The Indians have no money to spend?

Doesn't that make for a boring offseason in a sport that names their offseason, "The Hot Stove League?"

Sure, if all you pay attention to is the millions and millions of dollars the Yankees are going to throw at old friend Cliff Lee. I should apologize for that statement as I'm sure most are sick of hearing how the Yankees are going to pay Cliff Lee.

I prefer to classify the Indians offseason, at least this one, as timid. So Chad Huffman getting bounced from the 40-man roster isn't your idea of excitement?

That's understandable. But isn't it the least bit intriguing to see who's going to take his spot?

No?

You have to at least try.

I guess that's why I'm here. I'll try for you and if the wheels aren't at least turning, then maybe you should hibernate with the bears and I'll wake you up in roughly 100 days.

Trimming the Fat

The Indians have already taken the suspense out of this process. They could still clear roster space, but it looks like the entire house has already been swept up and cleared.

Andy Marte, Chris Gimenez, Drew Sutton, Luke Carlin, Wes Hodges, and Chad Huffman were all outrighted off the 40-man roster. None were claimed, which gives the Indians control over them, sort of. Exceptions include Marte, Gimenez, and Sutton, who all can elect minor league free agency and go elsewhere.

Anthony Reyes and Hector Ambriz were both outrighted, but neither were on the 40-man due to being on the 60-Day Disabled List. Ambriz is still property of the Tribe, but Anthony Reyes is a free agent.

Finally, Carlos Rivero was claimed by the Philadelphia Phillies, making him property of the NL East Champions. He is on their 40-man roster and he has options left, so it's likely he's gone for good.

As of right now the Indians stand at 33 on their 40-man roster. They still have to add Carlos Santana and Grady Sizemore from the disabled list as there is no such thing in the offseason. That gives them 35 spots to add prospects for Rule-V protection or to sign free agents. In other

words, that gives them five spots to add prospects.

The remaining players on the bubble in terms of the 40-man include infielder Luis Valbuena, outfielders Shelley Duncan and Trevor Crowe, and pitchers Jess Todd, Aaron Laffey, Jensen Lewis, and Justin Germano.

As I said earlier, a lot of suspense was removed with the cuts the Indians have already made. The end of Andy Marte was a bit of surprise in the instance that if they were only going to clear one more spot, you would think it would be Germano's.

I think the Indians have their reasons for keeping all the other players. Manny Acta really likes Trevor Crowe and thinks he can be a piece to the team as a role player at least. Shelley Duncan provided some value last year and if anything he can be the "first to go" if the club needs to make any additions the 40-man. Luis Valbuena is just Luis Valbuena and the Indians aren't giving up on him yet. I really couldn't think of a good reason as to why they would keep him, honestly.

Then you have the trio of relievers who I think all have value to the Indians, more so than some of the names they would add to kick off Laffey, Lewis, and Todd.

It comes down to who you are adding and who you think won't be taken. That is the bottom line when it comes to removing players at this stage. There is nothing that says Justin Germano won't be removed down the road in the offseason, but will they do it right now?

I think it's unlikely, which leaves us with five spots on the 40-man to protect players. I think five is ultimately the number of people they want to protect and it may surprise you how little conflict there may be there.

On a similar note, it only makes sense that Andy Marte was in fact cut, because after all this section is called Trimming the Fat.

Protecting the Future

Here is my list of noteworthy players that are eligible for the Rule V draft in early December.

Infielders: Jared Goedert, Beau Mills, Josh Rodriguez

Outfielders: Jerad Head, Matt McBride, John Drennen

Starters: Yohan Pino, Nick Hagadone, Corey Kluber, Zach McAllister

Relievers: Connor Graham, Josh Judy, Adam Miller

These are the names that give me an inkling of hesitation in getting selected or at the very least are noteworthy. I think it's unlikely you see someone like Beau Mills selected, but it is worth mentioning that he's a former first round draft pick.

So who would you give your five spots to? Is there a method to what position gets selected most or does it matter what level the player last played at?

There are different theories, but I think the five that get selected are five that the Indians will put a lot of thought and research into.

