



It's Labor Day weekend and that usually means three things: the Indians are gagging and falling further out of the playoff race, the Browns are on the tee box and Ohio State, as usual, wears the burden of giving us hope for some semblance of a successful season for the teams we root for.

Same Old Story...

I don't even have the energy to talk too much about this Indians team. And anything I do say will have been said 500 times and will draw the ire of the hopeless optimists who are convinced now that the schedule features more teams like Minnesota and the Mets and less of teams like the Braves and Tigers that there is still a run left in this team.

But really, why bother?

Beating the snot out of Miami, Minnesota, Houston and the White Sox is fine. You have to beat the bad teams. But what's problematic is that even if the Indians pull a rabbit out of the hat and make a wildcard run, even if they actually end up with one of those spots, they're probably going to face a team a bit better than those dogs in the playoffs.

And the Indians have proven time and time again this season that they can't play with those upper echelon teams.

These are the Indians W-L records against the better MLB teams this season:

Atlanta 0-3

Baltimore 2-2

Boston 1-6

Cincinnati 2-2

Detroit 3-15

Yankees 1-6

Oakland 5-2

Tampa 2-4

Texas 5-1

That's 21-41 against playoff candidates. That's a .339 winning percentage against 'quality' clubs. That's basically a Houston Astros level of incompetence.

That's disturbing and it's been earned despite going 10-3 against the best the AL West has to

offer.

So forgive me if I'm a bit down in the mouth when it comes to the Indians making hay over the next month or so in hopes of winning a wild card spot.

Yeah, yeah, yeah...anything can happen if you get to the postseason and get hot. Blah, blah, blah. And this team, with some exceptions, is easy to pull for. Blah, blah, blah. But that doesn't mean I have to sit here like the father of a 6-year old girl and blindly pull for the boys in the Block C caps without acknowledging their major flaws and weaknesses. There are no participation ribbons or trophies for effort.

The bottom line for the Indians is that they aren't good enough to be a playoff team as it stands right now and that there's nothing we've seen over the past 135 games that indicate that guys like Asdrubal Cabrera or Nick Swisher or Michael Bourn or Lonnie Chisenhall or Drew Stubbs or, well, you get the idea, are going to suddenly turn their mediocre (if not disappointing) seasons around and become something they've not been all year.

How realistic is it to expect that Justin Masterson will morph into a consistent ace as opposed to an inconsistent front of the rotation guy over his last five or six starts? How realistic is it to believe Ubaldo Jimenez will continue to get guys out despite throwing 20 pitches per inning? How realistic is it to believe Vinnie Pestano is "fixed" or that Carlos Santana will catch fire and carry this struggling offense?

I'm fine with appreciating the effort and the turnaround this season without being forced to jump on some half-assed rah-rah bandwagon that will only let us all out on Reality Avenue. I like what the starting rotation has done without a true ace and while holding Ubaldo together with bubble gum and band-aids. I like the fact that the Indians have seen Zack McAllister and Corey Kluber emerge as legitimate rotation options and I'm buoyed by Danny Salazar coming from nowhere to provide even more hope for the future.

But come on. Shake yourselves as to the expectations with this offense. I've said it before but the Indians top hitters are ALL guys who would probably be hitting 6-9 on legit, pennant-contending teams.

Look, weird things happen in sports all the time. Maybe Cabbie and Swisher and Chisenhall and Bourn all have ridiculous Septembers. Maybe the pitching is lights out and Jason Kubel and Jason Kipnis and Jason Giambi all go Friday the 13th Jason Voorhees and start killing pitching. But if you're betting on all of that you're not likely to see much of a payoff.

A lot of folks are upset that the Indians acquired Jason Kubel while the Pirates nabbed Justin Morneau from the Twins.

Meh.

Neither guy is going to fill any gaping hole in the middle of the lineup at this stage of the year or at this stage of their careers. Maybe one or the other gets hot (and I'd also prefer Morneau over Kubel if we're being honest) but these guys have struggled all season. Hell, Morneau is basically Nick Swisher this season and he's the better of the two players. And we already have a Swisher that hasn't been a difference maker.

It wasn't likely that the Twins were going to deal Morneau to the Indians, and his impact would have been minimal anyway.

I admire both the Indians and Pirates for making moves to try and strengthen their rosters at this point of the season but I just don't think having one here over the other would be a big deal.

Let's Get it Started...

Any team without Owen Marecic is a better team by my standards.

And any team without a kicker on it is even better. I mean, going without a kicker into the week before the season starts is a bold, innovative move and clearly tells the fan base that the organization is so convinced that Brandon Weeden is going to throw touchdowns and convert two-point conversions that they don't need no stinking kicker, right?

