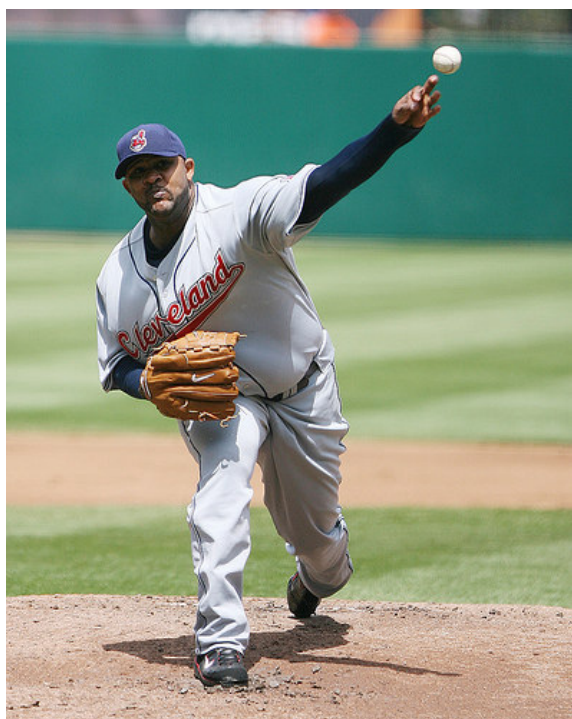


(K)Night Moves: Big trade means the chess game is on, and another big splash is possible



Late Sunday, the Milwaukee Brewers made the 1st major deal to open up the chess match to a cascading series of possible big moves.

Cleveland, for their part, acquired Milwaukee's top prospect, 2007 1st round pick OF Matt Laporta. With his tremendous power demonstrated in AA Huntsville (20+ doubles and home runs), the Indians must be tickled pink to possibly have all ready All-star CF Grady Sizemore and Laporta as their future outfield foundation.

At the very least, they did no harm to themselves in this maneuver to rebuild on the parts they can afford in acquiring 4 players in return. If a soon-to-be departing free agent does one thing, *and one thing only*, he should bring back 1-3 potential MLB players. *C.C. Sabathia was their queen (in chess)*, but the Indians may land a rook (Laporta) and a knight or pawns back, without sacrificing positioning for the long series of matches. *Much better than losing the queen without immediate compensation.* (Amateur Draft is a crapshoot sometimes, and expensive to mid-to-low market teams.)

Meanwhile, the rest of the National League Central was put on notice that this chess game will require aggressive positioning and tactics. The Cubs, even having 7 all-stars selected, (the most since 1936) must be well aware of this fact.

The 2008 Northsiders have been one of great offense, timely pitching, stable defense and comeback wins. However, the last 2-3 weeks has seen them struggle against the Rays, White Sox and Orioles, losing 8 of 9 in those three series. Their road record of 20-27 is indicative of weakness away from those friendly confines – *one that can be exploited. An aggressive opening gambit that is flawed, and requires a quick defense.*

So what are the tactics to counterattack your opponent's queen advance? How can the ultimate match be won by the Cubs? Who might be next in line to be moved forward in defense (a la a trade)?

Offense. The Cubs have potentially six players with 15+ home runs, .290 BA, .370 OBP and 75-100+ RBI. (**Aramis Ramirez, Derrek Lee, Mark DeRosa, Geovany Soto**, Alfonso Soriano and Kosuke Fukudome) Four of those guys can and will likely hit 30 home runs. Add in the nice mix of CFs Edmonds/Johnson and SS Ryan Theriot, this team will score runs *a plenty*.

Offense has been their saving grace, but it is lacking a *sure fire base stealer* (the role Soriano has failed miserably in) to bring in as a late-inning weapon. (**Think** Boston's 2004 championship run with Dave Roberts (5 of 7 in regular season stolen base attempts). Or maybe 1985, as Davey Lopes stole 47 bases in 51 attempts while only amassing 275 at-bats for the Cubs that year. The Cubs were maligned by pitching injuries...)

Speed off the bench, or a multi-positional player (better than Ronny Cedeno) could assist them further, and costs little in the way of prospects. *A strategically-positioned pawn to command the center squares. Possibly, a pawn-turned-queen in the late stages of the match. (A Dusty Rhodes in 1954 would be God*

Send. Either as a speed burner or an outfield/middle infielder that mashes the Cubs to an essential victory.)

Pitching. The post-season trek is littered with mashing teams that lacked top-flight pitching. The 1929 Cubs and 1930 Cardinals were accosted by the A's, while each scoring over 980 runs apiece. (Those A's were pretty prolific scorers too.) 1953 Dodgers scored 955 runs but lost the Fall Classic. Since 1969, a host of high-powered offenses have fallen short:

Year	Team	Reg. Season Runs	Reg. Wins	Reg. Season ERA	Reg. Season HR Allowed	Post Games Played	HR Allowed Post	Post ERA
1996	Cleveland Indians	952	99	4.66	173	4	9	5.84
1996	Texas Rangers	928	90	4.35	168	4	4	3.55
1997	Seattle Mariners	925	90	4.79	192	4	6	5.91
1998	Texas Rangers	940	88	5.00	164	3	4	3.24
1999	Cleveland Indians	1009	97	3.77	197	5	10	9.63
1999	Texas Rangers	945	95	5.07	186	3	2	3.60
1999	Arizona Diamondbacks	908	100	4.90	176	4	5	5.35
2000	Chicago White Sox	978	95	4.21	195	3	4	3.95
2000	Oakland Athletics	947	91	4.58	158	5	1	3.48
2000	San Francisco Giants	925	97	4.66	151	4	3	2.97
2001*	Seattle Mariners	927	116	3.54	160	10	12	4.53
2003	Atlanta Braves	907	101	4.10	147	5	4	3.68
2006	New York Yankees	930	97	4.41	170	4	6	5.56

***Mariners only team to make it beyond 1st round since 1997**

These teams, even with offenses that scored 5.5 runs+ per game, were giving up earned runs at high rates. (Aside from those 2001 Mariners.) Only the 2000 Giants pitching staff posted an unlikely sub-3.00 ERA, generally a benchmark to winning in the post season. A firm balance between offense and pitching is needed to go to the World Series, and win.

The Cubs are most likely in an Arabian marketplace under the quirky ownership of GM Billy Beane. Reports have Rich Harden, an injury-prone but talented gas pumper (remind you of anyone or two?), as a potential target of the Jim Hendry's regime. Kicking the tires of Harden, to see if they are stable, is but one *pawn move*.

Are the A's eyeing Sean Gallagher plus a few more prospects back – *a trade off of a knight, a bishop and couple of pawns, for possibly, a queen?* Can the Cubs afford to put the eggs in the fragile basket of a 27 yr. old Harden? With Zambrano, Dempster and Lilly giving good showings, and Harden stepping in ahead of Dempster, could they actually afford to trade 22 yr. old Gallagher? **Yes** – if Harden is over his Prior/Wood problems. *A queen well positioned can command the entire board, picking off opponents pieces and assuring a match win. A once-in-a-century opportunity.*

The moves to make before the clock expires.

Tick tock on the Cubs.