On the day that the Cleveland Indians announced the signing of 74-year old Orlando Cabrera to play, what? second base , came the item from Baseball Prospectus that it projects the Indians to finish at 72-90. The issues are completely related.

The Baseball Prospectus ratings are based on the rankings of each player on the team and their respective playing time in the major leagues. It then makes a projection on where that team will finish. While Cabrera being part of the Indians wasn't part of that analysis, ask yourself whether it really matters.

I certainly wouldn't begrudge the fine folks at Baseball Prospectus trying to introduce prediction theory to the masses. But in this case it's wasted effort. Science isn't really needed to predict that it will be another miserable Indians' summer.

When the biggest headline in the off season is reserved for the signing of Cabrera you kind of just know this isn't going to be your year. But if you needed more proof then you needn't have looked any further than the interview Cabrera gave from Arizona in which he had an ace bandage wrapped around his right shoulder that was masking what looked to be a block of ice the size of a Buick LeSabre.

General manager Chris Antonetti could make it much easier on the team's accounting

department if he just has them hand over Cabrera's an entire check now rather than in bi-weekly installments because the chance of Cabrera not coming down with a season ending injury during spring training is probably is far less than the chance that the Cavaliers could take the Lakers in a 7-game series.

I fully understand that spring training is all about optimism. It's the time when dreamers can dream and we're not supposed to utter the phrase "wait 'til next year" for at least a few more months. But really, is there anything about the Indians at the moment that inspires optimism?

Actually, yes. For starters, when Cabrera comes up lame, it won't cost the Indians all that much. Next, we could talk about the parcel of "prospects" that this team stockpiles like so many nickels and dimes, but doing so is to admit defeat in a sense. The prospects arrived via the usual route—the trade of a veteran on the verge of making more money than this ballclub is willing to pay.

But that actually gets us to the real point here and it's the real reason to be optimistic. The Indians aren't the St. Louis Cardinals.

Right now the Cardinals are dealing with a real Indians-type problem, a superstar who has dollar signs for eyeballs.

Albert Pujols is in his free agent season and when he and the Cardinals couldn't reach a deal on the same day that the Indians signed Cabrera (oh, the irony), Pujols did what so many Indians players of the past have done—shut down negotiations until after the season. Cleveland fans know what that's code for, don't we?

Pujols, of course, left the door open that a deal could get done after the season. But that's a game of chicken that usually doesn't end well for the team. All this means of course is that the Cardinals face the unenviable choice of going all-in on this season by keeping Pujols around and trying to win it all or building for the ubiquitous future that never comes as a parade of Pujols-wannabes dot the roster for the next 10 or so years.

It's actually refreshing in a way to see another team and its fan base go through the gut wrenching exercise where they curse short-sighted management and skinflint ownership for not tying a million ton millstone around its neck in the form of a contract that will eat up far more of the budget than any sane person would ever recommend.

That, really, is what St. Louis ownership is wrestling with at the moment. It's almost ludicrous to imagine, but the sticking point in the negotiations is that the Cardinals feel like Pujols can scrape by on an average salary that puts him in the top 10 paid players in the league and Pujols and his agents feel like an average salary that puts him in the top 5 paid players in the league will better help him get through those pesky retirement years.

The Pujols problem, like the CC Sabathia problem, like the Cliff Lee problem, like the Manny Ramirez problem, like the Jim Thome problem, is really a major league baseball problem borne of the unbridled economic Wild West that it allows to exist.

It plays out almost perfectly when you consider the context of Pujols' demands. According to the USA Today major league baseball salary database, the top 4 salaries belonged to, you guessed it, New York Yankees. The fifth highest salary belongs to a member of, you guessed it, the New York Mets.

But that only tells part of the story. The rest of the story is that what is skewing the numbers the most is the top major league salary of one Alex Rodriguez. His $33 million per season is $9 million more than the Yankees are paying Sabathia. If you eliminate Rodriguez's salary from the mix, then the Cardinals and Pujols are, at best, a mere few million dollars per season off, irrespective of whether his salary is based on the average of the top 5 or the top 10 players.

The Yankees, in an insane race to overpay nearly anyone who can hit .290 or sport an ERA under 4.50, aren't just driving the market for superstar salaries, they are the market. It is the reason that the Cardinals ultimately are likely to lose Pujols and for some reason commissioner Bud Selig, the worst commissioner of any sport ever, and the rest of the idiot owners in baseball don't see anything wrong with it.

To drive home the point of how absolutely stupendously ridiculous this all is, it's not like Pujols is exactly underpaid at the moment. This year he's scheduled to make $16 million. Last year

that would have put him in the top 20 overall. The difference between what the Cardinals want to pay Pujols and what Pujols wants amounts to about $3 million per season, which is the difference between the averages of the top 5 and the top 10 salaries even when you consider Rodriguez's ridiculous salary. If you remove Rodriguez as some sort of outlier, then the two sides are really arguing about $1.5 million per year.

Now the devil can be in the details, meaning that the parties aren't really talking about a one year contract. But according to sources, the number of years of an agreement isn't the issue, just the yearly salary. Thus it really does boil down to a pittance, relatively speaking, in the difference between the sides.

Yet the Cardinals may very well lose their superstar over this and the Yankees or the Mets or perhaps the Red Sox will get fatter as a result. And in the process of course the salaries will be driven ever higher making it that much tougher for teams like St. Louis or Cleveland to ever compete on a level playing field.

So yes, again, there is reason for optimism in Cleveland. For once the fans don't have to cope with the emotional toll of watching a homegrown superstar gut the team on his way out the door. But then again, that's only because there aren't any of those on the Cleveland roster at the moment and there don't look to be any anytime soon. So there is that.