Much has been made out of the trade that took Cliff Lee out of Cleveland, both at the time and since. Lee was dealt with a year and a half left on his contract, and a lot of fans simply wondered, “why now?” Regardless of the reasons that Lee was dealt, we get a truly unique opportunity to judge the question of just how much the Indians got for the reigning Cy Young award winner.

That’s because less than 5 months after the July 2009 trade that sent Lee to the Philles, they in turn flipped him to the Seattle Mariners. As if that weren’t enough, the Mariners turned right around and dealt Lee to the Texas Rangers in July of 2010. A Cy Young-quality pitcher, by all accounts a decent guy in the clubhouse, and yet traded three times in a calendar year. If anyone else can remember something like this happening in baseball, I’m all ears.

As a result of these unique series of deals, the question of who got the most for C.P. Lee can be asked and debated on barstools around the country. Let’s first recap the deals, in chronological order:

1. The Indians send Cliff Lee and OF Ben Francisco to the Phillies in return for C Lou

Marson, INF Jason Donald and pitchers Carlos Carrasco and Jason Knapp

2. The Phillies send Lee to Seattle for pitchers J.C. Ramirez, Phillipe Aumont and OF Tyson Gilles.

3. Seattle sends Lee and Mark Lowe to Texas in return for 1B Justin Smoak, INF/OF Matthew Lawson and pitchers Blake Beavan and Josh Lueke.

Ignoring Francisco and Lowe, Lee was dealt for a combination of Marson, Donald, Carrasco, Knapp, Ramirez, Aumont, Gilles, Smoak, Lawson, Beavan and Lueke. Wow. Again, if someone has an example of a similar series of trades in less than 12 months involving the same player, I'd love to hear about it.

So the question remains…who got the most for Lee? There's no doubt that the Indians gave up the most, as they dealt Lee with the most time remaining on his contract. So logically, they should have been able to get the most in return, right? I'm not trying to argue whether or not the Indians got "enough" for Lee, as that judgment won't be made for at least a couple of years now. I'm simply asking that, of the three trades, which team got the most in return for Cliff Lee? Let's take a closer look at the prospects that were dealt in the three deals, in rank order:

1. Justin Smoak, 1B (12/05/1986)

2010 MLB Line: .218/.307/.371, 13 HR, 48 RBI in 348 AB

2010 MiLB Line: .279/.404/.497, 9 HR, 30 RBI in 183 AB

You'd be hard-pressed to find a scout that isn't in love with Justin Smoak. He has a sweet, powerful swing that seems destined to anchor the middle of a lineup sooner rather than later.

He struggled a bit in his first exposure to MLB pitching, putting up a .678 OPS in 348 AB's last year as a 23-year old. His career minor league OPS was .869, and he's an above-average defender to boot. The move to Safeco won't help his power, but he'll be a solid force in the middle of the Seattle lineup for a long time to come.

2. Jason Knapp, SP (08/31/1990)

2010 MiLB Line: 1-2, 2.86 ERA, 47 K, 12 BB in 28 1/3 IP

Knapp has a higher ceiling than anyone in the Lee deals, even including Smoak. The problem is that he is quite a ways from reaching that ceiling, and a lot can happen between now and then. Due to injury and a justifiably cautious front office, Knapp only pitched 28 1/3 innings in 2010 between Rookie ball in Arizona and Low-A Lake County. But in those 28+ innings, he

struck out 47 and allowed just 29 baserunners (17 H and 12 BB). He's 6'5"/235lbs and can touch triple digits on the radar gun. He can be a true #1 starter at the big league level, an elite closer, or he can get hurt and never pitch above AA. He also won't be old enough to legally drink alcohol until August 31 next year.

3. Carlos Carrasco, SP (03/21/1987)

2010 MLB Line: 2-2, 3.83 ERA, 38 K, 14 BB in 44 2/3 IP

2010 MiLB Line: 10-6, 3.65 ERA, 133 K, 46 BB in 150 1/3 IP

Carrasco is an enigma, wrapped in a riddle. Scouts universally agree that he has top of the rotation talent. He's just 23 years old, has a plus fastball, a plus-plus changeup and a solid slider. He has a clean, easily repeatable delivery that only gets loose when he tries to overthrow. Carrasco has all the ability to be a #2 or even a #1 starter in the big leagues. His issues are squarely between his ears, as he tends to let little innings turn into big innings. He had a solid 2010 at AAA Columbus, and then went 2-2 with a 3.83 ERA in 44 2/3 innings in Cleveland. We'll find out in 2011 if Carrasco has turned a corner and will finally have his talent translate to success on the field, or if he continues to be his own worst enemy on the mound. At worst, he's a #4 starter in the big leagues, and projects to be so much more.

