Over the last few years the popular narrative regarding the Cleveland Indians has been that the organization is cheap...that the owner is not willing to make enough of an investment into the team to let it compete with some of the other "free-spending" franchises in the American League.

No, the Indians' payroll will probably never reach $201,689,030 like the current payroll of the New York Yankees or the $172,976,381 of the 2011 Philadelphia Phillies (or even the $129,285,539 of A.L. Central rivals, the Chicago White Sox this season).

It isn't all about payroll anyway.

Teams that spend a ton of money on free agents have the resources to do just that. The Indians do not have the revenue streams that enable them to do things like the Yankees, Phillies or White Sox. Simply put, unless Dolan wants to operate at a deficit and spend money from other endeavors on his baseball team, a different approach was/is a necessity.

For a number of years this different approach was not in place. The Indians seemed to be stuck

in perpetual stagnation, signing a few big-money free agents, struggling early as everyone searched to find their particular role on the team and playing out the string after an atrocious first three months to the season.

Sure, some of the pieces were falling into place but the overall product on the field was not benefitting from some of the earlier moves off of it. There was no real promise of a new day...just a team in an endless state of flux.

Things have finally changed, and you have to tip your hat to everyone in the Indians organization for letting this process play out. The Tribe concentrated on flipping expensive assets for a wealth of high-tier prospects, and though they took a bit of heat along the way the prospects are starting to pay off.

There were not many Indians fans happy when the team traded CC Sabathia, Cliff Lee and Victor Martinez. Many were convinced the team did not get enough of a return for what was traded away, bit it's pretty clear why the fans are in the stands, not earning a living assessing the development potential of players in all levels of minor league baseball.

As things stand the Indians have an organization in very good shape. The parent club has the best record in the Majors, the Class AAA team in Columbus has been virtually unbeatable, the Class AA team in Akron is sitting at .500 in pretty good shape while the Class A team in Lake County is the defending Midwest League champion and sits just 2.5 games out of first place this season.

The most impressive part, there is not a big-dollar free agent on the entire 40-man roster. The 2011 Cleveland Indians are a team that was built, not purchased, and it makes it feel a lot more pure to this writer.

Here is a look at some of the critical components within the organization. Yes, there are some free agents, but not a 6-year, $70 million contract in the bunch. The Indians are playing the cards they were dealt, and doing so very effectively.

Carlos Santana, C/1B – Santana was acquired on July 26, 2008 with RHP Jon Meloan and cash from the Los Angeles Dodgers for INF Casey Blake. This could go down as one of the greatest trades in the history of the organization. Santana is still raw and dealing with some consistency issues, but he truly looks like the next great Indian. The best part of this trade is that the Indians got the Dodgers to throw in cash.

Matt LaPorta, 1B – LaPorta was acquired on July 7, 2008 with Michael Brantley, Rob Bryson and Zach Jackson for CC Sabathia. LaPorta is becoming a quality Major League hitter as well as first baseman. Yes, there are times he still looks lost at the plate and he swings at far too many bad pitches, but the thought of LaPorta as the teams' everyday first baseman does not send shivers up Tribe fans' spines anymore. More to come on this trade.

Orlando Cabrera, 2B - Jolbert's little brother has become quite an addition to the team that used to employ him. I guess you could say the Tribe is in the bloodlines. Orlando was signed to a one-year, $1 million contract on Feb. 16 of this year, and he has brought with him an attitude of leadership, professionalism and winning. Orlando won a World Series ring with the Boston Red Sox in 2004 and has been on a playoff team six times in the last eight seasons. He plays great defense, gets big hits and is a leader on the field and in the clubhouse. His contract has been money well spent, and do not be surprised to see the Indians extend the deal before the season is over.

Asdrubal Cabrera, SS – In yet another steal of a deal, the Indians acquired Cabrera from the Seattle Mariners on June 30, 2006 for Eduardo Perez. Perez is now in the broadcasters booth.

Jack Hannahan, 3B – Hannahan, signed to a one-year, $500,000 contract on Dec. 4, 2010, brought with him the reputation of being all glove, no stick. His hitting has been a pleasant surprise as Hannahan has consistently provided some pop in the bottom half of the Tribe lineup. And his defense has been Gold Glove caliber.

Michael Brantley, LF – Brantley came with LaPorta and others in the Sabathia deal with the Brewers and has done everything he has been asked to do. He can lead off or hit down in the lineup, while playing a more-than-capable left field (while also spelling Grady Sizemore in center occasionally). You would think the Indians would rather not have Brantly lead off because he does not have leadoff speed, but Brantley is not a bad baserunner and has shown marked improvement in his approach at the plate. He puts balls into play and does not strike out nearly as much as last season.

Grady Sizemore, CF – Sizemore came to Cleveland with Cliff Lee, Brandon Phillips and Lee Stevens from Montreal for Bartolo Colon and Lee Stevens on June 27, 2002 in one of the greatest trades in baseball history. This trade would have been a lot better had the team shown more patience with Phillips, but that is pure hindsight. Sizemore, when healthy, is one of the best players in baseball...a true five-tool player. He is getting back into the groove after missing most of last season on the injured list, and has been a shot in the arm both offensively and defensively.

