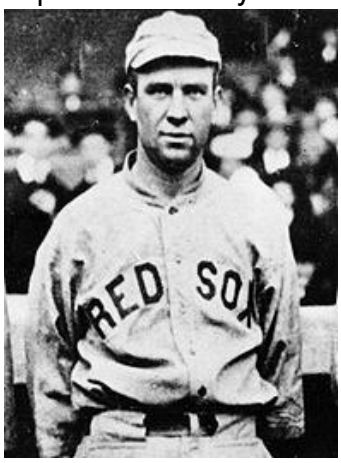
Established in 1901, the Cleveland Indians have made hundreds and hundreds of trades during their 107 years of existence. Which one was the greatest ever? I've put together the following list, with my thoughts on the 16 best trades in team history, ranked in order of how great I percieved the trades to be. The Tris Speaker deal? Jefferson and Fermin for Omar? Colon for Sizemore, Lee, and Phillips? Which is your favorite? Visit our Indians message forum to chime in with your thoughts.



1. 1916 - Sad Sam Jones, Fred Thomas and $55,000 cash to the Red Sox for Tris Speaker

After nine fantastic seasons in Boston, Tris Speaker had a falling out with Red Sox president Joe Lannin, who wanted him to take a pay cut from $15,000 a year to $9,000 a year since his average had fallen to a mere .322. On April 12, 1916 Lannin dealt Speaker to the Cleveland Indians for Sam Jones, Fred Thomas and $55,000.

During his 11 seasons in Cleveland (1916-1926), Speaker finished with a batting average over .350 ten times, and in 1916, finally ended Ty Cobb's amazing run of nine consecutive AL batting titles by batting .386 to Cobb's .371. Speaker is baseball's all-time leader in doubles (792, led league eight times) and outfield assists and retired with 3,515 hits and a .344 career batting average. In 1937, Tris became the seventh player elected into baseball's Hall of Fame, and he is generally regarded as one of the two or three greatest players in Cleveland Indians history.

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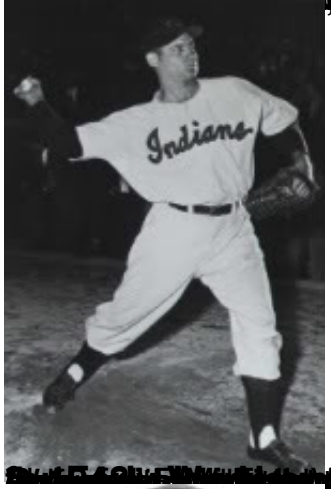
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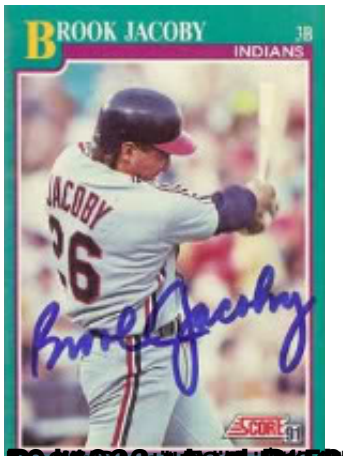

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For the Indians, their return on Gaylord Perry was a steal. He won the American League Cy Young award in his first season with the Tribe in '72, and over a three year period he won 64 games while working over a thousand innings. Gaylord would eventually move on ... all the way to Cooperstown. Trade throw in Frank Duffy would be the Indians' starting shortstop for a few years too.

McDowell struggled with the Giants, went on to the Yankees and struggled there too, and was out of baseball by 1975.

12. 1978 - Jim Kern and Larvell Blanks to the Rangers for Bobby Bonds and Len Barker

After a disastrous year in 1977, the Indians felt they needed to shake things up as they headed into the following season. So the team traded Jim Kern (one of their top relievers) and Larvell Blanks (utility infielder) to Texas for young starting pitcher Len Barker and veteran slugger Bobby Bonds.

While Barker had four and a half mostly productive seasons for the Tribe, the true value in this deal would be the return that they would get on both players in separate "sell high" trades later down the road. Bonds played one season in Cleveland (25 HR, 85 RBI) and was sent to Philly (where he played one more year before retiring) for John Denny. Barker was sent to Atlanta in a deal we already mentioned above.

Kern had one more productive season before flaming out. Blanks' MLB career ended about a year after the deal.

13. 1997 - Kenny Lofton and Alan Embree to the Braves for Marquis Grissom and David Justice

With Greg Maddux and Tom Glavine approaching the ends of their contracts with the Braves, General Manager John Schuerholz was looking for a way to free up money to resign his ace starters ... all while trying to stay competitive with a talented ball club. In the Indians, he found a perfect trade partner, and the two teams pulled off a blockbuster deal just a couple weeks into the 1997 season. The trade would go on to become one of the worst in an otherwise stellar career for Schuerholz as Braves GM.

