In years past, the Indians were criticized by us here at the site as well as other writers for sitting on their collective hands during the winter months. This winter, following an 81-81 campaign that only reached the .500 mark thanks to a furious second-half comeback from the doldrums, Mark Shapiro and his staff went proactive. In his latest, Erik Cassano breaks down all the moves the Indians made this off-season, and grades each one of them.

I need to think about baseball for a minute.

As I'm writing this, the temperature reading on my computer is minus-1. The forecast tells me the thermometer is going to bottom out at minus-11. There is also a foot of snow on the ground, and ice pretty much everywhere there isn't snow.

I could use a midsummer night's dream right about now. So let's check in with the Tribe. A team which, lost in the shuffle of the Browns' shakeup and the Cavs' fast start, has had quite an eventful offseason.

In years past, the Indians were criticized by myself and other writers for sitting on their collective hands during the winter months. This winter, following an 81-81 campaign that only reached the .500 mark thanks to a furious second-half comeback from the doldrums, Mark Shapiro and his staff went proactive.

Championships aren't won or lost in the offseason. But it's still good to see Shapiro roll the dice and attempt to improve a team that is well worth improving, if 2007's run to the ALCS is any indication.

Shapiro constructed the Tribe's offseason around four major moves -- two trades and two free agent signings. As of now, it looks like two of the moves were solid moves, and two were questionable.

Below, I give my grades for the four major moves of the Indians' offseason. If you disagree with them, the good news is that there is a long time and a lot of baseball

to be played between now and October.

But I'll take the October weather right now, thanks very much.

1. Indians sign closer Kerry Wood to a two-year deal.

For now, forget Wood's history of arm trouble as a starter. Yeah, it could surface. But Wood has put enough distance between himself and his days as a starter that we can consider him reinvented.

The Wood deal works on multiple levels. Along with Juan Gonzalez and Kevin Millwood, it is one of the few examples of the Dolan-led Tribe shelling out big bucks for a major free agent. And unlike Gonzalez in 2001 and Millwood in 2005, Wood isn't coming off an injury or a lousy year and looking for a one-year contract to reclaim his market value.

His fastball flirts with 100 mph, and he has the breaking stuff to take advantage of his heater. After watching Bob Wickman and Joe Borowski close games on fumes and guile for most of the decade, Wood's explosive stuff should be thrilling to watch.

Since transitioning to the Cubs' bullpen in '07, Wood has become a legit stopper. He worked his way into the back end with 22 appearances in '07, amassing a 1-1 record with a 3.33 ERA, 24 strikeouts and 13 walks in 24.1 innings.

OK, so those stats aren't terribly impressive for a would-be closer. But if you consider his '07 season a prelude to his '08 campaign, the numbers look a lot more impressive.

In his first full season as a closer, Wood pitched 66.1 innings, converting 34 of 40 save chances with a 5-4 record and 3.26 ERA. He struck out 84, walked 18 and surrendered three home runs. The major shortcomings in his stat line are his hits allowed (54) and earned runs (24). But if he keeps up that K/BB ratio and converts saves, that's what counts.

Grade: A

2. Indians trade Franklin Gutierrez to Seattle as part of a three-way deal, receiving relief pitcher Joe Smith from the Mets and infielder Luis Valbuena

from the Mariners.

The Mets and Mariners made bigger splashes in this trade, which went down in mid-December during the winter meetings. The Mets received Seattle closer J.J. Putz, while Seattle received seven players, including Gutierrez and reliever Aaron Heilman. But just because the Indians made the least noise doesn't mean they necessarily received the smallest return.

Smith made 82 appearances with the Mets in '08, compiling a 6-3 record and 3.55 ERA. What makes him particularly attractive to the Indians is his sidearm delivery. For a team that might break camp with Rafael Perez as the only late-inning lefty, the ability to give hitters different looks from the right side could be valuable.

A sidearm delivery is more than a gimmick or a way for a failed overhand pitcher to keep his career alive. There is a reason why guys like Tampa Bay's Chad Bradford seem to hang around in baseball for years, and always seem to find themselves on contenders.

Valbuena played 18 games with the Mariners last season, but he is still essentially a farmhand. But in an organization still trying to figure out exactly what its infield of the future will look like, throwing in a guy who hit .302 in 212 at-bats at Class AAA last year can't hurt. It appears Valbuena will start the season at Columbus.

