With the contracts of C.C. Sabathia and Travis Hafner both set to expire after the 2008 season, the debate amongst Indians fans over which one the team should lock up for the long term has kicked into full gear. Earlier this week, Erik Cassano stated that he felt Hafner should be the one to remain an Indian. And today, Cris Sykes backs Sabathia. He finds the notion of letting a home grown, fireballing, left handed starter with #1 stuff go elsewhere to be preposterous, and makes a spirited plea for the team to pony up, and keep CC here in CTown.

There has been a lot of talk in the last week about the future of the Cleveland Indians, most of which centers around the idea of trading CC Sabathia before he is able to walk away in free agency following the 2008 season. Sabathia's contract expires at the same time as fan favorite Travis Hafner's, and in all likelihood, the team will only be able to afford one of them. Our own Eric Cassano made the case for C.C. to be the one to let leave in this piece from earlier in the week.

To quote Jules Winfield, played brilliantly by Samuel L. Jackson in the classic film Pulp Fiction: "Well allow me to retort."

First, it is never easier to replace a left-handed throwing fireballer than a DH. Never. Pitchers with Sabathia's "stuff" come to an organization about as often as Halley's Comet. The man throws 98 MPH, in the 8th inning. His slider disappears from a hitter's zone like a cheeseburger does off my plate.

The Dolan regime has made it a point to stockpile talent in the pitching department. However, none of them are CC. Adam Miller projects to be close, but not from the left side of the rubber. The rest of the future in the pitching department looks to be more on the finesse/control side of the pitching paradigm. For a team to be able to put two power pitchers at the top of their rotation, one from the right side, one from the left is an advantage that few teams have. The Arizona Diamondbacks rode a combination like that all the way to a World Series title. Hmmm, that sounds fun.

Sure, there are complaints about CC being overweight, and coming into camp out of shape. Do you really want to spend the kind of coin on someone like that is a question raised many times? When he finishes the year third in the AL in ERA, first in complete games, first in shutouts and the fifth best strikeout to walk ratio, as he did in 2006, yes I can live with that. There is also the little matter of CC "quitting" in a game last year, which I agree is unacceptable. That also seemed to be a moment where a light turned on for him. And he responded. He responded by finishing the year with an ERA of 2.73 in 17 starts, after that game.

The next part of Cassano's equation is Victor Martinez, who will be a free agent one year after the decision on CC and Hafner must be made. Well, Victor is also my answer to who replaces Pronk. The Tribe has a pretty highly regarded young catcher in Kelly Shoppach, who is better behind the plate than Victor. Victor is made to be a DH but is blocked by Hafner right now. Victor will also give you some roster flexibility in that he can actually play 1st base, and he could still be your backup catcher. The inability of Hafner to play the field is a nightmare for the Indians during inter-league play, when they routinely play 24 on 25. What happens if they make the World Series? Will Hafner's elbow suddenly be good enough for him to play 1st? If you decide you can keep two of the three, I am sorry, but Hafner should be the one to go.

If you are really sold on building your team around the starting rotation, then how can you allow one of the top 10 pitchers in MLB walk away?

CC will not take a 50% discount to remain an Indian. Who would? Would he take 85%? I don't know, but they may want to check before deciding to wander off into the sunset.

Carleston Charles Sabathia is only 26 years old. Some people think he should be further along in his development, since he has been pitching in the big leagues since he was 20. Well, 26 is 26. Should CC step into the role of ace, there is no reason to not break the bank for him. How many players could step into an organization that had done nothing but win since he was in it, then bam, cut bait and rebuild as soon as it is your time to shine, at 20 years old, and not be a little disappointed? How many people are ready to take over the role of leader, or ace at the age of 22? That is what CC has been asked to do, and he has done it pretty damn well. So reward him. Make him the franchise guy.

Travis Hafner is a fan's dream. I realize that. He is also a very humble human being. If there is anyone that should/would/could take a lesser deal to stay, it's him. Sabathia has been brought up in this organization. We drafted him. We nurtured him. We coddled him. Now we are going to let someone else reap those rewards? Why? So we can retain a designated hitter? The farm system is full of guys that can hit. Ryan Garko. Brad Snyder. Ryan Goleski. I don't know of another left-handed starter in the minors that throws 100 MPH.

If Sabathia asks for $20,000,000, then maybe we have no choice. We have also seen the market come down after a couple of years of crazy spending in the past. I would be more inclined to think CC would accept a deal under that figure. If the large lefty decides to give the Cleveland Indians any type of discount, or the market comes down enough to drop his asking

price to the mid-teens, then I ask again, how can you allow one of the top 10 pitchers in the game to walk away? I can't.