Ever since Johan Santana was dealt to and resigned by the Mets, naturally, the talk that has followed here in CTown has all revolved around how that signing impacts the Indians ability to resign C.C. Sabathia. In Paulie's latest, he takes a comprehensive look at Johan vs. C.C. ... and essentially concludes that if C.C. wants Johan money, you gotta let him walk.

While everyone has likely been oversaturated with information on the C.C. Sabathia contract talk and how various recent contracts for similar pitchers (notably the Santana deal to the Mets) are relevant to the talks, a few more voices have entered the burgeoning discussion as national writers continue to weigh in on the affect of the Santana deal on the C.C. negotiations.

First off, let me start with TSN's Sean Deveney , and not just to point out the annoying discrepancy that has been appearing in most of the reports of the Santana deal, as Deveney incorrectly calls it a "
deal worth a little more than $150 million over seven years
". But, regardless of Deveney's misinformation (it is a 5-year extension that Santana signed worth $124.5M...but more on that later from Ken Rosenthal), he correctly points out that, "
No one was surprised by the size of the contract that Santana received. To suggest that the Santana deal will sink the Indians' hopes of re-signing Sabathia is to suggest that both Sabathia's agent and Indians GM Mark Shapiro live and work in barren bunkers with no access to telephones, newspapers, web sites or carrier pigeons. Everyone knew what the market on Santana would be, and the market on Sabathia is pretty clear, too

." Deveney is right that we all knew where the numbers were likely to come down (which, again, are not the ones reported by Deveney) and that Santana's deal was not the shocking news that some took it to be when it initially flashed on the ESPN ticker last week.

Interestingly, Deveney also quotes an NL executive as to how much C.C. could get on the open market. "*I don't think anyone would go beyond five years. Maybe he could get to six with incentives.* "

Five guaranteed years, eh?

That is, five guaranteed years after 2008...or what we've known is the sticking point in the negotiations for quite some time. The question, of course, remains if more money from the Tribe on a 4-year extension (which boils down to a 5-year deal as 2008 is included) would entice the Big Fella to the table.

Next up is John Donovan from SI , who rightly thinks that C.C. is headed for a big payday from someone soon...and he doesn't think it will be the Tribe comparing the likelihood of the Hefty Lefty staying in Cleveland on par with " *Roger Clemens planting a nice, sloppy kiss on Brian McNamee's forehead next week on Capitol Hill* ." OK, we get it...add Donovan to the names of Peter Gammons and Buster Olney on the list of writers who feel that C.C. is not long for the North Coast.

All of that being said, however, a part Donovan's article struck me, namely that "*One front-office executive told me recently that the Santana situation is so different than most -- Santana is widely considered the best pitcher in baseball these days -- that any "trickle down" effect on other contracts might not be as bad as people envision. After 2001, remember, Mike Hampton's $121 million deal with the Rockies wasn't bettered until last year, when Barry Zito extracted $126 million from the Giants. There's an argument there that these mega-contracts for starters are a kind of cyclical thing* ."

It struck me because, so often in Cleveland, we tend to trumpet the arrival of C.C. as the "homegrown ace" that we've all been waiting for and that he has immediately jumped to the head of the class in terms of starting pitchers; perhaps, in the minds of some, even leapfrogging Johan. But, according to Donovan's source, Santana is "*widely considered the best pitcher in baseball these days* " and really, as

much as we tend to put them on equal footing when it comes to these negotiations, how close are these two statistically?

Going back for the past 5 years, let's look at how both performed with the normal statistics everyone is used to seeing as well as ERA+ (or Adjusted ERA+) which adjusts a pitcher's ERA according to the pitcher's ballpark (whether it favors batters or pitchers) and the ERA of the pitcher's league.

As a quick aside, ERA+ is an accurate way to judge pitchers with factors weighed evenly for all pitchers with the average ERA+ set to be 100, a score above 100 indicating the pitcher performed better than average and below 100 indicating worse than average. As a point of reference Pedro Martinez holds the modern-day record for the best ERA+ in 2000 with an astronomical ERA+ of 285 and the Tribe's starters of 2007 breaking down like this - C.C.-143, Fausto-151, Westbrook-107, Byrd-100, Lee-73...looks about right and pretty easy to grasp, no?

But I digress.

