In the infamous words of Alex Baldwin in “State and Main”, well, that happened.

The Cleveland Indians signed Russell Branyan, against all sense and logic and this is what qualifies as good news in Cleveland. Back problem, schmack problem. If he can just somehow repeat his career year (and I’ll disregard the inherent oxymoronic nature of that phrase) then the Indians have a chance to, what, win 73 games instead of 71?

Branyan is an awful player living off a singular ability to hit long home runs on occasion. As a player, he’s less dimensional than even Mel Hall. I could spend the next several paragraphs providing the iron clad case against Branyan but at this juncture what’s the point? Indians-President-In-Waiting Mark Shapiro already struck the deal.

Here’s the issue with the Indians as I see it. They operate in an economically-depressed market in an ethically-challenged league led by a thin-skinned commissioner with the business sense of a Russian peasant. They are owned by folks committed to conflicting goals of winning a World Series while maintaining a modest payroll. To accomplish these goals the only competitive advantage they can muster is to find off-the-radar players through their use of quantitative analysis about any and every professional and amateur player in the universe. The problem is that irrespective of what that analysis tells them, they still end up with players like Branyan.

I’ll challenge Shapiro and General Manager-In-Waiting Chris Antonetti to make the statistical case for Branyan. Go ahead, I’ll wait. The truth is, they can’t. Sure, you can highlight some things, downplay others and come up with a scenario that paying Branyan $2 million for the numbers he projects is a relatively low risk proposition in the context of the bizarre economics of baseball.

But Branyan is simply a baseball vagabond, nothing more. He’ll drift from city to city year after

year and won't take root anywhere. He's not good enough to invest in long-term and apparently isn't awful enough to move on to his real life's work.

What good, though, is the Indians' so-called competitive advantage, its front office smarts, if they are put to this kind of use? Maybe Branyan's name was spit out by some hybrid program Antonetti cobbled together, but if he is the end result then it may be time to develop a new program.

There is just something about all of this that I find terribly depressing. For the last two seasons the Indians have been dumping nearly every asset of value as if the Dolans were trying to re-enact the movie Major League. In doing so they've stripped the fans of any real semblance of hope and replaced it with a lingering sense of dread.

But every year is a new year and no sport regenerates faint feelings of hope more than baseball. And yet the Indians are barely in camp and they're already dropping turds in the punchbowl, saying, basically, Branyan is the best that we can do.

This season and the next several are now officially being played for the baseball purists, that rare breed of person that loves the poetry of the game and would be just as content to watch the Washington Nationals play the Kansas City Royals as they would be to watch the Indians play anyone.

For them and maybe a few others, watching some young players get good enough where they'll be too pricey to sign long-term is about all that's on the horizon to keep them satisfied. Meanwhile the more meaningful games will be played elsewhere once more.

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