We reported it here first, on Tuesday in our Indians message forum. Travis Hafner is set to sign a 4 year, 57 million dollar contract extension with the Indians today. And in the wake of that great news, Paul Cousineau has penned a piece for us this morning that illustrates exactly how much of this team is under the Indians control ... well into the next decade.

The news that Hafner has signed a 4-year, $57M extension means that another one of the "core" players has been locked up for the long term. Going into the season, the Tribe faced the prospect of losing Jake Westbrook after this season and Hafner and C.C. after next season to Free Agency. Westbrook, obviously, has been taken care of; now, with Hafner in the mix (the C.C. discussion will be touched on in a bit), the following players are locked up through the corresponding years:

Hafner through 2013 (club option in 2013)

Sizemore through 2012 (club option in 2012)

Peralta through 2011 (club option in 2011)

Victor through 2010 (club option in 2010)

Westbrook through 2010

Lee through 2010 (club option in 2010)

That's 4 of the 9 positions (and the 4 best position players on the team) in the lineup and 40% of the rotation locked up through 2010.

Now consider the young players under the Indians' control until their first year of FA year indicated:

Barfield - FA after 2011 season

Carmona - FA after 2012 season

Garko - FA after 2012 season

Mastny - FA after 2013 season

Perez - FA after 2013 season

Shoppach - FA after 2011 season

Sowers - FA after 2012 season

Figuring that Barfield and Garko/Shoppach take up 2 more positions (with Garko and Shoppach's future tied to where Victor eventually ends up), that's 6 of the 9 positions locked up for 3 more years AFTER this season.

In 2010, the lineup should include the emerging talent of Sizemore, Barfield, Peralta, Hafner, Victor, and either Garko or Shoppach. To call that solid would be an understatement. The inclusion of Hafner in that lineup serves as the bedrock that everyone else can feed off.

It's true that Pronk has struggled this year, but he's still on pace for 26 HR and 107 RBI with the chance that this contract could trigger a Pronk fury that we've become accustomed to ... ballooning those numbers. Hafner has proven himself to be an elite hitter and a few months of average production doesn't change that fact (he was 1st in the AL in OPS last year and 2nd in the AL in 2005, behind only A-Rod, and 2004, behind only Manny). Seeing as how those are his only 3 full seasons in the league, there's no reason that we should expect any less.

Back to the big picture, specifically in the rotation, where you can pencil Carmona in and the possibility that either Sowers or Atom Miller or Chuck Lofgren (the latter two who haven't even had their service clock start) project into the rotation and the Indians are sitting on 60% or 80% of their rotation pretty solidly in place or en route

And that doesn't include the Hefty Lefty, about whom there's a prevailing attitude emerging from skeptical Cleveland fans who are perpetually casting a gloomy eye to the future that the news that Hafner means that they'll have to accept that "2 out of 3 ain't bad", already assuming that C.C. is gone.

At the beginning of the season, how many people thought that we would sign Westbrook and Hafner?

Why not C.C.?

Hafner's agent (Scott Parker) also represents the Crooked Cap and there's this quote from C.C. when asked about how a Pronk extension would affect him:

"It would be huge [if a deal is reached]. I would be happy. I would definitely take that as a good sign about getting something done with me. Everybody wants to stay. The core of this team has been together for a long time. We've been through a lot together, and we want to bring a championship to Cleveland together."

My head is racing after that quote and the excitement may result in my having trouble sleeping tonight, but for now, let's table the C.C. talk and take the bird in the hand and give kudos to the Dolans for giving an elite, somewhat-homegrown player this money and give thanks to the fact that Pronk will remain in a Tribe uniform for the next 5 years.

The contract represents the second instance (with Westbrook's deal) that the Dolans are "spending when the time is right", locking up their OWN players to keep a talented "core" together. Keeping Hafner on the team is the biggest move to date and should be applauded...by the fans of Cleveland on Friday, when the Tribe plays KC at the Jake. Featherheads should show up to recognize

the Dolans with their attendance and Hafner with their appreciative adulation.

The pieces continue to fall into place and obviously a lot can happen between now and then, but the Indians' core continues to grow and Pronk in a Tribe uniform through 2013 is reason to celebrate.