



Despite a final week collapse that left them on the outside looking in by the time October rolled around, the Indians organization had officially turned the corner. The highly hyped “2005” return to contention was delivered as promised.

Prospects came, and prospects went- but enough of them panned out to provide the franchise with a core to build around for the next five or six years. We had taken a time machine a decade back. Lets go get Eddie Murray and Dennis Martinez and catch the Sox in 06.

And so it seemed at the time. A right handed bat to replace either Ben Broussard or Casey Blake was high on GM Mark Shapiro’s wish list. Not far behind was a desire to look elsewhere for a closer, feeling Bob Wickman would be hard pressed to duplicate his all-star 2005 campaign. With an owner who said he would spend money when the team was close, this all looked very doable.

Offers were made, and offers were rejected. B.J. Ryan wanted the last dollar, albeit Canadian. Brian Giles and Trevor Hoffman preferred to stay in San Diego. And Mark Shapiro felt paying extra for a complimentary piece such as Reggie Sanders was not something that fit the team’s financial flexibility.

The Crisp trade, while intriguing, does not help the 2006 team on paper. Even if you can convince me that Jason Michaels can equal Coco’s production, that simply puts us back to where we were. One hitter short. At best, the lineup is in the same position it was at the end of 2005.

On the mound, it could be even shakier. Kevin Millwood should not have been resigned, but that does not mean that his absence will not be felt. Replacing an ERA champ is more than replacing his nine wins, as many have argued. The number of games he kept the Tribe in is invaluable. Bob Howry was an indestructible bridge to Bob Wickman. He was gone early. Would Shapiro have pursued him harder had he known how the next few months would have gone?

The bottom line is that it is very plausible to suggest February 2006's Cleveland Indians are inferior to last year's squad in hitting, starting pitching and relief pitching. Andy Marte becoming David Wright in 2007 does not change this.

Despite all of this, I still feel that adding one more legitimate hitter this offseason would give the Indians a fighter's chance at the Central. I would have overpaid SOMEONE on a one-year deal (sure, Nomar is not worth \$9m on a one-year deal, but is Grady Sizemore worth \$350k?). My thinking is that eventually, you have to overpay someone. Whether it's the bitter taste in Mark Shapiro's mouth from the Matt Lawton deal, or the tight purse strings of Larry Dolan- the Tribe won't go that route. That leaves a trade.

The X-Factor here is that we have Mark Shapiro, not Dan Duquette. He has proven to be creative and competent, and probably knows that something additional needs to be done.

My bet is that something will be done, and the Tribe's incomplete offseason will be completed.