Of course the Browns will have a kicker on the roster by this time next week. Otherwise guys will just stand their awkwardly after Weeden touchdown pass and the whole kickoff thing will come to a grinding halt. Delay of game penalties will pile up and we might be treated to Phil Taylor putting toe to football to get the game going again.

Anyway, no real roster surprises as the Browns cut down to 53 men. That's a fluid 53 as a RB and a K will be added at the expense of a couple poor bastards who already called mom and pop and told them they made the team.

One of the more mildly surprising cuts was WR David Nelson. I was excited when the Browns brought him on board because he produced when he wasn't hurt in Buffalo and because Norv Turner loves him his big WRs.

But Nelson participated just slightly more than you and I did in camp and the Browns determined that his mind and body simply weren't up to the challenge of playing football at this time. That's too bad because, when healthy in mind and body, Nelson can play.

I'm actually anxious for the real games to begin. Not because I love Browns and NFL Sundays (which I do) but because this season will be a crucial in the direction of this team. This season is where the rubber hits the road on Weeden. If he's going to be a guy you can hand the keys to an offense to, it'll be evident this season under Turner and Rob Chudzinski. No more excuses, no more being forced to try and fit a square peg into a round hole under Pat Shurmur, this is simply Weeden's opportunity to show he deserves to be a starting QB in the NFL.

So let's see it. And I want him to have the whole season. No vacillating between Weeden and the QB du jour. Give him the team and see where he ends up.

There are no concerns with the man's arm. He can make every throw a QB is required to make. And he has more weapons at his disposal in an offense built with a guy like him mind than he's ever had or will ever have.

But let's see what he has inside his helmet. Let's see if he can manipulate defenses much less react to them. Because that's the key to quarterbacking in the NFL if you're not a multi-threat weapon. And we'll know after a full season if Weeden is a guy capable of doing that.

What do I want and expect to see from Weeden? I'm not really concerned so much with raw numbers. I think in this offense that 4,000 yards and 20 TDS is probably a baseline. What I really want to see will be evident without numbers in terms of Weeden's grasp and control of the offense. But if any numbers are important to me they revolve around ratios of TDs to INTs. He has to be at 2:1 or better. He has to put footballs where his bigger WRs are the only ones able to bring them down so ball placement will be important.

Keep in mind Weeden should have more opportunities to prove to us he's the guy to run this team, too. Ray Horton's defense will be aggressive. That means more possessions for the Browns when they come up with takeaways or when they get beat for big plays. There will be both this season and Weeden will have more possessions each game to get his team in the end zone.

Josh Gordon's two game suspension hurts this team immensely for the opener against Miami and the following week in Baltimore. But there are no more excuses for Weeden and the Browns. Good teams and good quarterbacks get it done under less than optimal conditions.

In a week we start to see where the Browns are. Let's get it started.

Buckeyes Get Win, 'Teaching Opportunities' in Opener

I kind of wish I had watched only Ohio State's first few drives against Buffalo and then turned it

off. My optimism for the 2013 season would have been off the charts because Braxton Miller looked like Troy Smith in 2005 and Jordan Hall looked like another in a long line of Ohio State running back beasts in the first quarter or two.

I've thought for a few years that Miller looked like a better thrower of the football when he was a senior at Huber Heights Wayne than in his first two seasons at OSU. I think Luke Fickell's staff tried to change his motion his freshman year and Urban Meyer began fixing it last season, while putting out numerous other fires with the team.

But early in yesterday's game Miller looked like a new guy. Much like Smith morphed from an athlete into a QB his junior season it seems that Miller might be on his way as well. The 40-20 win over the MAC team wasn't as big a margin as you might like but Miller looked good to this layman.

It's also comforting to know that he has that ridiculous running ability in his pocket when he needs it and, if RT Tyler Decker continues to be a windmill, he's going to need it more often than you'd like to see him need it.

But at the end of the afternoon the Buckeyes had their 13th straight win under Meyer and move onto face a SDSU team that got beaten up yesterday (and gave up over 500 yards of offense) against Eastern Illinois, a mediocre FCS school. Meyer will be pleased with the win, less pleased when he picks apart the film and some of the lapses on the OL and with the defense, and the process will continue with the Buckeyes. Getting wins and getting better at the same time isn't easy but Meyer has the cupboards stacked with talent and he'll find someone to step up and into spots that he deems to be weak.

While it would have been nice to see a more dominating performance there was a lot to like in yesterday's win. Beginning with Braxton Miller's development.

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