The fire sale continued yesterday as the Tribe dealt second baseman Ronnie Belliard to St. Louis for former farmhand Hector Luna. Belliard was going to be a free agent at seasons end, and Luna is signed for a couple more years on the cheap. Will this savings be spent by Larry Dolan this off-season, or is this just another straight salary dump for the team and their frugal owner?

Making their fifth trade of the season, the Indians dealt popular second baseman Ronnie Belliard to the St. Louis Cardinals yesterday for utility infielder Hector Luna. The Indians had previously dealt Jason Johnson, Eduardo Perez, Bob Wickman, and Ben Broussard ... and this deal of Belliard could be their last trade of the season, save for a possible deal of Guillermo Mota or Aaron Boone before todays 4 PM deadline.

The main factor in this deal was the fact that Belliard was set to be a free agent at seasons end, and likely command a salary in the 5-6 million dollar per year range, which the Indians obviously felt uncomfortable committing to. Had the Indians kept Belliard, and lost him in free agency, they would have been compensated with a draft pick, but the Indians and GM Mark Shapiro opted for the affordable Luna instead.

Luna is a former Indian who was signed by the team in 1999 as an undrafted free agent. He was then lost to the Rule 5 draft in 2003, when he became a victim of the team having a glut of middle infielders in the farm system, and Jhonny Peralta and Brandon Phillips as the apparent heirs to the second base and shortstop positions.

Now, with Phillips gone, Peralta waffling defensively at shortstop, and the team suddenly lacking major league ready middle infield prospects, Luna once again has become desirable to the team. Not hurting matters is the fact that Luna is making just $340,000 this year, and will make just about half a million dollars next year before becoming arbitration eligible. Luna will platoon with Joe Inglett at second base for the remainder of this season before entering the mix for a starting role in the middle infield next season.

Luna was hitting .291 in 223 at bats this season for the Cardinals with four home runs, 21 RBI's, and five stolen bases. While not as adept at turning the double play as Belliard, he has better range, better speed on the basepaths, a more patient approach at the plate, and is a better hitter against left handed pitching ... which the AL Central is now loaded with. Luna also played six different positions for the Cards this year, spending time at first base, second base, third base, shortstop, left field, and right field. This all said, Belliard is the superior overall player,

and this is why the perennially contending Cardinals are making this deal.

I've always felt that Belliard and Ben Broussard were never "Wedge Guys", and that notion has been essentially proven by the fact that they are both now gone. Belliard's free spirit, laid back demeanor, and laissez faire attitude never seemed to rub manager Eric Wedge the right way. Despite the public talk from Shapiro about potentially resigning Ronnie this off-season, it appears highly unrealistic to me. And the Indians have dealt a guy they had no interest in resigning for a utility man that gives them insurance and options at several different positions heading into sprign training next season.

And this also represents another salary dump for the Dolans, who moved Belliards 4 million dollar 2006 contract for Luna's $340.000 deal. The team has now eradicated several of their more pricy 2006 contracts from the books, and this is after the team never spent the "10 million dollars or so" that they had left over to allegedly play with after striking out with every big name free agent they spoke with this off-season.

Will the team take these savings and use them to boost a payroll for next year that ranked 25th in Major League Baseball this season? Have the Indians finally realized that a miniscule payroll will not get it done in a suddenly loaded AL Central? Or does this just represent more savings for the Dolans, who in my view ... have failed miserably in their promise to "spend when the time is right" when they purchased the team in 2000.