The Braves achieved their goal of freeing up some money by letting go of Justice and Grissom and got a player in Lofton who was in the last year of his deal. The move cut the team's payroll by almost $6 million in 1997. Grissom had three years remaining on a four-year $19.2 million deal and the Braves owed Justice $6 million in the fourth year of a five-year, $27.5 million deal. The team resigned both Maddux and Glavine that summer.

Grissom and Justice went on to become key cogs to the '97 Indians team that came within a whisker of winning the team's first World Series since 1948. Grissom was traded to Milwaukee (along with Jeff Juden in exchange for Ben McDonald, Mike Fetters, and Ron Villone) a couple months after the World Series loss. Justice had three and a half fine seasons in Cleveland before being dealt to the Yankees for Jake Westbrook and others. Lofton struggled in Atlanta, and then resigned with the Indians that off-season.

14. 1979 - Paul Dade to the Padres for Mike Hargrove

While Mike Hargrove is a familiar name to all Indians fans, many forget the hot start his career got off to, and also the manner in which the team acquired him back in 1979. "Grover" was the AL Rookie of the Year in 1974 after hitting a career high .323 with the Rangers and was also a member of the AL All-Star team in 1975. Unhappy in San Diego after signing with them in 1979 the Padres dealt him 52 games into the season to Cleveland for Paul Dade, a utility player that had a couple decent seasons for the Tribe in '77 and '78.

Grover went on to hit over .300 as the first baseman for the Indians in each of his first three years with the team, and played a total of six and a half seasons in Cleveland. He then went on to embark on a managerial career with the team, working his way through the Indians minor league system, being named manager

of the big league club on July 6, 1991, a post he would hold for eight seasons. Dade's major league career ended not even halfway through the 1980 season.

15. 1992 - Kyle Washington to the Orioles for Jose Mesa

Desperate for pitching help as the team began to improve and readied itself for the Jacobs Field era, the Indians traded minor league utility infielder Kyle Washington to the Baltimore Orioles for a talented and erratic 26-year old starter by the name of Jose Mesa. Mesa would make 48 starts for the Indians during the '92 and '93 seasons before the team moved him to the bullpen before the start of the '94 campaign.

The rest is history. Mesa took over the closer role during the 1995 season and had one of the most prolific stretches of any Indians relief pitcher in history, saving 101 games over the course of the next three seasons. However, his inability to hold a one run lead in the ninth inning of Game 7 of the 1997 World Series was a black mark on his career, and the Tribe traded him mid-way through the following season. Washington would never ascend past AA ball.

16. 1978 - Cardell Camper to the Phillies for Joe Charboneau

It was an afterthought of a deal to most Indians fans, an exchange of minor leaguers between the Indians and the Phillies in the winter following the 1978 season. Pitcher Cardell Camper would never make it to the big leagues in Philly. "Super" Joe Charboneau would go on to have an exciting, albeit short career in Cleveland.

Super Joe broke in with the Tribe in 1980, hit .289, slammed 23 HR's, and was named American League Rookie of the Year ... exciting the fan base as much as any one player had in many years. The season started out with Charboneau getting stabbed with a pen by a rogue fan, and also included several different hair colors for Joe as well as tales of him opening beer bottles with his eye, drinking the beer through his nose using a straw, and doing his own dental work with a pair of pliers and a bottle of Jack Daniels. For at least one season, Joe was a rock star in Cleveland.

The following season could not be more opposite from the first. Charboneau injured his back in a headfirst slide in spring training the following year, and was sent to the minors halfway through the 1981 season after hitting only .210, becoming the first Rookie of the Year to find himself back in the minors the following season. Joe only appeared in 22 games in 1982, underwent back surgery twice but never fully recovered, and the Indians released him in 1983.

Also considered ...

1954 - Bob Chakales to the Baltimore Orioles for Vic Wertz

1976 - John Lowenstein and Rick Cerone to the Toronto Blue Jays for Rico Carty

1980 - Gary Alexander, Victor Cruz, Rafael Vasquez and Bob Owchinko to Pittsburgh for Bert Blyleven and Manny Sanguillen

1981 - Jorge Orta, Larry White, and Jack Fimple to the Los Angeles Dodgers for Rick Sutcliffe and Jack Perconte

1983 - Von Hayes to the Phillies for Manny Trillo, George Vukovich, Jerry Willard, Julio Franco, Jay Baller

1983 - Jerry Dybzinki to the Chicago White Sox for Pat Tabler

2000 - David Justice to the Yankees for Jake Westbrook, Rickey Ledee, and Zach Day

2004 - Milton Bradley to the Dodgers for Franklin Gutierrez and Andrew Brown

2007 - Eduardo Perez to the Mariners for Asdrubal Cabrera