Shin-Soo Choo, LF – Choo was acquired with SP Shawn Nottingham from the Seattle Mariners for Ben Broussard and cash. Choo has a load of potential, but has not played at his 2010 level yet this season. He also looks like he is getting frustrated with his inability to hit, and his defense has been just marginal. Choo still has one of the best throwing arms in the Majors, but he has to get to the ball first. A DUI arrest last week probably isn't helping things. By the end of the season he should be back to form.

Travis Hafner, DH – Hafner came to Cleveland with Aaron Myette from the Texas Rangers for Einar Diaz and Ryan Drese on Dec. 6, 2002. Hafner looks bigger, stronger and happier this season than he has in a couple of years. A healthy, strong Hafner is feared by opposing pitchers.

Fausto Carmona, RHP – Carmona was signed as an amateur free agent on Dec. 28, 2000 and began a steady climb through the ranks of the organization. His hiccup that saw him sent back to Single A ball from the Majors seems to be well in the past. Torii Hunter once said Carmona's sinker is unhittable when he commands it, and he has commanded it well this season. Is Carmona a No. 1 starter? That has yet to be determined with any certainty, but he is a very good starting pitcher and among the best in the American League.

Justin Masterson, RHP – Masterson was acquired with Nick Hagadone and Bryan Price from Boston for Victor Martinez on July 31, 2009 in a deadline deal. Masterson has been given some Cy Young Award mentions already this season, and rightly so. He has been amazing. And the rest of this trade isn't too shabby.

Carlos Carrasco, RHP – Acquired with Jason Knapp, Jason Donald and Lou Marson from the Phillies for Ben Francisco and Cliff Lee on July 29, 2009. Carrasco and Donald are hurt, but

Marson has been a tremendous backup catcher this season. Carrasco has electric stuff when healthy.

Josh Tomlin, RHP – Drafted in the 19th round of the 2006 amateur draft. Tomlin has been much more than anyone could have expected. His stuff is great and, more important, he knows how to use it. Could become a mainstay of the Indians' rotation for a long time...not bad for a 19th round pick.

Alex White, RHP – Drafted in the first round, 15th overall, of the 2009 amateur draft. White is a big pitcher and a hard thrower. His body of work in the minors has been impressive and he is up with the big club for now. How long he will remain in the Majors is unclear, but White is not afraid to pitch at the highest level.

Mitch Talbot, RHP – Was the player to be named later in Tampa Bay's trade for Kelly Shoppach. He is currently injured, but is a highly thought of prospect who has shown ability in the Majors.

Chris Perez, Closer – Acquired on June 27, 2009 along with Jess Todd from the Cardinals for Mark DeRosa. This was a much-maligned trade at the time, especially when Perez melted down in his first appearance in a Cleveland uniform. However, Perez has put a hammerlock on the closer role and, despite frequently making things a little more dramatic than Tribe fans would like, has done an outstanding job shutting down games for the Indians. DeRosa was a popular player, but Perez gave Cleveland something Kerry Wood couldn't (for $10 million a year), a closer that gets the job done.

Vinnie Pestano, RHP – Drafted in the 20th round of the 2006 draft. Pestano has been a solid match-up guy thus far.

Tony Sipp, LHP – Drafted in the 45th round of the 2004 draft. Sipp, like Pestano, is a solid match-up guy out of the pen.

Rafael Perez, LHP – Signed as an undrafted free agent in 2002. Perez has one of the top

sliders in the business and can, at times, be unhittable for opposing lefties. A great set-up man to get the ball to the closer.

Here are some of the top minor leaguers in the Indians' system: **Lonnie Chisenhall** – top-rated prospect in the organization drafted in the first round, 29th overall, in the 2008 draft.
Nick Hagadone
– the No. 10 prospect in the organization, a 6-foot-8 lefty that can hit 100 mph on the gun. Came over in the Justin Masterson deal.
Drew Pomeranz
– A quality lefty that is the No. 4 prospect in the organization that the Indians drafted in the first round, fifth overall, in the 2010 draft.

What is the point of all of this? Take a look at the list...there is not one player in the $8-$10 million per year range. What the Indians have done is build through the draft while, at the same time, collecting strong young pieces with incredible upside in deals for soon-to-be overpriced talent at the big league level. This is the only way a team in a market like Cleveland will ever be competitive.

Yes, it would be nice to bring players like Carl Crawford or Cliff Lee to Cleveland (or, in Lee's case, back to Cleveland). But that is never going to be economically feasible.

What Tribe GM Chris Antonetti has at his disposal now is one of the best young teams in baseball, and loads of talent in the minors if he would wish to make a trade deadline deal to get the team over the top should they be in striking distance this season. So, for the first time in a long time, expect the Indians to be buyers at the deadline if they are still in contention. And with the pitching staff they have, and the bullpen backing it up, they should be right there in late July.

It could be a very, very fun ride.