

Friday Night In Cleveland

Written by {ga=riverburns}

Saturday, May 04 2013 6:26 AM -



I do sometimes wonder if my commentary is fair, being off the reservation, so to speak. It's been over a decade since I put Northeast Ohio in the rear view mirror, and I'd admit there are certain things about being a Cleveland sports fan that I don't have to deal with from my desert abode.

Perhaps, it's a wash, the upside of not being able to attend the home games on anything close to a regular basis, which actually isn't anything close to what I would consider a silver lining.

Not having to deal with the atmosphere, in exchange for not getting to be a part of the atmosphere is the same type of "glass half-full" viewpoint as someone raving about the cleanliness of the silverware at a restaurant where they were given food poisoning.

While it's true that I don't miss the wintry mixes, the potholes, or the summer afternoons of sucking exhaust fumes on the Inner Belt, one thing I sure do miss is Cleveland, Ohio on Friday night.

Left with only the options of missing out altogether or watching on television, living vicariously through the 13,000 that show up, on average, to the ballpark, I choose the latter. Given just two home games, the tenants at the Field that they call Progressive, though most of us still call it Jacobs, have given their Friday night faithful with something to go home happy about on both

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occasions.

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his most recent Friday night, Tres De Mayo, was a much more pleasant affair than the freeze-fest a few Fridays ago with the White Sox and Tribe trading zeroes for 2 hours and 18 minutes.

This one, the one where they rescued victory from the jaws of a series-opening defeat at the hands of the inept Minnesota Twins, came in the midst of outstanding weather conditions and hey, 13 runs is a more fun than 1.

The Indians also won their first Friday night home contest in walk-off fashion in 2012, starting their Friday night home docket the same way they ended 2011, with a happy mob surrounding home plate as the winning run scored. Obviously walk-off wins on Friday night don't count for anything more in the standings than a walk-off on Wednesday afternoon or 7-1 win on a Tuesday night, but it accelerates the pulse of the fans; I don't have to be at Ninth and Carnegie to understand that because I feel it myself. I take it into the weekend with me and it distances me from the grind of the 9-to-5.

Even if the dark clouds of Monday morning are inevitable, you can't take away that Friday night high after an Indians win, when they're in the hunt.



Of course, one playoff berth in the last 12 seasons means they haven't been "in the hunt" very often, but perhaps in the early months of the season in seasons that included mid to late seasons collapses that have encouraged us to forget more than we remember. Do we really

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need to re-live

[the events of September 30, 2005](#)

?

That was Cleveland on a Friday night, a chance to the division, and an extra-inning home run, but the magic was on furlough that particular night.

In a case of 10,000 spoons when all you need is a knife, Ronnie Belliard hits a solo home run in the bottom of the 13th inning, only after the White Sox got two off Fernando Cabrera in the top half of the inning.

So, it didn't really matter what they did on Saturday and Sunday; no win on Friday assured them of not playing a game after Sunday.

It's actually more recent events that get me stoked for Friday night. Hell, it may not have necessarily been the Indians that really get me thinking about being homesick (in a good way) on Friday night in the Forest City.

Whether you watch basketball or not, you were probably privy to how historically terrible the Cavs were in the 2010-2011 season.

At one point, the Indians next-door neighbors had lost 26 in a row and 36 of their last 37 games.

It took a bit of questionable officiating and an overtime period, but the streak didn't get a 27th loss and confetti fell from the rafters as the home team improved to 9-45 on the year, but the body language of 20,562 in attendance didn't tell you they were

[pulling for an 8-win team on February 11th](#)

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It was a playoff atmosphere, a reward a team as crappy as the Cavs are quite unworthy of, but we could start talking about this town's obsession with its 14 year-old expansion franchise, if we really want to go down that road.

The win that broke the streak was the first of four consecutive Friday night wins for that pathetic excuse for a basketball team, but the fan base deserved wins that felt like they mattered and it was only a matter of days before pitchers and catchers reported to Goodyear.

The 2011 season actually started on a Friday, with the Indians hosting Chicago, but this was the year of Fausto Carmona playing the role of Opening Day starter. That season was full of fun Fridays, but as I sat on a friend's couch in one of Chicago's northern suburbs, this was a day of seeing the wintry mix on the TV screen and looking out the window.

However, when I looked out the window, I didn't see

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[the Indians down 14-0 in the fourth inning at home](#)

, in front of 41,721 would-be enthusiastic fans.

Despite a bit of a push to make things interesting, they dropped that one 15-10, but one Friday later we had a clear view of a 30-15 team in the making.



They were on the road in Seattle, coming off a series sweep of the Red Sox, but the crowd was pretty electric for the [Mariners home opener](#) on a night where they were honoring the late Dave Niehaus, the former “Voice of the Mariners”.

This is where I might enjoy certain road games a little more than my friends of the feathered in Northeast Ohio; those 10:19 first pitches can’t be fun, but it was Friday night.

