With Tony on "vacation" (pay no attention to yesterday's 4,000 word column) working the phones, talking to people inside the Indians org, and chatting with scouts about all the new prospects acquired in the still ongoing fire sale ... he hasn't even really had a chance to give us his opinion on the Cliff Lee deal. So today he does. In between beach visits, Kinston Indians games, and minature golf. Heather Lastoria is a saint! Hopefully the Victor deal doesn't push her over the edge!

With all the recapping of the Cliff Lee trade the past two days, I have not had a chance to really give much of an opinion on the deal. Here are some random thoughts and notes:

- I'm indifferent on the trade at the moment. I don't think the haul they got in return was great, but by the same token I don't think it was the train wreck many people are making it out to be. This is a trade I think will take some time to show its true warts or sheer genius, although I think in the long run it will just be viewed as a solid trade. Nothing more or less.

- The Indians were not bowled over in this deal, which was supposed to be the key in any deal regarding Lee since he was under contract relatively cheap for next year. If they did not get what they liked - a great haul - they could walk away and just keep Lee for next season. About two weeks ago they had zero intentions of trading him, but something changed in the past week or even 24 hours before

the trade where it looks like budget constraints for 2010 came into play and made it necessary to deal him now and get the ball rolling to rebuilding for 2011 and beyond.

- I have not been told this, but reading between the lines and going on some other things I have heard, it looks like what happened is ownership came to Shapiro and his staff and told them that payroll in 2010 had to be cut substantially. Knowing this, and having very little means to trade Jake Westbrook ($11M in 2010), Travis Hafner ($11.5M in 2010) and Kerry Wood ($10.5M in 2010), the only option available to take a huge chunk off the payroll was to trade Lee ($8M in 2010).

- Knowing that they had to trade Lee because of financial reasons, and also knowing that they did not have the means to supplement the team in a way to compete in 2010 even if they kept Lee, they dealt him for the best available deal. Contrary to what fans want to believe, a lot of teams still view Lee as a good #2 starter or even a middle-of-the-rotation starter, but not an ace. Roy Halladay is viewed as an ace, which is why the rumored packages for Halladay were so much different.

- The Indians did try to get as much as possible for Lee, but in the end teams were just reluctant to move any high level pitching deemed close to major league ready. The Indians targeted pitching, but the contenders did not want to part with anyone. As an example, I got a good tip from a reliable source that the Indians offered Lee straight up to the Red Sox for Clay Buchholz and were TURNED DOWN. The Red Sox countered asking for Indians catcher and #1 prospect Carlos Santana straight up for Buchholz, and the Indians in turn TURNED THEM DOWN. This is interesting as it shows how highly valued young elite prospects are (Buchholz, Santana) and how they both are viewed to have more value than Lee right now in straight up deals. Don't get me wrong, Lee is valued and coveted, just I think the perception of his value by some fans has been a little out of whack as people were expecting more than maybe what he ultimately was worth.

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The trade lacks any near major league ready elite guys, but they did get back three very good major league prospects who may end up solid second level lineup options and a #3 starter. The prize of the bunch is obviously Knapp, who is a guy the Indians deemed as the best pitching prospect in the Phillies farm system. One source for another team I talked to felt the same way, and ESPN's Buster Olney even reported it yesterday that Knapp was viewed by a lot of scouts as the best pitcher in the Phillies system. This means better than J.A. Happ and Kyle Drabek, two guys Indians fans coveted more than the guys we got in return like Carlos Carrasco and Jason Knapp.

- I'm also reluctant to really have a strong opinion on this deal because I think there is more to this and that once the dust settles some question marks may then be answered. Namely, why they picked up Jason Donald and Lou Marson in the deal, two players which sort of crowd the middle infield and catching situation. Well, I guess Donald could be a utility guy and offer up a nice three man shortstop-second base mix with him, Asdrubal Cabrera and Luis Valbuena, but certainly the addition of Marson is interesting considering that the Indians are overstocked so much with catching at the big league and Triple-A level with Victor Martinez, Kelly Shoppach, Carlos Santana, Wyatt Toregas, and Chris Gimenez. All five of those guys are on the 40-man roster, and while Gimenez is more a utility player, the addition of Marson technically puts an unheard of six catchers on the 40-man roster. Something has to give there, and from what I have heard Marson and Donald are very valued throughout the league, so they could be on the move, or maybe someone like Martinez or Shoppach may be on the move.

- Also, even if J.A. Happ was available, the Indians apparently would have passed anyway since they are not looking for guys who are already accruing service time. Happ has played in parts of two seasons, and by the time 2011 rolls around assuming he would be here the rest of this season, he would be in his fourth major league season and about three years from free agency. They wanted players who could be part of the next run for a longer timeframe.

- In any case, once the dust settles, I don't think anyone is going to truly be happy with all the deals. Maybe all the secondary trades like the Betancourt, Garko and DeRosa deals which made sense and we got solid returns on, but

many people are not going to be happy seeing another All Star traded away in Lee. Whether now, or several months from now. The Indians are clearly set on using the rest of this season to sort out some of their roster and then all of the 2010 season to audition and get a contending team in place by the end of the season going into 2011. There are a lot of pieces here that can impact this team and provide some optimism on the prospects of a great 2011, but anything can happen.

- That said, the projected lineup in 2011 looks pretty impressive from a prospect perspective: CF Grady Sizemore, LF Matt LaPorta, RF Shin-Soo Choo, 3B Lonnie Chisenhall, SS Asdrubal Cabrera, 2B Luis Valbuena, 1B Jordan Brown, C Carlos Santana, and DH Travis Hafner. That's a pretty impressive "potential" lineup, and while Chisenhall may be a reach, he is clearly the 3B of the future and could be with the Indians by the end of 2010. If not, then insert one of Wes Hodges, Andy Marte, Jason Donald or Jhonny Peralta. Either way, the solution will come from in-house. The starting rotation is still somewhat murky, but with Fausto Carmona, Hector Rondon, Carlos Carrasco, and David Huff to build on along with some backend rotation options like Aaron Laffey and Scott Lewis they have the start to a solid rotation. Also, there is the possibility they may get a middle-of-the-rotation starter type in another trade they may be working on, so the rotation setup could change quickly.

By the way, remember when about a decade ago this time of year was like Christmas in July for Tribe fans as we looked to pluck players off other teams for the stretch run? My how times have changed, and how much this time of year feels so different when you are on the other side of the pickings.