Grade: B-plus

3. Indians trade a package including reliever Jeff Stevens to the Cubs for infielder Mark DeRosa.

This trade reeks too much of a Mark Shapiro and Eric Wedge pet move for me to accept it just yet. As we have seen over the years, Shapiro and Wedge love versatile, hard-nosed, under-the-radar players. You might call them "grinders." It wouldn't be a Shapiro-Wedge offseason without the acquisition of at least one grinder.

To be clear, I have nothing against versatile, hard-working players. Those attributes are valued in just about any profession. I have more of a problem with how Shapiro overvalues his so-called "grinders," and how Wedge uses them.

Mark DeRosa as a utility guy? Sure, why not? Mark DeRosa tossed into the battle royale for the starting second baseman's job? Cool. Mark DeRosa as your rubber-stamped starting third baseman? Um, can we talk about this?

DeRosa is a career .279 hitter. He wasn't a fulltime player until 2006, when he played in 136 games for the Rangers -- and it's not for lack of experience. He made his major league debut in 1998, and he'll turn 34 next month.

Prior to clouting 21 homers last year, he'd never hit more than 13 in a season. His 87 RBI last year for the Cubs is by far a career high. Entering his mid-30s, everything DeRosa did last year screams "career year" rather than "late bloomer," which is really what the Indians are hoping they have in DeRosa.

They also only have DeRosa, a 2009 free agent, for one more guaranteed year. Stevens, on the other hand, could be a mainstay of the Cubs bullpen for years to come. This seems to go against the value-based principles that Shapiro holds so dear when making trades and signings.

What really grinds my gears about this deal is that I am a proponent of moving Jhonny Peralta to third base and Asdrubal Cabrera to shortstop. Peralta played third in winter ball this year. Cabrera is so much of a natural shortstop, it almost hurts to watch his glove at second base. But with the Tribe's new utilityman-made-good at third, it appears the status quo will be kept as long as possible.

Shapiro and Wedge could do this the easy way. Make the inevitable infield shift in spring training, when experimentation is acceptable. Instead, it looks like they're going to make circumstances -- injuries, slumps, etc. -- force their hand into shifting Peralta and Cabrera. So instead of a nice, neat transition in March, we'll probably have an awkward transition in the middle of the season.

Call it paralysis by analysis or just plain old mule stubbornness. Whatever it is, it's not one of the more endearing traits of the Tribe's leadership.

Grade: C-minus

4. Indians sign Carl Pavano to a one-year deal.

OK, so it's only one year and a base salary of $1.5 million. That's way down from Pavano's 2008 salary of $11 million with the Yankees. For the Indians, it's a relatively low-risk proposition from a money standpoint.

But the Indians need a reliable veteran arm to help stabilize what might end up as a very young rotation behind Cliff Lee. They need more than a tide-me-over until Jake Westbrook completes his rehabilitation from Tommy John surgery.

Pavano might end up falling short on both counts.

He ended his '08 season with a relatively strong showing, but that was after four years of nearly continuous arm problems that limited him to 26 starts between 2005 and '08, making him one of the worst free-agent signing disasters in Yankee history.

In short, Pavano's injury history is so extensive, it's hard to believe he can stay healthy and take the ball every fifth day for an entire season. It doesn't matter how little guaranteed money the Indians have committed to Pavano, if he's on the disabled list, he's not going to be earning his paychecks, and the Indians will have the same hole to fill that they did before Pavano's arrival.

On top of that, it's difficult to see what made this guy attractive to Shapiro in the first place. You don't have to dig very deeply into Pavano's stats to see that he's been a mediocre pitcher for the vast majority of his career.

His prime years were 2003 and '04, the only two years of his career in which he eclipsed 200 innings pitched. In '03, he went 12-13 with a 4.30 ERA in helping the Marlins win the World Series. In '04 -- by far his career year, and a contract year to boot -- he went 18-8 with a 3.00 ERA, then left the Marlins to sign his infamous contract with the Yankees.

I'm all for second, third, fourth and fifth chances. But if Pavano can't keep his arm intact enough to take the ball every fifth day and pitch reasonably well, he's not going to help this team. And history says he won't be able to.

Grade: D