



As our friends to the south try to come to grips with what happened in their series against the San Francisco Giants, I'm reliving the memories of the 2007 ALCS. The Cincinnati Reds' epic collapse in the NLDS made them the first National League team to ever blow a 2-0 division series lead. Maybe The Cleveland Experience has morphed into The Ohio Experience. In any event, the whole thing got me to thinking.

What would we rather have in Cleveland? A playoff experience with a disappointment of gargantuan proportions or no postseason at all? My Twitter timeline has been full of people proclaiming that "There is nothing like playoff baseball" or other variations. Of course, a lot of these same people will post in five months that "There is nothing like the first four days of March Madness" or "There is nothing like the fourth quarter of a NBA playoff game".

Everybody's goal at the start of the season should be to make the playoffs because anything can happen. Nobody expected the Colorado Rockies to make the 2007 World Series. Nobody expected the 2011 Wild Card St. Louis Cardinals to upset the Texas Rangers last season. Look at what has happened to Rangers fans over the last three years. After World Series losses in 2010 and 2011, they fell apart to lose the division to the Oakland A's, were forced to play a one-game playoff against the Orioles, which they lost, and now are talking about firing their manager and letting Josh Hamilton walk in free agency.

Does playoff disappointment outweigh not making the playoffs at all?

In a word, yes. In another 800 or so words, here's why. Every offseason, fans put together pipe

dreams in their heads. They're blowing off work to attend the downtown parade after their team wins a championship. They're picturing what bar they'll watch the away games in and finding reasons to justify paying ten times face value to get tickets for home games. They're imagining the division title celebration or the (now) one-game wild card play-in series.

There's nothing like that feeling of knowing that your team's season won't end when almost everybody else's does. I can still remember my excitement in the '90s and in 2007 when the Indians clinched division titles. The 2007 one was special, because it wasn't just a formality like the ones in the '90s. It's infectious. The city's morale instantly improves. It doesn't matter if it's cold and snowing when there's a playoff baseball game that night. The stadium will be packed and the city will be abuzz. Looking at lineups. Second-guessing the manager. Raucously cheering pedestrian baseball accomplishments like drawing a walk or making a routine catch.

It's not until after the ride is over that we actually sit back and reflect on what we lived. There's still a hole that hasn't been filled. Much like Indians fans still lament about 2007, Reds fans will sit back and wonder what could have been. Their magical season with so many great wins and individual performances (sound familiar?). It doesn't melt away because of a NLDS collapse. Those emotions, those feelings, and those memories will always stick with fans.

The only way to create those memories is to qualify for the playoffs. Would Texas Rangers fans trade 2010 and 2011 for watching the Anaheim Angels in the playoffs? I highly doubt it. When I got to thinking about this, I wondered if playoff teams that fall short are any different than the 94-loss Indians. Ultimately, both teams fell short. One fell short earlier than the other. Professional sports don't hand out consolation prizes the way CYO Coaches hand out participation trophies or the "Most Improved Player" award to a kid with substandard motor skills.

Aside from some playoff revenue, it shouldn't make a damn bit of difference to the front office whether the team won 94 games and lost in the first round or lost 94 games and spent two months playing minor leaguers. But, from a fan's perspective, it makes all the difference in the world. Baseball teams shouldn't allow fan morale and opinion to dictate their offseason plans. But, when the Indians failed to make any improvements to the 2008 team, they suffered. When the fans are hungry and don't get fed, the end result is the apathy that the Indians are currently facing, when 70% of the ballpark is empty almost every night. That's a byproduct of the standings.

Frankly, this discussion is a lot like the famous Alfred Lord Tennyson quote, "Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all." The playoff experience is love. Casual fans become die-hards. Die-hards become fanatical. There's unity in a common goal – cheering on your team to win. As a fan, it's a feeling unlike any other. Even when the Lake Erie Monsters made the playoffs in 2011, though I have nowhere near the attachment for them that I do for the Indians, I was still excited. Playoff hockey, if any of you have ever watched any, is the definition of intense. Whether you're a former player or have never stepped foot on a field, court, or rink, the body knows when adrenaline is supposed to flow. Playoff action does that, no matter what sport, as long as it's your team in contention.

Since baseball is my primary love in the sports world, I yearn for the playoffs like somebody would yearn for a lost love. I can't watch the MLB playoffs unless the Indians are in it. I just can't. What's the point? I know what will happen. I'll get nostalgic about the Indians playoff appearances, I'll get pissed off because there isn't any meaningful October baseball on the horizon, and I'll wind up hating the fans of those teams because of pure, unadulterated jealousy.

Alas, here I sit, bitter and disappointed again, as the leaves change and the number of teams still playing baseball dwindles down to a champion. I would trade places with the Reds and their fans. Even though it was a soul-crushing blow to lose all three games at home and have their season come to an abrupt end, it's still better than having your season end effectively two months before Game 162.

My 2013 optimism will kick in at some point, blinding me to the fact that the Indians will probably be projected to lose 90 games again next year, barring some earth-shattering free agent moves that cost a lot of money. But, for now, baseball is on the backburner for me.

The two AL finalists are the Yankees, who spend at will, and the Tigers, who miraculously came up with \$210M to throw at Cecil Fielder Jr. when Victor Martinez went down with a torn ACL. The two good stories in baseball, the A's and the Baltimore Orioles, are no more, eliminated by financial Goliaths. Hell, I saw Jon Heyman of CBS Sports talk about CC Sabathia's heart pitching the Yankees to the ALCS. Get the f#\*& out of here. Where was his supposed heart in 2007 when he hung an 8.81 ERA? On a team that REALLY needed him because they couldn't have \$180M worth of support around him.

That right there signifies my end of caring about on-field baseball for the 2012 season. I'll follow the Hot Stove and see what the Indians can put together now that they have a win now

manager in Terry Francona once the games are done, but, until that point, baseball is dead to me.