



“Where’s Grady Sizemore?” “Who’s this guy?” “I don’t know who any of these guys are.” “The Dolans should sell to Gilbert.” These and other brilliant quips are things I have heard too many times at the ballpark this season. Along with blasting umpires, the flavor of the week for the national media has been to chastise Cleveland for its early season attendance figures. Yeah, they’re embarrassing. Yeah, Cleveland’s no longer the baseball town it was 12 years ago – that image we still attach ourselves to as if it’s from the recent past and not a distant memory. You know, when Clevelanders cared about baseball for seven or eight years after not caring in the slightest for, oh, about 30 years.

So, yeah, attendance sucks. But not as much as the people who are going to games yet don’t have a clue at what’s going on. You’re clearly not there for baseball. You’re there to bullshit about everything but baseball. You’re there to use baseball as an excuse to get together, pay a lot of money for beer, and sound like an ignorant dumbass. Hey, I’m glad that your ticket revenue is going to one of the organization’s many costs, but, for Christ sake, please get somewhat informed before you show up. It takes watching ONE game on television to realize that Grady Sizemore is no longer on the team. Frankly, it takes barely paying attention over the last year and a half to figure out what has happened to Sizemore.

Who’s that guy? He’s our second baseman Jason Kipnis. He’s actually been around for a while. Who’s that guy? He’s our center fielder Michael Bourn, one of our prized free agent signings by our cheap ass owner. Who’s that guy? Mark Reynolds? Oh yeah. He’s the guy who strikes out a lot. Stupid signing.

I don’t know what’s worse about Cleveland baseball fans – physical attendance or mental attendance.

“This guy sucks! He has a 9.00 ERA! Why can’t we score points?!” Because he’s pitched one inning this season, has allowed one run, and is actually a very good reliever. And they’re not “points”, they’re runs.

Part of me likes going to games in shitty weather because the true fans are there. The ones who actually have a clue what’s going on. Nobody willingly sits out in a mix of sleet and snow unless they want to be there. Nobody goes with a 70% chance of thunderstorms unless they’re willing to sit there through a rain delay, full knowing that they might be there on a weeknight until midnight waiting for the final out.

I’ve heard all of the attendance arguments. Six of the Indians’ 17 games this season have been on weeknights. That doesn’t explain the terrible attendance pretty much every season since 2011 with the exception of a couple months of 2007. School nights are difficult for most families. Downtown construction is a pain in the ass. Parking and food can get very expensive downtown. People have moved further and further from downtown to get into better school districts and live in nicer areas.

Then, there are the arguments about how we’ve been teased before. How the Dolans don’t spend money. Cleveland fans, by and large, have a glass two-thirds empty approach (yes, it’s not even half full) because of past disappointments in sports. It’s understandable, and ESPN reminds us of every single one of them on a daily basis.

Guess what Tribe fans. Your children will be just fine if they lose an hour of sleep to have a life experience and family time. Would you rather send your youngster to bed at 8:30 after he’s been playing video games for two hours or would you rather carry him or her from the car into bed at 10 after being at the Indians game? Spending quality family time together, telling stories of Jim Thome and Manny Ramirez. Remember the times you went to games as a kid? Why not pass those along?

You have to work in the morning? Are you watching the game at home? Are you staying up until 11:30 anyway to watch the news? Are you busy watching Modern Family and Revenge? There’s something called a DVR. Maybe you’ve heard of it?

Downtown construction does suck. But guess what? There are other ways into downtown than taking I-90 to Ontario or E. 9th. In fact, I could probably name at least at least six of them. Just open up <http://maps.google.com> and look at the area surrounding downtown. I'm sure you'll find a couple of them. And they're very easy to navigate. Of course, you could always take the RTA Rapid which, depending on how many people you have, is probably cheaper than parking. As for food, here's a novel idea. Eat on the way downtown. Of course, with \$3 hot dogs and \$2 soda refills, feeding a family of four isn't nearly as expensive as it used to be. You have a longer commute? Isn't everyone's criticism about baseball that it's too slow? You might miss the first inning. Not a big deal.

Then there's performance stuff. We've been teased before. Sure we have, with guys like Ezequiel Carrera and Orlando Cabrera holding down everyday spots. I'm going to go ahead and say this: This is the most talented team we've had since the 90s. There are no CC Sabathias or the one-year wonder Fausto Carmona on the 2013 Indians, but the lineup is truly the best one we've had since those glory days we all cling to. This isn't the same team as 2011 or 2012. This one is better.