Back to the comparison between these two pitchers for the last 5 years with their ages during those respective years in parentheses:

2003
C.C. Sabathia (22): 13-9, 197 2/3 IP, 141 K, 3.60 ERA, 122 ERA+
Johan Santana (24): 12-3, 158 1/3 IP, 169 K, 3.07 ERA, 148 ERA+

2004
C.C. Sabathia (23): 11-10, 188 IP, 139 K, 4.12 ERA, 106 ERA+
Johan Santana (25): 20-6, 228 IP, 265 K, 2.61 ERA, 182 ERA+

2005
C.C. Sabathia (24): 15-10, 196 2/3 IP, 161 K, 4.03 ERA, 104 ERA+
Johan Santana (26): 16-7, 231 2/3 IP, 238 K, 2.87 ERA, 155 ERA+

2006
C.C. Sabathia (25): 12-11, 192 2/3 IP, 172 K, 3.22 ERA, 140 ERA+
Johan Santana (27): 19-6, 233 2/3 IP, 245 K, 2.77 ERA, 161 ERA+

2007

C.C. Sabathia (26): 19-7, 241 IP, 209 K, 3.21 ERA, 143 ERA+
Johan Santana (28): 15-13, 219 IP, 235 K, 3.33 ERA, 130 ERA+

So, essentially Santana has outperformed (often vastly) Sabathia every year but last year, which was not as heavily weighted towards the Crooked Cap as we in Cleveland would like to believe.

Yeah...but we beat him 5 times last year...stop.

Regardless of my admiration for C.C., Santana remains the best pitcher in baseball and the numbers above speak to the consistency and dominance that have rightfully put him on that pedestal.

Is C.C. two years younger? Sure, and it remains entirely feasible that Sabathia is poised to rattle off years comparable to Santana's last five into the early 2010's. But for now, if past performance is playing a vital part in the comparison, the comparison is brief and one-sided.

Need further proof that Santana has established himself as the superior pitcher? Now, for as arbitrary as Cy Young voters can be and as controversial as that award generally becomes after it is awarded, consider the Cy Young votes that Santana and C.C. received in those five years and where they finished in the voting:

2003
C.C. Sabathia - 0
Johan Santana - 1 (7th)

2004
C.C. Sabathia - 0
Johan Santana - 140 (1st unanimous)

2005
C.C. Sabathia - 0
Johan Santana - 51 (3rd)

2006
C.C. Sabathia - 0
Johan Santana - 140 (1st unanimous)

2007
C.C. Sabathia - 119 (1st)
Johan Santana - 1 (T-5th)

How unbelievable is the fact that C.C.'s 1st Cy Young votes EVER came in his 2007 campaign and that Santana earned 332 votes over the 4 years that C.C. was shut out, winning two awards unanimously during that time. Certainly C.C.'s 2007 was superb and deserving of the award, but (again) the comparison between the two, if their past performance is the comparison, is shown to be both brief and one-sided.

Look, lest anyone think that I'm discounting the brilliance of C.C. and his importance to this team by making him look positively ordinary next to Santana, understand that I'm firmly of the belief that Sabathia is the most important player on this team as the ace of the rotation - the best player on the best part of the team. His presence allows the rest of the rotation to slot down the line and sets the tone for the pitching staff every 5th day.

The Indians with C.C. are, quite obviously, a better team than they are without him.

But, to simply say that Santana received X amount of money (by the way, Ken Rosenthal accurately reports his deal with the Mets and brought Santana's deal even closer to Earth in his most recent piece by getting the numbers and years right AND pointing out that $5M of Santana's money every year is deferred), so C.C. should also receive X amount of money and years or X+ whatever is not taking into account that C.C. and Santana (despite their comparable 2007 seasons) are not true peers in terms of long-term performance.

Could C.C. eventually rival Santana in terms of performance as the years go by?

No question, but as of today, Santana remains the better pitcher.

Now, the other point of interest in Rosenthal's article linked above is the revelation that "*only five active pitchers threw 630 innings between ages 32 and 34, according to STATS Inc. - Greg Maddux (719 2/3), Tom Glavine (704 1/3), Mike Mussina (659), Curt Schilling (647 1/3) and Derek Lowe (639 1/3)* ."

Remember how the Indians and Sabathia's people seem to be locking horns over the 5th year of a contract extension, which would be his 6th guaranteed year?

Guess how old C.C. would be in that debated 6th year (2013)?

Yep...32.