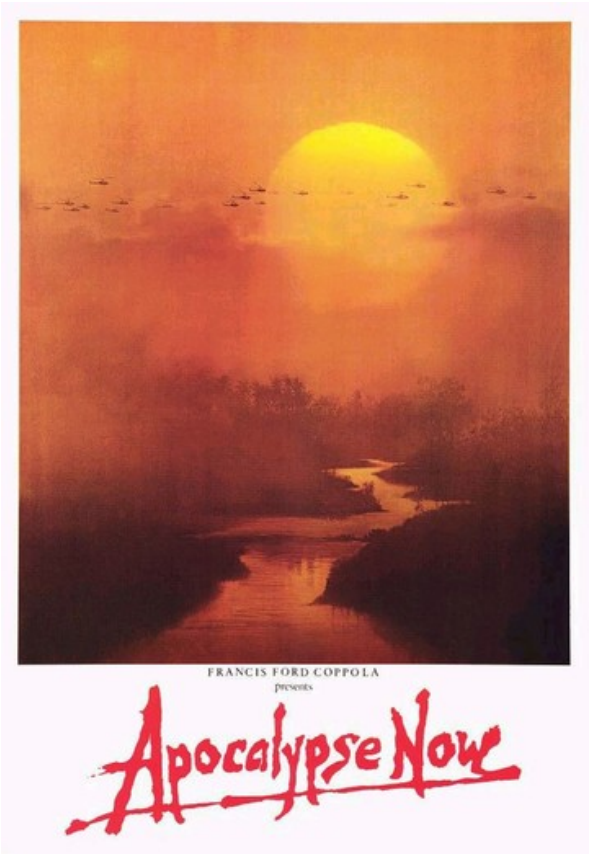
I was trying to determine who was more delusional, Cleveland Browns head coach Eric Mangini for trying to convince the public that every other sign notwithstanding he's really not a power-hungry maniac or Cleveland Indians general manager Mark Shapiro for trying to convince the public that signing Russell Branyan and taking away at bats from two prospects makes sense, when it dawned on me. The answer is Indians owner Larry Dolan for trying to convince the public that the Indians' organization is the envy of major league baseball.

It never occurred to me that anyone, let alone other major league executives, would view the Indians with envy after it just polished off the near complete alienation of its fan base with a two-season garage sale in which nearly anything of value was sold for spare parts. But yet there was Dolan justifying his promotion of Shapiro to club president as season's end because of the great shape this franchise is in. As I pondered again Dolan's assertion I started to wonder about the New York Yankees and why, for example, they might not be a tad more envied.

In a not unrelated way, I came across still another story about still another off-season

acquisition by the Yankees that makes them arguably stronger than last season's World Series champs, this time superstar-in-the-making Curtis Granderson. How could you not envy that?

As for Dolan, I understand that a little salesmanship goes along with any announcement and so I forgive Dolan's wild hyperbole. And the Indians' front office may actually be a great place to work. Shapiro and Chris Antonetti, for example, seem nice enough. They're constantly working on new and exciting ways to identify players that they can never acquire. Their offices are downtown.



As for Granderson and the circumstances that take him to New York, to me, they represent ground zero for baseball's impending economic apocalypse. I don't mean to come across like Glenn Beck trying to scare the weak and vulnerable about a nefarious shadow conspiracy that is trying to take over our country through mind control and liberal-biased textbooks, but I am worried about baseball. Quite a bit, actually.

The reason a guy like Beck can attract so much attention is precisely because his points can't be proven. Sure you can cobble together half-truths and innuendo, but the minute someone points out the obvious flaws they just become part of the conspiracy. Pretty powerful stuff, actually.

The reason that baseball's impending implosion attracts little interest is precisely because baseball lays its intentions so out in the open. There aren't any half-truths and leaps of faith required. Anyone can look at facts because they're printed everywhere. Google "major league salaries" and you'll find plenty of databases that set out in stark terms the growing economic disparities. You can do the same with attendance figures and on and on. The problems are so obvious and so many that anyone trying to draw attention to them looks like the wacko.

On the surface, Granderson is exactly the kind of player that gravitates to the Yankees. He's young, productive and hasn't quite hit his prime. When he does hit his prime only the Yankees will be able to afford him so the chance of him becoming a free agent is minimal. I'd say non-existent but as long as the Mets and the Red Sox are open for business there is a chance that the Yankees could be outbid, but I doubt it.

The real problem is below the surface. For one thing, Granderson wasn't even a free agent. He was traded to the Yankees and by the Detroit Tigers, a team that has been throwing around money like the Cub Scouts throw around candy at a Memorial Day parade. This wasn't the Royals dispensing with an approaching iceberg or even the Indians dumping another Cy Young winner. It was the free-spending Tigers finally coming to grips with the notion that no matter how much they spent they could never outspend the Yankees. As the economy has finally caught up with Detroit, it's been shedding payroll like a contestant sheds pounds on The Biggest Loser on its way to joining the Indians and others in the race toward the middle.

What makes this so disturbing, too, is that Granderson is a great guy. He's well raised, well schooled and charitable with his time and money. He's committed to his craft. In short, he's exactly the kind of player that should be on a team like the Indians, at least until he becomes too expensive to keep. Instead, he was dumped in a preemptive move well before the July trading deadline. You could actually see Shapiro making exactly the same deal.

I no more expected baseball to step in and use this trade as a prime example for why it needs to make fundamental changes in the way it does business than I expect Rush Limbaugh to vote for Barack Obama in 2012. But it would be nice to think that the forces that pretend to run

baseball, like Bud Selig and the various victimized owners, could actually wrest control of their sport from those who actually do run it, the union and the agents and in doing so, save baseball from itself.

That isn't going to happen either.

But here's what I do know and it all goes back to Dolan's reason for promoting Shapiro. The Tigers traded Granderson in order to acquire prospects as it changes its business model to more match the surrounding economy in Michigan. Arguably it's something they should have been moving toward the last several years but a well-healed owner stymied that descent for a long time. One wonders why.

In the last 20 years, the Tigers have had just 5 winning seasons. On the other hand, they had 9 seasons when they lost at least 90 games and 4 seasons when they've lost over 100. Overall they are 356 games under .500 for those 21 seasons. Sure they went to the World Series in 2006 and lost 4-1, but that's their only playoff appearance during that stretch. From a cost/benefit standpoint I doubt there's another team in the league that has spent as much in payroll per win over that same period of time as the Tigers.

The Indians on the other hand have had far more success and have spent far less in the process. They've had only 3 seasons in which they lost at least 90 games and only 1 season when they lost at least 100. They made the playoffs 7 times, losing twice in the World Series. Overall, they are 91 games above .500 in that stretch.

What the Tigers really have proven during that period of time is that it's easy to waste bundles of money. Actually, they've really proven something far more valuable to the overarching dialogue. If you can't actually spend like the Yankees, there's no reason to try and come close. Financially, the Tigers would have been in better shape and no further behind with half the payroll that they were carrying.

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