I guess you start with the obvious in **Nick Hagadone** and whatever classification you want to give him (starter or reliever). I know he's only been as high as Double-A and he wasn't all that impressive last year, but he was a big trade investment and any bottom-rung team can nab him and stick him in their bullpen for a season like the Indians did with Hector Ambriz.

From there you start to look at players who are on the brink of a call-up or the major leagues and just about all those players outside of Graham and Mills fit the bill. I would throw Jerad Head's name out as he's more of a depth guy, but a contending team looking for a bench player could always select him.

I don't think the Indians would be worried if that happened though.

That leaves you with two outfielders in McBride and Drennen. This is where the log jam starts to form because you already have a lot of guys on the roster who are outfielders and two of them in Carrera and Weglarz who have yet to debut in Cleveland. What makes it likely that Drennen and McBride go ahead of them?

With that question, I think you can cross those two off as well and move onto the pitchers.

I don't consider Graham, just because the relievers with him are higher ceiling guys or at more advanced stages. If the Indians didn't nab the starting pitchers they did last season, the news that Rob Bryson isn't Rule V eligible could have been positive for Graham.

I also think Yohan Pino goes two straight years of finishing in Triple-A and off the 40-man roster. It goes back to upside and a swing/bullpen guy isn't going to beat out backend relievers with good stuff.

Call me crazy, but I see the Indians rostering four pitchers in addition to Hagadone. Josh Judy, Adam Miller, and Corey Kluber all get protection for their own separate reasons.

For **Josh Judy** its just time especially if they want him to compete for a bullpen spot next season out of spring training. He's at the point where any team can grab him and take a shot on him because he's ready to at least compete for a job at the big league level.

I think the Indians would be crazy to take any sort of risk of losing **Adam Miller**. Because he

re-signed as a minor league free agent, he's eligible to be selected in the draft because he isn't on the 40-man.

Why risk losing all the resources you put in to not only developing this kid for years, but trying to help him rehab to a point where he can contribute? Why take that sort of chance? For that reason and what he could be capable of, I think the Indians put Miller back on the roster with intentions of him competing for a job next spring.

I think the news that Rob Bryson isn't eligible for the Rule V Draft until next year makes this a much clearer situation. In the end, you have two spots left and I think one of them will go to an infielder, so the decision comes down to two additions, Zach McAllister and **Corey Kluber**.

What you have in Kluber is someone who has strikeout stuff. He's a guy that anyone can take and stick in the bullpen and work on for a year, he is exactly like Ambriz. McAllister is more in the mold of a Yohan Pino and there is a reason the Yankees had no problem just sending McAllister to Cleveland to finish off the Austin Kearns deal.

Every organization has their own Zach McAllister, the Indians happen to have a few. If they lose him, I don't think they'll lose that much sleep.

Kluber on the other hand has higher upside and he was in a deal that sent Jake Westbrook to St. Louis, so you know the Indians are going to want to make sure he sticks around.

So of the five spots, all four that have been decided are going to pitchers. We've ruled out the rest and are now simply down to a few infielders, so there will be a position player addition.

I think we're all going to be surprised as to who it is.

Again, I think we can eliminate Beau Mills from the discussion and make it a one-on-one battle between third baseman Jared Goedert and everything-man **Josh Rodriguez**. And I say

everything-man because I think that's the biggest reason he beats out Goedert.

Goedert can't play defense and in a way he's handcuffed to not having a true position. The Indians already have several of those players in Travis Hafner and one similar to Goedert in Jordan Brown.

If he played a lick of defense, especially at third, I think Goedert would force his way on. But ultimately the Indians not calling him up in September spoke volumes as to what they think and I think that is the biggest indication as to why they'll probably pick Rodriguez over Goedert, if they even give one of them a spot.

Rodriguez has more versatility and before his injuries, was actually more of a prospect than Goedert was or is. Going forward, I think he has more value to the Indians because of what he can do and if there is an injury in the middle infield or at third base, you can cal Rodriguez up and not be worried.

If you call up Goedert to start at third, you have to worry. Now if Goedert doesn't get rostered and is still a member of the Tribe it doesn't mean he doesn't stand a chance at competing for the third base job. However the Indians clearly don't believe his defense is quite there to win that job, so they probably skip on rostering him.

Trade Bait

I would not count the Indians out from making a deal this offseason. They traded spare parts last year with Kelly Shoppach for Mitch Talbot and if a deal comes their way this year, they could pull the trigger.

