

Build it from within... make every cent count... balance risk.

That might be the best way to describe how **Mark Shapiro**, the executive vice-president and general manager of the Cleveland Indians, conducts business. Since coming on-board with the Indians in 2001, he immediately set about restructuring the Indians model for success. High salary veteran players were dropped to give payroll flexibility, and the focus was shifted to developing young talent.

Shapiro has seen the game, as worked from outside the lines, since he was at a very young age. His father Ron, was a high profile lawyer in the Baltimore area that shifted to becoming an agent. In an interview on *Baseball America*, the elder Shapiro said, "For as much as he loved sports, he was disadvantaged in that genetically he was deprived because his father was probably the worst athlete in the world. But exposure-wise, he got to have a unique view of players and their lives outside baseball. I think that gave him a better understanding of how things work right from the beginning."

The rebuilding of the Indians paid off in 2005 when Mark was honored with the *Sporting News* Sports Executive of the Year by winning 93 games that year, while having a payroll that ranked in the bottom five of the 30 teams.

The following interview focuses on how Shapiro balances the resources that the Indians have available to continue to contend. Unsurprisingly, he mentions **Billy Beane** (<u>read the Biz of Baseball interview with Beane</u>

), and

Terry Ryan

read the Biz of Baseball interview with Ryan

) who have been able to evaluate undervalued talent with budgets many times lower than clubs such as the Yankees and the Red Sox.

This year sees the Indians in the hunt again. As of this publication they hold a two-game lead over the Tigers for first place in the AL Central, with **C.C. Sabathia** leading the league in Wins with 12,

Victor Martinez

seventh in RBIs, and

Joe Borowski

tied for third in the league with 24 Saves.

Other topics in this interview include his views on the Draft system, whether the Indians will focus on re-signing **C.C. Sabathia**, how this year's first draft pick **Beau Mills** might be developed, how the Indians approach risk as it pertains to pitchers, competing for free agents with a player payroll that is ranked at 23rd by Opening Day payroll (\$61,673,267), and much, much more.

Maury Brown for The Biz of Baseball: We're very near the All-Star break, and with that, the Indians and Tigers are battling it out for the lead in the AL Central. Are you satisfied with where you are at, or are you looking to make a move before the trade deadline?

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Mark Shapiro: Well, you know it's funny; I think in the moment, you're not satisfied. You feel like you could have been better within the context of the season you played. If you would have flashed back to Spring Training and told me that we would have the third or fourth best record in the big leagues, we'd be fourteen games above .500, I would have signed up for it.

The second answer to the question that you asked is yes, it is our obligations to constantly,

Interview - Mark Shapiro - Exec. VP & GM - Cleveland Indians

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regardless of our spot in the standings, be attempting to improve the team. It is a challenging market to do that. The backdrop of our protectiveness of our young players always has to be there because that's really our greatest ability to compete and win here, but with that being said, we are active, very active, and diligent in the area of trying to secure more talent.

BizBall: We just recently went through the First-Year Draft, and with that changes that were implemented with the new CBA were put in place on how the drafting system functions. What is your take on the new changes? Do you think it works well, or will there continue to be adjustments made?

Shapiro: Time will tell. I think it clearly creates slightly more leverage for the team, but it still doesn't achieve the end result. Our draft system is extremely flawed. It does not result in the desired outcome, which is the best talent taken, strictly based on ability where it's spotted on the board. Finances still enter into the equation at a very significant level. It is often the teams that lose the most that aren't able — if they are a smaller market team — to catch the best player that is on the board at that time. Until that's the case, I don't think the draft functions as it's supposed to with the distribution of talent.

BizBall: With the Draft, the Indians selected 1B, Beau Mills from Lewis & Clark State College with the 13th pick. What kind of player do you see him as, and what roll might he be developed into for the Majors? Do you look for a particular role for him?

Shapiro: I think what we look to do in the first round of the draft is secure some level of talent that we basically have an inability to compete for on a free agent market. So, whether that's a top of the rotation player, whether that's a top of a rotation starter, whether that's a middle of the order run producer, or a middle of the diamond talent, that's what we're looking to do. And in Beau we feel like we secured a potential middle of the order run producer and that's how it will development. I think we'll find the best fit for him defensively. Initially we feel that's probably first base, but time will tell defensively. Clearly what we're looking to get, what we feel most confident of, is that we have the potential to sign a run producing, middle of the order bat.



"I think 'risks' and 'pitching' on the free agent market are just inseparable. You're just dealing with levels of risk."

"The Red Sox could value a player identically to us and basically, just with their tolerance for risk and their level of payroll, they could both pay him more and offer him more years within an exact same evaluation."

"Without that internal supply of talent, we cannot compete at the playoff caliber level."

"I don't believe in hard and fast rules in this game it is a game of grays, there are no black and whites."

> "My philosophy has always been: Why limit yourself to one type of data? Why not seek to get the best information in every area?"