4. Phillipe Aumont, RP (01/07/1989)

2010 MiLB Line: 3-11, 5.68 ERA, 115 K, 80 BB in 122 IP

Seen as the big arm acquired by the Phillies in the Lee deal, Aumont struggled mightily in 2010. After 49 2/3 AA innings in which he was tagged with a 7.31 ERA and an even 38/38 K/BB ratio, Aumont was sent back to A+ Clearwater. He found a little more success at the lower level, putting up a 4.31 ERA and striking out 77 in 72 innings. But he still walked 42. Aumont is a big kid and throws hard, but his mechanics are a mess and his injury history is troubling. Scouts see him as a bullpen arm at best, and the Phillies would best be served moving him to that role sooner rather than later. Aumont could be a closer some day, but as of right now his career AA numbers are appalling. He's 2-10 with a 6.82 ERA, 62 K and 49 BB in 67 1/3 innings. Ouch. Aumont turns 22 in January, so there's time for him to turn it around and be a useful arm in the bullpen. But another season like 2010 and he's really in trouble.

5. Jason Donald, INF (09/04/1984)

2010 MLB Line: .253/.312/.378, 4 HR, 24 RBI in 296 AB

2010 MiLB Line: .277/.396/.423, 2 HR, 17 RBI in 137 AB

In his first season at the major league level at age 25, Donald struggled at the plate to the tune of a .690 OPS in 296 at-bats. His defense at 2B was about average, as he saved 3 runs more than average per some advanced defensive metrics that I really don't understand. Worst case, Donald is a solid utility infielder that can contribute at three positions around the diamond. But don't close the book on his chances to be an everyday 2B in the bigs either, as his bat should eventually play there.

6. Lou Marson, C (06/26/1986)

2010 MLB Line: .195/.274/.286, 3 HR, 22 RBI in 262 AB

2010 MiLB Line: .202/.327/.371, 4 HR, 14 RBI in 124 AB

Marson pretty much is what he is. A light hitting, solid fielding backup catcher. Even if the thought of Marson standing at the plate with runners in scoring position makes your stomach turn, players like him can have long major league careers. "Tofu" Lou won't turn 25 until midway through the 2011 baseball season, and despite an abysmal OPS+ of 59, he caught 38% of would-be basestealers in 2010 and 47% (8 of 17) in 2009. No one is projecting future stardom for Marson, but no one thinks he'll be out of the league in 2012 either. One Salvatore F. Fasano managed to play 11 seasons in the show despite a career OPS+ of 75 and a caught stealing % of just 31%.

7. Blake Beavan, SP (01/17/1989)

2010 MiLB Line: 14-8, 3.90 ERA, 101 K, 21 BB, in 168.1 IP

A massive righthander at 6'7"/250, you look at Bevan and think that he would overpower hitters with a big fastball. That is anything but the case, as he relies on command and control of a fastball that sits at 88-91. He throws a changeup and a slider, with the changeup grading out higher than the slider. He has outstanding control, walking just 21 batters in 168 1/3 innings last year. Bevan could be a #4 or #5 starter in a big league rotation someday, an innings-eater with a rubber arm who will take the ball every 5th day and at least give his team a chance to win. Beavan does not appear in Baseball America's top-10 list, and comes it at #9 on Baseball Prospectus' Kevin Goldstein's top-20 Mariners prospects.

8. J.C. Ramirez, RP (08/16/1988)

2010 MiLB Line: 7-7, 4.82 ERA, 111 K, 52 BB in 142 IP

Ramirez has a live arm, but is more of a thrower than a pitcher at this stage of his career. He has been a starter for most of his minor league tenure, but scouts see him as a bullpen guy down the road as he pitches primarily off of his fastball and none of his secondary offerings profile as any more than average. In 548 2/3 career innings pitched, Ramirez has an ERA of 4.30 with 468 K's and 210 BB. He's only 22, so he has youth on his side, but his ceiling is that of a setup man in the bigs.