The issue this year is that the spare parts they have won't net you much in return. It almost would have to be a Talbot-Shoppach situation where the team you are trading with doesn't have much need for the player they want to trade you.

Perhaps someone has a third baseman they don't want or need and are ready to give up on?

In that scenario, I could see the Indians trading one of the following: Lou Marson, Jared Goedert, Jordan Brown, David Huff, Mitch Talbot, Jensen Lewis, and Aaron Laffey.

I would not deal Lou Marson or David Huff, unless of course a team shocks you in their offer. Some might ask, "Who would want those two?"

The answer: Some cunning front office executive who likes to buy low. The last thing the Indians want to do is trade David Huff and see him go on to better things and get nothing in return. Huff's value is at an all-time low. You stand to get more by holding on to him and seeing if he turns it around.

You can almost duplicate that statement with Lou Marson, not to mention you may need him. If the Indians are planning to put Santana at first for a portion of the season, that would leave the backup, who is Lou Marson at this point, to get a lot more playing time. Do you see a better option behind Marson?

Marson at least has some history as a good prospect and he plays very sound defense. There is virtually no one beyond Marson in the system worth giving a look and I doubt the Indians want to bring in another veteran backup.

I group Huff and Marson together, like I'd group the rest of the players together. Laffey and Lewis to me are in the middle range of trade chips, Goedert and Brown are in the prospect range, and Talbot is in the sell high grouping all by himself.

Laffey and Lewis to me are next on the low end of probability in terms of being traded. If anything, Jensen Lewis, who has Super Two arbitration eligibility, could be just non-tendered. Still, as we saw with Shoppach last year, just because someone is arbitration eligible doesn't mean the Indians can't deal them.

Lewis is a reliever though and so is Laffey, even though he has starter ability. They've got some proven success, but not a whole lot. It goes back to that organizational aspect. A lot of organizations have their own Aaron Laffey or Jensen Lewis. If anything, I could see a team taking a stab at Lewis in a packaged deal, but he is nothing more than a throw-in at this point.

In the more prospect range you have unproven commodities in Jordan Brown and Jared Goedert. The problem with both of them is that they don't have positions. They are basically designated hitters or bench bats. This isn't quite a Kevin Kouzmanoff situation because at least Kouzmanoff had defensive capabilities.

Not that the Indians are looking to acquire a Josh Barfield, but that is the type of deal you'd probably see either Goedert or Brown included in. The Indians are simply not looking for that type of piece right now.

This brings us to the piece the Indians were looking for last year and were pleasantly surprised with, Mitch Talbot. It really was a spare parts trade as the Tribe was just looking to add starting options and Talbot fit the bill.

If there is a third baseman out there that has run his course with his particular team, much in the way Talbot did with Tampa, Talbot could probably be used to complete the swing. Unless the Indians believe that first half Talbot can be all-year Talbot, his value is probably higher than it ever will be.

Does that mean they should trade him though? Not necessarily, but it should at least make them think about it.

Scoping Out Additions

If the Indians are active in any market this offseason (and they'll be active, every team at least invites veterans looking for another chance to spring training) it will only be in two markets: third base and the rotation.

I'm not sure whether to define this as a problem or not, because ultimately, Adrian Beltre isn't going to be on the Tribe's radar.

But the third base market is weak. Now that creates a problem in that maybe some guys that the club could target would actually get guaranteed major league deals elsewhere, but really, if the Indians miss out Pedro Feliz, are you going to be that disappointed? We're talking about how much you want to spend on a seat warmer.

The way I see it, there are six names in free agency that I would estimate as "in" the Indians price range (price range meaning: minimum salary, minor league deal). They are: Geoff Blum, Miguel Cairo, Pedro Feliz, Jerry Hairston Jr., Jeff Larish, and Melvin Mora.

There is ultimately one factor that I think the Indians care about here and that is defense. Would it be nice if this player produced offensively? Absolutely and that is part of the reason behind getting Jayson Nix to play there.

But the infield defense was, at times, unbearable to watch in 2010. A guy like Pedro Feliz is going to put up rotten numbers with the bat (especially if he moves to the AL for the first time in his career), but he'll play reliable defense.

