The Cleveland Indians may be in extreme cost-cutting mode, which is about the only explanation out there for how they found a doctor to medically clear Russell Branyan. Perhaps their medical staff is made up of equal parts Dr. Vinnie Boombatz, Dr. Bombay and Dr. Demento.

Branyan has yet to sniff an at bat in the preseason as he supposedly rehabilitates the bad back that kept him out of the last month of the season. With almost no competition for his services given both his incredibly mediocre major league career and his physical condition, the Indians got medical clearance and couldn't wait to throw $2 million of its shrinking revenue pool at him. Now Branyan looks destined to start the season on injured reserve.

To which I can only say, really? It's exactly this kinds of bizarre moves that gets fans so frustrated with general manager Mark Shapiro. There is nothing about Branyan's history that suggests the Indians should have signed him even if he was completely healthy. He's a hack in the field and a hack at the plate. He can occasionally hit the long ball but all the stuff he does in between those pokes isn't worth the effort.

But Branyan isn't healthy, which makes this signing even worse. Supposedly Branyan is at least participating in some spring training activities but the fear is that Branyan's back won't physically let him swing and miss too often against actual pitching. Here's the thing, I think Branyan would strike out just as often if he was hitting off a tee. He doesn't need 50 spring training at bats to polish his batting eye, he needs a new set of eyes.

Branyan claims he really only needs a week of spring training to get ready for the season and for once I can't disagree. Branyan has been kicking around professional baseball since the mid 1990s. In that time he's shown remarkable consistency in his ability to strike out, whether it's against the American League, the National League or the minor leagues. That's not a skill that takes much practice to master. You could literally pull a man off the street, give him a uniform and a week of practice, and accomplish the same thing. And I'm guess that would have cost Shapiro far less than $2 million.

At some point, which means when Branyan actually goes on the disabled list, Shapiro will switch into "it was worth the gamble" mode when it comes to justifying the Branyan signing. As Branyan's back persistently refuses to respond favorably to rehabilitation Shapiro will then switch to "this now gives us a chance to look at the prospects" mode.

Meanwhile as the season turns from one fitful month to the next and Shapiro starts entertaining offers for any assets left of value, we can then begin to calculate the real impact of this little $2 million mistakes. As they like to say in government, $2 million here, $2 million there, pretty soon you're talking about real money.

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The National Football league has changed its overtime rules for playoff games to hopefully lessen the impact that winning the coin flip can have on the outcome of the game and this is hailed as progress.

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