The Indians won't be much of a player in the trade deadline this year as either a team looking to pick up impact quality talent or one looking to dump it.

Even still, the Indians are expected to at some point clear the decks of some players like Jake Westbrook, Jhonny Peralta, Kerry Wood and Austin Kearns, and when they do it is inevitable that fans will want to immediately grade the trade based on first impressions and insights gathered from other sources.

But, often times it can take years for a trade to show its true colors.

Sometimes players make an immediate impact and then fizzle later, while others struggle initially but then come into their own later. It's the great unknown when you are dealing with veteran for prospect trades since prospects are just what they are: prospects.

I mean, if teams truly knew what prospects would ultimately become they would never trade a future five time All Star, or teams would never acquire a highly valued prospect who tears an

elbow ligament or who ends up bottoming out in Double-A hitting .221.

That's the beauty of prospects. It's like digging for gold. You know where to find it, but you often don't dig in the right spot. The key is to be accurate more times than not on where to dig. Bottom line, young players with upside and talent to burn are extremely valuable. Not just in baseball, but all sports. The more young talent a team has, the more chances they have to strike gold.

Whatever interest the Indians receive for the players available, and whatever kind of compensation they ultimately get in return for them, only time will tell if the Indians made the right decisions on the compensation package received. No team ever makes out better in every deal they make, and every team makes some mistakes along the way. The key is to swing away and hit more often than you miss.

The typical reaction and the first question raised when a team makes a veteran for prospect trade, is 'did they get enough'? This is a question Indians fans have far too many times been forced to ask, and it will be asked yet again in the coming weeks once some trades are made.

As fans, we want instant gratification. Often the player being sent out in the deal is a fan favorite, so we want the players received in a deal to help ease the pain of losing such a player; however, almost no deal involving trading a veteran for prospects is ever received well initially.

When the Indians traded the likes of Bartolo Colon or Joe Carter for unknown prospects at the time, there was obvious resentment over the deals. In time those deals proved bountiful for the Indians. Of course, there have been veteran for prospect trades in the past that have not worked out well, such as the Robbie Alomar trade.

To truly determine value in a trade it takes one thing: time. Sometimes it can take three to five years to really get a pulse on how a veteran for prospect trade worked out for both teams involved, mainly because the young talent sometimes needs a few years to be seasoned still. Unfortunately, that requires a lot of patience, which is something that understandably does not come easy these days for a fan base in Cleveland starving for a professional sports championship.

Trades take time to reveal themselves for what they really are. For teams getting the established big league player, the impact is almost always felt immediately. For the team getting the "prospects", the impact takes several years to truly be felt. During that time between when the deal itself is consummated and when the players ultimately prove their worth there will be much hand wringing between those for and against the trade over how valuable the players really are that were received.

Take for example last year's Cliff Lee trade between the Indians and Phillies.

We are coming up on the one year anniversary of that trade where we shipped him to Philadelphia on July 29th, 2009 for four prospects: right-handed pitchers Jason Knapp and Carlos Carrasco, middle infielder Jason Donald, and catcher Lou Marson.

A year later we still don't really know what we got in the deal. Meanwhile, Lee has been traded twice since then where in one deal the Phillies received a poor return from the Mariners for him, and another where the Rangers got into a bidding war with the Yankees and other teams and sent the best overall package of players among the three deals.

“I think the entire industry would agree that Philadelphia by far received the least [in the Lee deals],” said one industry source when asked to evaluate the three deals. “Smoak has a chance to have the most upside [of all the players received], while the secondary players the Indians received are much better than what Seattle got.”

The Lee deal between the Indians and Phillies is hard to dissect because the Phillies and Dodgers were the only two true suitors for his services, and in the case of the Dodgers they weren’t offering much more than the Phillies but wanted the Indians to take back money in the deal. Teams like the Yankees, Mets and other high budget teams had no interest.

But the point is that the Indians-Phillies deal for Lee will take another two to three years before we truly know what kind of value the Indians received. The Indians definitely picked up four players of high prospect pedigree as they were all in the Phillies Top 10 to open the 2009 season per Baseball America, but unfortunately the returns to date have been somewhat

disappointing.

Marson hit .191 with a .530 OPS in 45 games for Cleveland before being optioned to Triple-A Columbus where in 31 games he is hitting .175 with a .610 OPS. Donald has had a nice season where he hit .277 with an .820 OPS in 37 games for Columbus and since being called up to Cleveland in May is holding his own hitting .271 with a .754 OPS in 54 games.

But the two keys to the deal in making it a success are Carrasco and Knapp as at least one needs to turn into a reliable big league starting pitcher. Knapp has been sidelined for most of the season rehabbing from offseason shoulder surgery and just made his first official minor league appearance over the weekend for rookie-level Arizona throwing one shutout inning on Saturday. Carrasco has had a solid but unspectacular season numbers-wise as he is 9-4 with a 4.00 ERA in 20 starts for Columbus, though is struggling with a lingering right forearm issue of late.

At this point, a year into the trade, it is certainly not going the Indians' way. But, before jumping off the ledge and considering the trade a failure, it is important to realize again that trades take time to show their true colors.

Consider the Indians trade in June 2002 where they sent Bartolo Colon to the Montreal Expos for three prospects: shortstop Brandon Phillips, left-handed pitcher Cliff Lee and outfielder Grady Sizemore.

Eight years later, we of course know that the Indians ultimately received three All Stars and one CY Young Award winner in the trade. That's an exceptional trade, and one for the ages. Time has proven it to be so. It is the blueprint for what every team trading off a highly sought after veteran player hopes to follow.

But a year after that trade in July 2003, fans were hardly in the mood to praise it and many considered it a colossal failure.

Remember, that year Brandon Phillips was hitting just .210 with a .549 OPS at the All Star

break and then was shipped out to Triple-A Buffalo for most of the rest of the season where he hit just .175 in 43 games. A vast majority of fans were calling Phillips a bust after that one half season.

Lee opened that 2003 season on the disabled list with a lower abdominal strain and hernia and did not make his first start in the minors until May 29th that year for High-A Kinston on a rehab assignment. At the All Star break that year he had made a grand total of eight starts in the minors and was 5-0 with a 1.76 ERA (46.0 IP, 35 IP, 9 ER, 21 BB, 46 K) between starts at High-A Kinston (1), Double-A Akron (2) and Buffalo (5).

Sizemore at the All Star break in 2003 had just played in the Futures Game and won MVP honors. At Double-A Akron he was hitting .292 with 9 HR and 42 RBI, and ended up finishing the year hitting .304 with 13 HR, 78 RBI. So the future was certainly bright for him.

At the time, though, there were some serious questions as to whether the Indians had bombed on the Bartolo Colon trade. But - over time - those questions have more than been answered and that the deal was about as perfect a trade you can make and the defining moment in Mark Shapiro's career as Indians' GM.

Over the rest of this season and next season the merits of the Indians-Phillies trade will be put on display on a nightly basis as three of the four players obtained in the deal should be with the big league team and start building a resume to evaluate them on at the big league level. We should have a much better understanding on where we stand on that deal as soon as at the end of next season.

Such is the life of the veteran for prospect deals.

In a time where we want information immediately and it rests at our fingertips, it is best to evaluate these trades as they happen the old fashioned way and let time run its course.

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