



The Indians entered the All-Star Break 1.5 games behind a team very few people thought they could contend with, let alone beat, in the preseason. With a patchwork pitching staff and some shiny free agent acquisitions in the lineup, the Indians got a decent buzz from the fans leading up to the season. At 51-44 this season, however, the Indians rank 13th out 15 American League teams in attendance.

In 2007, when the Indians had an improbable run to the American League Championship Series, attendance at the All-Star Break was 993,580 over 40 home games. If you'll recall, three games were played at Miller Park after the April Snowpocalypse and the opening four-game series against Seattle was snowed out and played through the season. That's an average of 24,839.5. We'll round up and say 24,840 in the first half of the 2007 season, a season that the Indians opened with about the same expectations as 2013.

The 2013 Indians played 49 home games leading up to the All-Star Break with a total attendance of 920,827. That's an average of 18,792. If we take away the games at Miller Park, the total home attendance for the Indians in 2007 was 2,223,416, for an average of 28,505 per game. The total attendance, games in Milwaukee included, ranked 10th out of the 14 American League teams. This season, the Indians aren't even on pace to crack two million fans, though an exciting second half could put them over that number.

Why?

One of the big reasons, in my humble opinion, is the never-ending cynicism of the Cleveland

sports fan. We've seen this before. In fact, we've seen it each of the last two seasons. The Indians were 44-41 at the All-Star Break last year, just three games out of first place. We know how that ended. The 2011 version was 47-42 and just a half game back after spending the majority of the first half in first place. It wasn't a full collapse in 2011, more of a gradual downturn, as the Indians went 33-40 in the second half and finished second....15 games behind the Tigers.

My question, then, is when will casual Indians fans believe in this team? It's clear that casual fans drive attendance figures. Diehard fans are going to games regardless. The casual fans are the ones that need convincing. Only the Astros, who were picked to lose 100 games, and the White Sox, who are terrible and play in what could almost be described as a war zone on the South Side of Chicago, have drawn less total attendance than the Indians. But, the White Sox have drawn nearly 3,000 more per game than the Indians. The Tampa Bay Rays draw the fewest per game, with 1,000 less than the Indians, and the Astros are 500 fans per game behind the Indians.

What will it take for fans to believe in the Indians enough to show up at the ballpark? According to Sports Media Watch, television ratings for the Indians [are up 10 percent](#) this season. In the first half of the 2012 season, the Indians drew 848,364 over 45 dates, for an average of 18,852, a HIGHER average attendance than this season. More people are watching on TV, which is great, but fewer people are showing up at games. This team has a decidedly different feel than the 2012 team and if you can't see that, then I can't help you.

The crowds have been better as the team passes the litmus test of more and more casual fans on a weekly basis, but the gate figures are still trying to catch up from April's poor attendance. Even still, the Indians averaged 21,531 over 11 home games in June. That's barely 50 percent capacity. During the 10-game homestand leading up to the break, the average attendance was 23,003, including a four-game series against rival Detroit.

In defense of the fans, part of the problem is the Indians' dynamic pricing structure that changes ticket prices on the day of the game. If the upper bleachers are sold out, and they generally are, it costs minimum \$25 just to get into the ballpark for weekend games and somewhere around \$20 on weeknights. For a family of four to spend \$100 simply to get through the gate is a substantial expenditure and I sympathize. In a market where weather can and does change rapidly, people are hesitant to buy advance tickets.

I'll admit, that while I have my secrets about getting tickets on a budget, it has become more of a strain to get tickets with the new pricing structure. I used to be able to get an upper reserved ticket for \$9 and stand on the Home Run Porch. A pair of tickets for my fiancée and I for \$20 is great, considering it's cheaper than most decent movie theaters for a lot more enjoyment. Those days are gone, as the Indians attempt to maximize every dollar they can, considering that if you're already down there, you're going to pay whatever price you have to.

The Indians have lost me a bit there because it's not a fair pricing structure. The company response to any critique will be that the Indians encourage fans to buy tickets early in order to guarantee the best possible seats and save money. While true, that's not always an option for people and there's nothing wrong with people deciding to go to the ballpark on a whim, walk up, and buy tickets. Unfortunately, that's no longer an option for some people.

I'm all for companies making money and I understand how economics work. But the Indians are pricing large groups of fans out of the picture. Isn't a seat filled at \$9 better than an empty seat at \$25? At that point, we're getting into a cost-benefit analysis of filling seats in the ballpark compared to paying employee wages to monitor and clean that section, but if that's really a major concern, then shame on the Indians for trying to save very few bucks at the expense of potential paying customers.

But that's really the question I'm left with regarding attendance. Is it because fans don't believe that this team is for real or is it because of the other factors – cost of attending a game, long commute, etc.? Is it a combination of both?

Unfortunately, I can only answer one of those two queries. Yes, this team is for real. There are a lot of high character individuals on this team, so it's nearly impossible to see them fall off the face of the earth like 2012 or quietly sink into oblivion like 2011. They may not have the most talented pitching staff, certainly not compared to the Tigers, as I showed [yesterday in my look ahead at the second half of the season](#), but there's enough tenacity and talent on this roster to stay in the hunt.

If that's your concern, it shouldn't be. If you're afraid of getting disappointed, well, I'm sorry, but there's only one champion in each sport, so 29 other fan bases will also be disappointed, so you might as well join the club.

Whatever your reason for not going to games, I hope you reconsider over the final 66 games of the season. Buy in advance if the issue is money. Take your chances if you're not a believer. This team deserves to play in better crowds and the front office deserves your support after spending this past winter and tirelessly working to improve the ballclub throughout the season.

I'm not doing this to be a mouthpiece for the organization or guilt trip anybody. The ballpark atmosphere is a lot more fun when there are a lot of people there and these final 66 games should be fun, no matter what happens. Do your part to enhance that.