

Hasty Assumptions: Breaking Down Fielder-for-Kinsler

By Dan Hasty

97.1 The Ticket

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Late Wednesday night, shockwaves were sent around baseball when the Tigers traded Prince Fielder to the Texas Rangers for Ian Kinsler. I spoke with Jon Morosi of FoxSports.com about the trade.

(put link to interview here)

Here's an in-depth look at the deal from the most important angles from the Tigers perspective:

Financial

From a financial standpoint, I like this trade for Detroit. Any time you can save a sizable chunk of money (\$76 Million) and get a valuable asset in the process, you pull the trigger. Hopefully, the Tigers learned their lesson about giving big contracts to players they're unfamiliar with. Combined with the \$30 million they will send to Texas, the Tigers will have paid Fielder nearly \$95 million over two seasons. While he was productive, signing Fielder was a \$30 million mistake.

Don't be surprised if this or next off-season, the Tigers pay 200 million for another first baseman: Miguel Cabrera.

Flexibility

In order to put the best product on the field each day, you have to have more flexibility than the Tigers had. This doesn't make them completely flexible, as Victor Martinez continues as the teams and designated hitter, but it's a step in the right direction.

On the flipside, added flexibility can also create more needs. While the tigers helped themselves from an athletic standpoint, they now have glaring holes and a number of key positions. Not only can the case be made that the Tigers lack a clear-cut hitter behind Miguel Cabrera, but now they sit without a bona fide third baseman or leftfielder heading into next season.

Team Performance

As of now, this trade does not improve the Detroit Tigers. Like most trades made for financial reasons, a wait-and-see approach must be taken. While it's unreasonable to expect the Tigers to immediately reinvest the near \$80 million they just saved, one can fully evaluate the trade once the off-season concludes. This trade isn't simply Fielder for Kinsler, it's Fielder for Kinsler, a pair of bullpen arms, and a left fielder, Only then can we assess whether or not this trade was successful.

The American League Central continues to get better by the day, and this team will have to make a significant upgrade just to win their own division next year. This trade allows them the chance to do that.

The Scherzer Angle

Even with the money saved from the deal, I still believe you make the effort to trade Max Scherzer. It's my belief that Scherzer is a good, but not great pitcher. I think we're dealing with a pitcher who had a great season, as opposed to a great pitcher. The two are very different. Kevin Brown, Mike Hampton, and Chan Ho Park had great seasons, but we're never great pitchers: at least not those who lived up to the mammoth contracts they received.

If you can fill your bullpen with 2–3 playoff-caliber arms for the next 2-3 seasons, trading Scherzer, a free agent after next season, is a move worth making. Keeping him for the sake of pairing him with Justin Verlander isn't like pairing Randy Johnson with Curt Schilling. Even at his best, Scherzer usually gives you seven dominant innings. Johnson or Schilling could each give you a dominant complete game. Scherzer has never been, isn't or ever will be that type of pitcher. The fact that he's never pitched a complete game in his Major-League career is a clear indication of that.

A dominant bullpen shortens a game, making a pitcher like Scherzer unnecessary. In 2006, pitchers like Jeremy Bonderman and Nate Robertson had great success thanks to a strong bullpen behind them (Rodney, Zumaya, Jones). Teams with a strong bullpen go farther in October, and that's what this is all about.

Review

The Tigers did themselves an enormous favor by getting out from under Fielder's contract. Now, the effort to reshape the team into a World Series Champion needs to happen. To do that, continue to upgrade team speed, athleticism and defense. Even then, the bullpen needs drastic changes above all else. If that doesn't happen, this trade doesn't improve the Tigers; and if this trade doesn't improve the Tigers, they're not winning the World Series, let alone a division title next season.

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