While the Indians push ever closer to that “goal” of a .500 record (1 win to go) and a 2nd place finish that became the focus of the season after being steamrolled by the Tigers (who steamrolled through the rest of the AL as well), the last week has been an interesting one in the world of baseball as Brad Pitt graces the cover of SI in an A’s hat and as a movie about baseball statistics continues to pack them in at the theaters. Though most baseball fans who come here are familiar (even if vaguely familiar) with the whole “Moneyball” movement, the misconceptions about it, and how it is perceived by those who love it and those who hate it (and those two camps are both full), much of the better analysis of “Moneyball” that’s been coming out since the movie opened has had little to do with the actual book or even the movie.

Rather, what has been the most compelling narrative to follow has been how “Moneyball” has evolved and how it not only has changed the manner in which baseball decisions are made, but the landscape of MLB altogether. For starters, Ken Rosenthal has **a terrific piece on how “Moneyball” basically pulled back the curtain on what a few teams were doing** when it was written and how the (relative) success of those teams has now caused basically every MLB team to engage in some sort of statistical analysis. Rosenthal delves into what has happened since the release of the book – focusing on specific markets – and attempts to frame it as an evolution, or at least the starting point of a particular evolution.

However, the most compelling piece from the week comes from Tom Verducci in the print edition of SI as **Verducci focuses on one market very specifically and how the evolution of the Red Sox, from their statistical analysis, has vaulted Boston into an upper echelon of teams** that it is unlikely to leave any time soon. While this is no great revelation, Verducci goes inside what the Red Sox do and how the revenues that they generate separate them from every other team that has leaned on certain philosophies in the past decade. Again, the piece presents no great surprise to people who have been paying attention to the evolution of the Red Sox in the past decade, but Verducci frames it in such a way that he accurately points out how Boston uses their built-in advantages (in the draft, in FA, their ability

to overcome mistakes, etc.) because of their revenue streams.

Reading it is pretty sobering as the fan of a small-to-mid-market team that is never going to be able to compete on the consistent basis that the Red Sox have done in the past decade. It also strikes some fear into any Tribe fan's heart in that it certainly lays out for any large-market, big-revenue team that is NOT taking advantage of the system the way that the Red Sox do to put their current system under the magnifying glass. Since MLB certainly doesn't seem to be interested in really overhauling the system to prevent the "haves" from becoming further separated from the "have nots" (**they prefer to add another Wild Card** so the 10 or so teams in each league that don't get a playoff berth as a birthright have more hope as the season rolls on), it certainly doesn't elicit a lot of confidence for a team like the Indians, or the other 25 or so other teams in a similar predicament.

So what can the Indians do?
Sure, they can try to make a move with the Marlins, now that **Florida's closer is…um, not who they thought he was** , and try to find that RH bat by perhaps dangling Chris Perez to the Fish, who continue to be **included on the lists of being "in" on the Pujols/Prince extravaganza** (albeit with a heavy dose of skepticism), but the best they can do is hope to get the pieces lined up together every couple of years and take a shot at it.
And isn't that what they've done…and what they're currently doing?

As much as we hear about "windows" and **read about how they are set up for 2012 contention** and while everyone knows about the current "window", what the Indians (or any team like them) need to do is identify a talented group of players, keep them under club control for as long as possible as a group, and hopefully get an extended playoff run (or two) out of that group of players. They did that from 2004 to the middle of 2009 and, while that group only made one playoff run, they're doing it again, as evidenced by their breakout 2011 season, **even if it ended prematurely** .

That said, most Tribe fans seem to be looking at this group of players and seeing a fairly limited "window" of opportunity as there are some major pieces that are only under control through the 2013 season (Asdrubal, Ubaldo, Choo) or the 2014 season (Masterson), but if what is past is truly prologue, isn't this the off-season that the Indians take some of these now-identified "core" players and attempt to keep that window open a little longer by approaching some players that are arbitration-eligible and are only under club control for a couple additional years?

As soul-crushing as it may be to see the usual suspects make the playoffs (NYY, BOS, PHI, TEX) with the rotating group of "see, they can do it" teams (MIL, AZ) after reading those pieces from Rosenthal and Verducci that point out how the already-uneven playing field is probably going to continue to tilt – and not in the Tribe's favor – the best course of action for the Indians

to take this off-season is to take those “core” players that they’ve assembled (via trade or however) and start to approach them about extensions to keep them in Cleveland as long as possible.

They did it in the early-to-mid-1990’s…
They did it in the early-to-mid-2000s…
And, it’s more than likely that they’re going to start doing it this off-season…

While I’m not suggesting the wholesale approach to the whole roster that John Hart and Dan O’Dowd executed in the early-to-mid-1990s (Scott Scudder…Glenallen Hill, anyone?), there is little question that the current group of Indians has some players that need to be approached by the club with offers that guarantee fair salaries for the next few years in order to keep them under club control past what their current service time would dictate.

This was mentioned **about a month ago** , but the Indians “could approach Asdrubal with an offer similar to the contract that Troy Tulowitzi signed back in 2008 (not the 10-year deal he just inked) for 6-years and $31M just as they could go to Masterson with a deal similar to the ones that Jon Lester (5 years, $30M) and Clay Buchholz (4 years, $29.95M) recently signed to keep those two on The Reservation for the foreseeable future at set contract numbers.”

Let’s keep this line of thinking going, and since I’m using Tulo’s first deal as the basis for a potential Asdrubal extension, let’s remember **what was pointed out back in May and re-visit the comparison** , as it is worth pointing out again what Tulowitzki put forth in his first 3 MLB seasons as well as what Asdrubal did in his first 3 MLB seasons:

Tulowitzki (2006-2008) – 281 games
.276 BA / .346 OBP / .435 SLG / .781 OPS / 96 OPS+ with 99 XBH in 1,082 AB

Asdrubal (2007-2009) – 290 games
.287 BA / .355 OBP / .411 SLG / .766 OPS / 105 OPS+ with 92 XBH in 1,034 AB