Cleveland Indians general manger Mark Shapiro completed what ultimately is a "trust me" trade for C.C. Sabathia on Monday and now fans are being counseled again about exercising just a little more patience with a team and a franchise that hasn't won a World Series in 60 years. In his latest, Gary comments on some of Shapiro's statements from yesterday's press conference and the challenges of being a mid-market team in Major League Baseball in 2008.

As if there's a choice.

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That may not be as satisfying as the near-term splash that a press conference announcing the signing of Sabathia might have generated but it will have to suffice nonetheless. It's the kind of move that reminds fans again that despite the billboards, it's not their team.

The beauty of this trade, at least from Shapiro's standpoint, is that the time will never arrive for properly evaluating it. The prospects received are in the low minors. Fans are more likely to forget that Sabathia was ever an Indian in the first place well before they have any idea whether this trade was any good. And even if the prospects arrive sooner rather than later, it undoubtedly will be just in time

for someone like Grady Sizemore or Victor Martinez to plan his exit. By keeping the team in a constant state of transition, Shapiro has made it nearly impossible to assess.

Speaking at the press conference Monday about the move, Shapiro said nothing unexpected. In fact any fan paying attention the last few years could have written the script. At best, the only possible news was Shapiro's admission that the Indians were never on the same page with Sabathia's demands in the first place. But that ceased to qualify as news once the New York Mets signed Johan Santana.

There was the usual talk of the prospects received and the expected rationalization of taking a deal now instead of waiting to see who might emerge with a better offer closer to the July 31 trade deadline and it all made perfect sense. But Shapiro has given this same speech so often, you can now set a watch to it.

The bigger picture in all of this is that it matters little who the Indians received in exchange for Sabathia anyway. The real takeaway is that this is the kind of trade a franchise like Cleveland is always going to make. The Indians, under present ownership and management, are not going to devote a large portion of its self-imposed budget on any one asset, particularly a pitcher and particularly a pitcher of Sabathia's stature at this point in his career.

There was never any chance that the Indians would pay Sabathia upwards of $20 million over the next seven years, which is the kind of money and the length of time it was going to take to keep him in a Cleveland uniform. The risk in the out years of injury on such a contract are far too great for a team like the Indians to sustain. Like it or not, the present regime is not going to allow itself the kind of payroll flexibility to withstand an extra $20 or $30 million of unproductive money should Sabathia have proved to be ineffective or injured in years five, six or seven. Capitalism being what it is, someone else will. It's the system that Major League Baseball prefers.

If you focus just on the American League Central, which is as good a barometer of the rest of Major League Baseball as anything else, it is clearly a division of haves and have nots from a payroll perspective. More than anything else, it illustrates why the Indians can't invest in a player like Sabathia for the long term while Chicago and Detroit can and will.

Both Chicago and Detroit are working with payrolls that are in excess of $120 million. At that level, a $20 million a year salary for one player still allows either team to spend more than 80 percent of the rest of its payroll on the other 24 players. And that's 80% of a rather large pie to begin with. For the Indians, or Kansas City or Minnesota for that matter, a team that works with budgets well below $100 million, that kind of salary eats up 25% or more of the team's payroll. That gives the team far less to work with, both as a percentage of payroll and in real dollars, when filling out a roster worthy of investing that much money in a superstar in the first place. Indeed, it's the reason that the Texas Rangers ultimately decided that their signing of Alex Rodriguez was among the great blunders ever in baseball.

For reasons that still defy any logic, baseball continues to dodge a salary cap as if it were another shattered maple bat. Maybe it doesn't recognize that all of its markets are not equal or maybe it just doesn't care, but clearly it prefers a tilted playing field. By essentially ignoring the economic disparities between its markets, baseball creates situations like that with Sabathia in which a team like Cleveland essentially feels forced to give away a player it nurtured and brought to the doorstep of greatness in order to remain a viable franchise years later.

That doesn't mean that current management gets a free ride to throw up its arms in frustration, although that seems to work season after season in places like Kansas City and, until today, Milwaukee. Shapiro still has an obligation to see the obstacles as opportunities and improve the team in ways that may be as trivial as they are unnecessary for their rich uncles in other cities.

But Cleveland fans will never be able to use this trade to figure out whether

Shapiro has met that charge. Instead, they'll have to be content to judge the dozens of other relatively minor moves that have made this team one year only to break it the next.

There is no doubt that most Indians fans secretly hoped that the team would find a way to re-sign Sabathia, even as they accepted the reality long ago that it would not. It's not just part of the grieving process but also a defense mechanism for avoiding the nasty reality that baseball has once again stacked the deck against a mid-market team like Cleveland.