also, he is probably including arbitration estimates for those players eligible for arbitration). In addition, there is wiggle room to add more players now (Mulder) as well as in a July deadline trade. Right now, the organization realizes this is an important time for the club, and they are in a “win-now” mode. This mode doesn’t mean the budget is limitless, but if an opportunity arises to improve the club “we are going to seize it.”

**On Shapiro’s constant harping of “the realities of our market”:** Dolan took several calls from fans, and one called mentioned how Shapiro’s constant mentioning of “the realities of our market” is growing quite tiresome. Dolan responded by saying a lot of it is GM-speak and that you would probably hear other GMs in like markets say similar things if you listened to them as often as Shapiro. Dolan did acknowledge that maybe Shapiro does not need to refer to our “market” every time since the fans at this point understand our situation. Shapiro probably does not need to qualify his statements with such talk, although Shapiro is accurate in what he is saying.

**On why we acquire so many players with an injury history:** Another called made mention to the fact that all we seem to do is gloss over the MLB disabled list from previous seasons and see which ones are free agents and target them. Dolan responded by saying that this is the market we are in, in that we have to take risks on some guys with an injury history. Also, Dolan feels we have a competitive advantage in this area because our medical staff is so good. We have become very attractive to players who may need some rehab and want to re-establish themselves, and so the player and Indians seize that opportunity. Our history with rehabbing players and getting them re-established to sign bigger contracts down the road is a big reason we were able to sign Keith Foulke, why we were in play for Gagne, and why we were able to sign players like Kevin Millwood and Bob Howry in the past.

**On some of the “insane deals” from this off-season:** Show host Les Levine asked Dolan if there was a reason for a lot of the insane deals from this off-season. Dolan responded saying that the big reason for the deals is we have labor peace for the next five years and also the TV deal with MLB is locked in for many years. The new TV deal does not add a lot of additional revenue to clubs, but what it does is keep funneling money into teams and teams know that it isn’t going away for some time.

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**On whether or not agents can affect the type of players we go after:** Sometimes a certain agent can affect who we do or do not attempt to draft, sign as a free agent, or re-sign internally. This applies more to the Amateur Draft for signability reasons for draft picks. The Indians keep a detailed profile for all agents, and they do routine follow-ups on agents to see who is truthful in their deals. When talking to agents about deals for players, if an agent says that “we have X deal from Y team” the Indians are not allowed to verify this information during the process. But, when the process is over (whether we sign the player or not), it can be verified and we can contact the other team(s) the agent said they had deals from and ask “did you really offer that?” If no, you take a note of it for future dealings, and the agent loses credibility as it is now known that he doesn’t necessarily speak the truth in contract discussions.

**On STO:** It is still growing, and will benefit this organization more in time. STO will continue to grow from a TV aspect, but also look to become more interactive in connection with the on-line audience. Dolan feels strongly that “the Internet has the potential to do to baseball what TV has done for football.”