

Ruben Amaro, Jr. once made a playoff roster over Dave Winfield. Talk to him about his playing career for a few minutes, and Amaro will offer the information to you, unprompted, with a toothy grin. Sure, it was at the end of Winfield's career – Winfield's own family might not remember that he played with the Indians – but it's still something Amaro is proud of. Something he's less proud of: the Indians released him a month later.

“You know it's a business from the first time you step on a field in A-ball,” Amaro says, “but it still stung. One month I was in the World Series, the next I was looking for a team. I can't remember that stinging when I'm making the decisions. I have to shut that part of the brain off.” Amaro bounced around for a bit before landing with the Phillies, for whom he had his best seasons. Eventually, he became the man holding the reins for the Phillies, taking over for a team that had just won the World Series. But you'd better believe he still roots for the underdog, the hidden gem in the list of players surfing on the waiver wire. “It's in my blood.”

Alex Anthopoulos most certainly did not make a playoff roster over Dave Winfield. When the fresh faced general manager of the Blue Jays was still collecting baseball cards, Winfield wasn't even a hot commodity anymore – certainly not like Ken Griffey, Jr. or Jose Canseco. Anthopoulos was a McMaster University graduate who pestered the Expos for a job, any job, in 2000. Less than ten years later, he was trying to figure out just how in the heck the Blue Jays are supposed to compete with the New York Yankees and Boston Red Sox. “Being smarter is my only option,” he says, “because we're not going to get richer. So if I'm not smarter now, I need to get smarter, and fast.”

A former player looking for unwanted players, both to help the team and to make him feel a little better about the business side of the game.

A young, eager executive, hoping to outthink his division rivals by acquiring players who would provide production well beyond their modest salaries.

It added up to laboratory-perfect conditions for a struggle over a player like Brian Bocock.

Bocock was drafted in the 9th round out of Stetson University, which produces baseball players roughly at the same rate it produces U.S. senators, and made the Opening Day lineup for the San Francisco Giants less than two years later. His rapid ascent was the result of one thing: a brilliant glove at shortstop. “He’s like Ozzie Smith with more lateral range,” says Amaro. “Think about that for a second. Bocock plays the game like he’s Reed Richards from *The Fantastic Four*. He gets to everything.” The offensively challenged Giants couldn’t afford to keep a defense-only player on their roster. When they removed Bocock to make room for RBI machine Aubrey Huff, Bocock was available to other teams. The National League teams, though, got first crack at players waived by other NL teams. “When the news broke, I received about 50 text messages,” says Anthopoulos. “All I could do was wait, though, and hope that the teams ahead of us passed on him for some reason.”

Amaro had the chance to claim Bocock for the Phillies. They declined. “I’d like to say there was a better reason, but I just blew it. I knew Bocock’s reputation, but I didn’t think he’d be on the waiver wire. I didn’t look closely enough at the name. I didn’t put two and two together.” The fallout from the Phillies failure to acquire Bocock was kept out of the papers, but internally, there were repercussions. The Phillies front office was a tough place to be. Team president and part-owner David Montgomery held a series of closed-door meetings, trying to calm down the ownership group.

In another country, Anthopoulos felt like he had won the lottery after not even buying a ticket. There was no way Bocock should have made it all the way to the Blue Jays. His once-in-a-generation glove was coveted by every team – why was he even available? “I actually had some guys look into his personal life,” says Anthopoulos, “to make sure he wasn’t just arrested for trafficking cocaine, or something.” The Blue Jays’ 40-man-roster suddenly seemed whole now. Fans were giddy.

The Phillies weren’t giddy. Amaro went about his routine, but he couldn’t stop kicking himself. He called Anthopoulos to work out a deal, but the talks were over quickly, with the Blue Jays requesting a cool dozen of the Phillies’ best prospects. That just wasn’t a risk Amaro was willing to take, even for Bocock. Amaro focused on adding relievers to the back of his bullpen.

One week later, well into the middle of the night, Amaro's phone rang. Something must be wrong, he thought. It's never a good thing when a cell phone rings that late. Amaro picked up the phone with trepidation, wondering just how his life was going to change. "Don't ask questions," Phillies assistant G.M. Scott Proefrock said on the other end, "just act. Brian Bocoock is on waivers again. And he's about to make it back to us." It didn't make sense, but Amaro took the advice. He acted. He claimed Bocoock for the Phillies.

If he thought things were settled, he was wrong. The tug of Bocoock had only just begun.