Why is it better? Because the Dolan family spent money. The new television rights deal, the sale of Sportstime Ohio to Fox Sports, and the transition from Larry Dolan to Paul Dolan allowed the Indians to go out of their comfort zone this winter and spend money proactively to improve the ballclub. For once, Cleveland, be fans of your word. You said "We'll come when the Dolans spend." Unless you spent winter under a rock, which you might have because winter sucks around here, the Dolans spent. And they spent in a big way. They spent \$3.5M to make the Bauer/Choo deal work. They paid for Mark Reynolds, Brett Myers, Nick Swisher, and stunned the baseball world getting Michael Bourn. They paid enough money to get Terry Francona to manage here. They looked at their profit margins and decided to lower concessions, including beer. A decrease in beer prices? That's unheard of!

That's not begging. That's not pleading. Those are facts. There are plenty of ways in and out of downtown and plenty of ways to save money on a night out to the ballpark if you're inclined to show any level of effort. There's a lot to be excited about with this team because it has more legitimate Major League talent than it has had in a long time.

There are a lot of misconceptions about baseball. People call it boring. They say you don't have to be athletic to play it. It's too slow. It takes too long. As my colleague and friend Brian McPeck said on the message boards, "Every game is a puzzle. Every pitch is a piece." That's brilliantly profound.

It's a thinking man's game. The hitter is guessing what pitch is coming next. The pitcher is thinking about what pitch to throw next. "He was late on the last fastball. But he might be looking for it. I can't spot my slider. I've hung my last two changeups. Guess I have to throw my fastball." Meanwhile, the catcher puts down the sign for the changeup. The pitcher shakes him off and then second guesses himself. The catcher puts down the sign for a fastball. The pitcher steps off the rubber and motions for the catcher to come out. It's a cat and mouse game.

The "fans" boo because they don't understand. It's a pause in a game that already takes too long. But to people like Brian and myself, along with his daughter and my fiancée, we understand what's going on. We know what's at stake. We know what having crossed signals could mean. One mistake can change the entire complexion of a game. But the four of us, we love baseball, far more than the common person does. So we go. Regardless of record. Regardless of the weather. Regardless of how much the center fielder is making. I wish more people felt that way, but they don't.

Unfortunately, it's the casual fans and the fairweathers that the organization needs to make money on tickets. The crowd of 9,000, half of which are diehards and baseball enthusiasts, won't help pay the bills. And possibly even more unfortunate is that the Indians will have to win deep into the summer before people do start to show up regularly. I hope it will be different this season since there are some bigger names and maybe it won't take as much convincing, but I'm not holding my breath.

To go back to the original point of my ranting and rambling, I don't know what's worse. Not going or going and having no clue what is going on. At least people who aren't going are generally watching on TV. If you have no idea who Jason Kipnis or Michael Bourn are, then it's painfully evident that you haven't paid any attention and you don't deserve to be sitting in that seat you paid for.

Like I've said before, I don't expect anybody to be as much of a diehard as me. I've gone to eight of the 17 home games and have watched every road game except for one that I listened to on the radio coming home from the day I [went to Cy Young's grave](#) (subtle plug for that article in case you missed it). I don't expect people to dive into sabermetrics and I'm thankful to anybody who has read my articles with sabermetric concepts and has either tried to understand them or has even learned more about them as a result.

I have no expectations for attendance. I understand the reality of it. I won't sit and plead for people to show up. If they win, they'll draw 25,000+ no matter what night of the week. If they make the playoffs, I'll get shut out of playoff tickets because of bandwagons who suddenly give a shit. I know that they could have a \$150M payroll and it won't change attendance unless their record dictates it. The allure of Jacobs Field wore off a long time ago for most people. Even though it still looks and feels new, it will turn 20 years old next season, so it can no longer be counted on as a draw, unless a group of guys touring ballparks rolls through.

This is an exciting, talented, lovable group of players. There are so many endearing personalities on this team. As a group, they could not be any farther from what we've seen recently. Cleveland has taken notice, but they've done it from their couch instead of from one of Jacobs Field's 41,000+ seats.

I know, I know. You don't owe the Indians anything. You don't owe the Dolans anything. Nobody can tell you how to spend your hard-earned money.

Well then, I beg of you, please don't get in my way later this season if something special is happening. If you're not going to go now, then don't go at all. I'm telling you that you don't owe the Indians anything. You don't owe the Dolans anything. I'm telling you how not to spend your hard-earned money. I'm agreeing with you. I'm sympathetic to your concerns and understanding of your pessimism. Please, continue.

I'd rather have it that way. And so would the other people who have been going since day one this season and throughout the last decade.