9. Tyson Gillies, OF

2010 MiLB Line: .243/.302/.336, 2 HR, 7 RBI in 107 AB

Gillies is a faster, lighter-hitting version of Trevor Crowe. He's the homeless-man's Michael Brantley. He struggled with injury in 2010, and didn't really hit or run when he was healthy. Gillies' ceiling is that of a 4th outfielder in the bigs, and I'm doubtful that he ever even makes that. His productive hitting season came in the hitter's paradise of High-A Desert, a park notorious for producing crazy batting lines.

10. Josh Lueke, RP (12/05/1984)

2010 MiLB Line: 5-2, 1.86 ERA, 94 K and 15 BB in 63 IP

Lueke has the raw stuff to be a late-inning reliever. His delivery is a little funky, and he has trouble repeating it at times leading to wildness. Regardless of his on the field talent/troubles, Lueke has had some pretty significant off the field issues. He was arrested, charged and plead no contest to false imprisonment charges for an incident involving a sexual assault, and sentenced to time served. Seattle tried to give him back to Texas after the trade, claiming that Texas withheld the arrest when they were negotiating. That seems silly, considering the arrest was public knowledge and even on Lueke's Wikipedia page. If he can overcome his significant off the field issues, he could someday become a very nice bullpen arm, but that is a long way off right now. Lueke does not appear in Baseball America's top-10 list, and comes it at #15 on Baseball Prospectus' Kevin Goldstein's top-20 Mariners prospect list.

11. Matthew Lawson, UTL

2010 MiLB Line: .293/.372/.439, 9 HR, 56 RBI in 458 AB

Lawson will play 2011 as a 25-year old utility player, and has yet to see AAA. He doesn't have much power (27 HR and .407 SLG in 1522 minor league AB's), nor does he have much speed (43 SB in 67 attempts). He's a solid defender, but nothing special and has played 2B, SS, LF and CF. He did have a solid 2010, posting a combined .811 OPS between two minor league levels. But he's just a year younger than Jason Donald, and he's still two big levels behind him in the developmental curve. Lawson does not appear in Baseball America's top-10 list, nor is he on Baseball Prospectus' Kevin Goldstein's top-20 Mariners prospects.

So by my rankings, the Indians go the #'s 2, 3, 5 and 6 players out of the 11 traded for Cliff Lee. Seattle got the blue-chip guy in Smoak, who was a consensus top-25 guy in all of MLB prior to the 2010 season, but little else. Philly got fleeced, and I'm still confused as to why they made

the deal in the first place since they had another full year of club control.* A rotation with Roy Halladay, Cliff Lee and Cole Hamels would have assured the Phillies of a playoff berth, and they likely would have been the runaway favorite for the 2010 World Series. And now the Phillies have rectified that error by signing Lee off the free agent market, pretty much admitting that they never should have traded him in the first place. Some might argue that Philadelphia got the best of both worlds, getting Lee AND prospects. But I'd much rather have Cliff Lee's age 31 season than the three guys they got for him from Seattle.

Looking at the deals, my biggest disappointment with the Indians front office is not necessarily who they got for Lee, its how they went about the trade. GM Mark Shapiro was telling the media and fans that he would have to be "blown away" to trade Lee, when in fact he was actively shopping him with the intent to move him before the trade deadline. In essence, this meant that any trade Shapiro did pull off would be skewered locally unless he received a future star ready to play right away, as well as several top prospects with instant name recognition. I follow prospects around baseball pretty closely, and I'll admit that I didn't know who Jason Knapp was when this deal went down. I don't think Shapiro was blown away by the Phillies offer, I think he was ordered to cut payroll and was forced to make whatever the best Lee deal was on the table before the deadline.

I would like to have seen what the market would have been like if the Indians had held on to Lee and dealt him in the offseason, during the winter meetings. The sense of competition between GM's and desire to make an offseason splash can lead to some pretty crazy deals going down in Orlando, and I think it would have been worth it to wait it out and see what happened. I don't think there is any doubt that we weren't going to be able to resign Lee, so the only question is whether or not Shapiro maximized the value he got for the ace southpaw. Could Shapiro have waited and got more in the offseason? Was he ordered by ownership to dump payroll because the team was losing money? We'll probably have to wait for Shapiro's book to come out to know for sure. What we can say is that the Indians got much more than Philly for Lee, and the overall package already looks better than Seattle's. All this despite the fact that the best talent in the deal (Knapp) has yet to pitch above Low-A.

*In case you're wondering, I think that Toronto got more for Roy Halladay, as those prospects would rank 2nd (Drabek), 4th (Taylor) at 6th (D'Arnaud) on this list.