Miguel Cabrera and Dontrelle Willis to the Tigers. Outta nowhere. That's not how I wanted to see the Winter Meetings start. But alas, the Tigers paid a heavy price, dealing their two most prized prospects as well as four others to the Marlins for Miggy and Dontrelle. What does this do to the AL Central? How loaded is the Tiger lineup now? Will the Indians counter? Paulie C addresses all of these questions in his latest.

Miguel Cabrera and Dontrelle Willis, welcome to the AL Central.

With all of the talk of Cabrera going to Anaheim, the Tigers pounced on an opportunity out of nowhere, adding a ridiculously productive hitter by parting with their two top prospects in OF Cameron Maybin and SP Andrew Miller, to go with 4 other prospects. The move makes a clear announcement that the Tigers are making their move right now in the division, with the future perhaps an afterthought. It's an acknowledgement that their team is getting old and they need to make a push for a World Series trophy before age and injuries catch up to the likes of Gary Sheffield and Kenny Rogers.

The inclusion of Willis is ancillary, regardless of how the casual fan will see the name and think that the Tigers rotation just added an important top-of-the-rotation starter, because Willis is simply has not been one for a solid two years now. Since bursting on the scene in 2005 (22-10, 2.63 ERA), he has regressed to the point that his WHIP in 2007 (1.60) was third worst among qualified MLB starters, behind the likes of Baltimore's Daniel Cabrera and Chicago's Jose Contreras. At

this point, Willis projects as a 4th or maybe even 5th starter with the hope in Detroit that he can recapture the success of his superb 2005 season, something that becomes less likely when you consider that he's making the jump from the NL to the AL, which boast better, deeper lineups and won't give him the luxury of facing 8 hitters in a lineup as he has throughout his career.

If Willis makes the career recovery, this trade is great for the Tigers as Willis is still only 25 years old and (best case scenario for Detroit) makes the loss of stud prospect Miller a little easier to take; but Willis' mechanics and his confidence need a major makeover for him to find consistent success in the American League.

But, as I said, Willis is ancillary to this deal - the "Big Fish" is Cabrera, a ridiculously talented hitter who has posted OPS of .946 in 2005, .998 in 2006, and .965 in 2007 while averaging 31 HR, 44 2B, and 116 RBI in those three years - all without much protection from the rest of the Florida lineup. The addition of Cabrera to any MLB team immediately bolsters a lineup, but consider what the Tigers are looking to trot out to the dish every night, with their OPS and rankings for their position (how they stack up against other players playing their postions) against the rest of MLB for 2007:

Pudge - .714 OPS (8th in MLB)

Guillen - .859 OPS (would be 9th among 1B)

Polanco - .846 OPS (3rd in MLB)

Renteria - .860 OPS (3rd in MLB)

Cabrera - .965 OPS (3rd in MLB)

Granderson - .913 OPS (1st in MLB)

Ordonez - 1.029 OPS (1st in MLB)

Sheffield - .839 (5th in MLB)

Though one could argue that Pudge may be on the downslope of his career or that some of these players may be getting older, Left Field (not included above as it figures to be manned by Marcus Thames and Jacque Jones) is the only position that doesn't qualify as a strength for the Tigers. The addition of Cabrera just made this offense (3rd in MLB in runs scored in 2007) incredibly potent. Consider that Renteria and Jones will augment the offense as well - replacing Sean Casey and Craig Monroe, with Cabrera likely replacing Brandon Inge - and the

Tigers' offense has become downright scary in a short time, regardless of some expected regressions from a few of the main cogs of the lineup.

While Detroit may have given up quite a bit in terms of young talent, it's important to remember that Cabrera is not Jim Thome v.2005 or Gary Sheffield v.2006, an aging slugger looking to help out a lineup. He is the real deal, the anchor of a lineup, and a

player who now resides in the AL Central. Sure, the Tigers still have question marks in their bullpen to sort out (Denny Bautista considered) and Willis is far from a sure thing in the Detroit rotation, but the addition of Cabrera gives them some heavy lumber to swing around in the AL Central.

From the Indians' perspective, the reactionary response would be that the Tribe needs to

counter this move with something to bolster their lineup to "keep up with the Joneses"; but it's important not to get too tied up in matching moves (ask the Yankees how their Japanese import to match Dice-K, Kei Igawa, worked out in their AAA rotation) simply to make a move to match a divisional rival. The Indians need to remember that quality pitching still beats quality hitting and the idea that the Tigers just secured the AL Central title is entirely premature, but the team closest

to the Indians in their division just improved their team in the short-term, closing an eye to the long-term for sure, but have made a huge improvement nonetheless.