Of course, the night was young in my neck of the woods, as I enjoyed the action from my barstool in Tempe.

Asdrubal Cabrera went deep to give the Indians an early lead, but the wheels fell off for the home team in the away half of the 4th inning. The Indians scored ten runs on ten hits in the inning, but Travis Hafner, the (third and) twelfth batter of the inning, quite blatantly smiled before smacking Tom Wilhelmssen’s 2-0 offering into Bolivia, as Iron Mike Tyson would say, in his second at-bat of the frame. That gave the Indians an 11-0 lead on their way to a 12-3 win, their fifth in a row, after starting 0-2.

Three weeks later, we would get all of the drama we could ask for, in Cleveland, but with only 15,000 in attendance.

The Indians and Tigers were going in different directions when [they met on April 29, 2011](#). Detroit got out to a 5-2 lead after six and a half, and it looked as though the Tribe’s 3-game winning streak was coming to an end, but they made them play 9 that Friday and the Indians evened things up after “Take Me Out to the Ballgame” on home runs from Matt LaPorta and Asdrubal

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Cabrera.

That set the scene for all of the dramatic things you can get out of a baseball game in the bottom of the ninth.



I was on that same barstool that sat on weeks earlier, but unable to watch the events unfold live since the Free Trial had ended for the MLB Package and this particular establishment was unwilling to pay for me to watch the Indians one night a week. So, it was dots on a Blackberry for me, but the drama was there, even without the visual.

Bases loaded, nobody out for Shin-Soo Choo; he goes down on 3 straight ones from Detroit's Joaquin Benoit.

Adam Everett, the only one that mattered at that moment, stood on third base with a Grady Sizemore on second and Asdrubal on first; Carlos Santana basically just needs to put in play and works the count to 3-1.

Why won't my phone refresh?

Finally, my phone tells me the ball was put into play and, in fact, went over the right field wall for a grand slam and a big 9-5 victory. Watching dots is not the way I want to remember it, but seeing the [YouTube clip of it](#), watching Sizemore raise his arms in the air and begin jumping was the quite the scene.

The video included synced-up audio of Tom Hamilton's call as well, and I wished I could have experienced that live.

Above all of that, I wanted to be fan #15,569 to have seen that live.

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The Indians swept the Tigers that weekend, winning all three game in their final at-bat.

The next time the [Tribe played at home on a Friday, the Mariners were in town](#) . Doug Fister, who was still a marginal starter for Eric Wedge, simply outpitched Carmona for 8 innings before turning it over to Brandon League to close out a 4-2 game.

The Indians offense had other ideas; the inning started with back-to-back doubles from Michael Brantley and Cabrera.

After a couple of groundouts, Travis Hafner came to the plate, representing the tying run.

Of course, he goes deep on the 0-1 pitch from League, there's a mob at the plate, and no better place to be than Cleveland on a Friday night.

Those games inspire you to want to watch this team. You don't always remember every one of them, but it's how they affect you at the time.

That's one of the beautiful things about watching baseball; you can root for a team that hasn't won the whole thing since 1948, but continue to treasure the moments, just the same.

Everyone knows the first walk-off win in Jacobs Field history came on Opening Day in 1994, but I'm sure not as many could tell you who hit the first walk-off home run.

It was Kenny Lofton taking Jay Howell deep in the [bottom of the 12th inning of April 29, 1994](#) , a Friday night.

The one that does the most for me was [one I gave up on, back in 2007](#) . It was a Friday night and they were playing the Tigers in front of a full house.

Detroit got out to an early lead against the Tribe.

The Indians nibbled away, but Detroit kept biting back and putting up runs of their own right away.

The Indians had a big inning to turn a 5-1 deficit into a tie game, but it was completely undone when Detroit put up their own 4-spot the next inning.

Their last gasp in the ninth inning on June 1st, down 11-7, was a successful one.

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Victor Martinez's 3-run home run got it to striking distance at 11-10, before David Dellucci, the big free agent signing brought Trot Nixon home from 3rd for a walk-off win. Five runs on five hits in the bottom of the ninth does the trick just about every time.

That was almost six years ago, and I know 2007 doesn't end with a parade down Euclid Avenue, but if I could handpick a game to go back in time and be in attendance, that one is definitely on the list.

41,365 people might be able to make that claim, but I'll be honest and tell you that I decided to ditch the Indians for whatever trouble I could into on a Friday night when the Tigers stretched the lead from 9-7 to 11-7 in the ninth.

I'd had it with the Indians that night, but then David Dellucci made me a believer.

The fact that these moments have stuck with me have me hoping that I remember Swisher going down the line against Crain in early April and [Stubbs looping that double to the wall to take down the Twins in early May](#). Of course, early May is what we'd consider early in the baseball season, but how nice it would be for these great moments in the present tense to be part of a greater big picture for years and years in the future.

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Right now, I'd just settle for the opportunity to take in a game at Ontario and Carnegie on a warm Friday night.