Ultimately I don't even know if one of those guys will end up coming to Cleveland, but I'd be confident in saying the club will extend invitations to one or two veterans for the third base job at spring training. If one of those guys ends up being in that mix, then that would be a plus.

The other, much murkier market would be the rotation. This is the department that Shapiro has made his money in the past few years, spinning down-on-their-luck starters with little interest elsewhere into worthwhile signings and productive members of the Tribe's rotation.

If the club does bring in a starter, it will be that kind of starter. While the Indians have plenty of internal options that are both young and ready for exposure, I think every club feels good if they

have a guy that can eat up some innings early in the year, just in case.

And if you turn out a guy like Carl Pavano, who is productive and actually becomes a tradable commodity, those are bonus points my friends.

There are plenty of names out that will be reclamation projects. I'd rule out guys like Jake Westbrook, for the fact that even if he is willing to take a discount to return, that discount probably won't be small enough for the Tribe's small purse.

That leaves you with guys like Jeff Francis, Erik Bedard, or Justin Duchscherer looking to rebound from injuries or others like Nate Robertson, Ian Snell, or Aaron Harang who are looking to reclaim old magic.

I'd throw out Brandon Webb, but who wouldn't take a chance on a former Cy Young winner like Webb? He's surely to get a pricey guaranteed deal somewhere not in Cleveland.

There are probably less-attractive (if you can get less-attractive than Nate Robertson that is) names out there, but those names should give you an idea of what type of pitcher the club would be in the market for, if they are in the market at all.

Raised Up

The final aspect of this particular offseason rundown concerns the fact that the Tribe's payroll will not be lower than the one the Florida Marlins will sport. While all their current money is tied up in three players (Carmona, Hafner Sizemore! Carmona Hafner, Sizemore! Carmona, Hafner, Sizemore!), arbitration players will add to that total along with usual one year tender deals for pre-arbitration players (peanuts, or cashews if you are the Yankees).

The Indians have gone years without having to visit the arbitration court room (is it a courtroom? I'm not sure) to settle a contract situation. Could this be the year with Super Boras manning the

SS Choo?

I'll hold my breath, but it wouldn't surprise if Boras tries to squeeze every last penny out of the Indians, even if that means low-balling an offer and getting more than what is desired from an arbiter.

The biggest difference between this year and previous years is the amount of players eligible. This is the biggest group of arbitration eligible players that I can remember in awhile and I suppose that is a good thing. Cabrera, Smith, and Rafael Perez will all get their raises and probably without the need for arbitration.

Another thing we aren't used to around these parts is the whole Super Two thing that two players have become eligible for this season. In case you are as confused as to what Super Two actually is, all you need to know is that Chris Perez and Jensen Lewis get an extra year of arbitration due to being eligible as a Super Two.

Their service time didn't quite reach three full years, but it was within a certain percentage of players, so they are eligible to demand a higher salary for four seasons rather than just three.

The Overall Plan

So to recap, this is how things shake out with the Tribe over the course of the next two months.

They'll add five players to the 40-man roster in preparation for the Rule V Draft. My best educated guess says that those five players are Nick Hagadone, Josh Judy, Adam Miller, Corey Kluber, and Josh Rodriguez.

I can't see them adding anyone in the Rule V Draft after they took a chance on Ambriz last season, but it all depends on what is available, so I wouldn't rule it out. You never know, they might find their stopgap third baseman there.

Don't expect any free agent to be added on a major league guaranteed deal. If that is the case, it will be really cheap and it would likely be a starting pitcher.

Do expect several free agents signed to minor league deals, likely third baseman. Even if the Jayson Nix experiment goes as planned, the club will want more than internal options.

If the Tribe spins a trade, spare parts like prospect Jared Goedert or starter Mitch Talbot could be used to gain another team's spare third baseman part.

Prepare for the worst with Scott Boras and client Shin-Soo Choo in terms of arbitration. Not only will it set the tone for the next three years, it will tell us just how ruthless Choo is going to let Boras act in terms of getting him a long-term contract.

Boy, February can't come soon enough.

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You can follow Nino on Twitter @ TheTribeDaily where he often tweets about his parties with Andy Marte and sometimes about the Indians.