



*Random musings that still won't help you beat the Tigers...*

**PLAYOFF PRETENDERS:** Following the Tribe's latest indignities at the hands of the Braves and Tigers, the Indians' woes against playoff-caliber teams have come into even sharper focus.

Their record against teams currently in first place now stands at a miserable 10-26. In case that's not enough to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that this year's Indians have absolutely no business in the playoffs, let's provide a little more perspective.

Here's how the other wild-card contenders have fared to date against first-place teams:

Tampa Bay 10-18

NY Yankees 13-16

Baltimore 18-11

Oakland 14-15

St. Louis 12-21

Cincinnati 11-16

Aside from Baltimore, none of these marks are impressive, but all are notably better than the Indians'. And while it's worth noting that the Indians have played more games against first-place teams than any of the others in this category, that does little to strengthen their defense.

And just to add a bit more perspective, here's how the last five Tribe playoff clubs - the "ordinary", non-powerhouse ones, if you will - have fared against fellow first-place teams:

2007 9-11

2001 7-12

1999 7-16

1998 9-16

1997 10-15

Again, while none of this information jumps out at you as remarkable, you can see the clear difference between how a bona fide playoff team should fare against other playoff teams and what the Indians are currently doing.

The Indians' improvement this year has been both enjoyable and commendable. They've improved far more than essentially anyone thought they would. But they've still got a good distance to go before seriously entering a playoff race.

There's still plenty to play for and the remainder of this season will go a long way toward setting the table for 2014.

And of course, there's the wildly outside chance the Indians could surf their cupcake last three weeks of the schedule into a wild-card berth. But considering their epic struggles against playoff-caliber teams - and the fact that you generally will face playoff-caliber teams in the playoffs - it seems to go against both common sense and any sporting sense of justice to really hope for this.

Painful as it is to admit, believing that this year's Indians club deserves a spot in the playoffs is trying to sell wine before its time.

**ON THE OTHER HAND:** Take away the bloodlettings with the Tigers and the Indians are 28-32 against teams currently at or above .500. The Tigers are 29-31.

**TIGER TYRANNY:** The 15 losses to the Tigers this year marks the most defeats the Indians have suffered to a single team in one season since dropping 15 out of 18 to the Washington Senators in 1969. Strangely, that Washington team finished only 86-76, good for fourth in the American League East. The Indians went 62-99 that year.

Their .211 clip against the Tigers this year marks the worst winning percentage against a team they've played at least 10 times in a season since the Indians posted a 1-12 record against Toronto in 1991. That Indians team, you no doubt recall, went 57-105.

**READING THE PRESEASON TEA LEAVES:** First, the good news: over the course of their history, when the Browns post a winning record in the preseason, 85% of the time they go on to post a winning record in the regular season.

The bad news: two of the last three times they've posted a winning preseason record, they've had losing records in the regular season. That includes 2004, when they won three games in the preseason, then just four in the regular season.

**'95 FLASHBACK:** Usually, anytime the modern Indians are compared with the 1995 team, it's a good sign. But last week's sweep in Atlanta - provided mostly by an essentially invisible offense - left us all with a sense of deja vu that couldn't help but remind us of the great October flame-out in '95.

*Last week in Atlanta:*

0 wins, 3 losses

3 total runs scored

.227 (22 for 97) team batting average

9 walks

0 for 18 with runners in scoring position

*1995 World Series in Atlanta:*

0 wins, 3 losses

5 total runs scored

.099 (9 for 91) team batting average

8 walks

0 for 7 with runners in scoring position

**A TOO-QUICK KICK?:** After cutting their only placekicker candidates over the weekend, you can't help but think the Browns might be seriously...ahem...kicking themselves for letting **Phil Dawson** go without more of an effort to keep him.

They're now in the bizarre position of bringing in a new kicker just days before opening day. It's not all that big a deal for a kicker to just show up and take the field, since his skills are so unique and separate from everything else the team is doing.

But doesn't it strike you as unusual that the Browns went through an entire preseason - an entire offseason, really - without making a firm decision on how to go forward with this now-glaring need? Particularly since Dawson was easily the most popular and beloved player the Browns have had for the past 13 years, and there was extra attention being put on who his replacement will be?

Whoever winds up getting the job will likely be entirely adequate, and that's more than we can say for many of the starters on this team. That is, until he misses a kick that Dawson would have made, especially once the Lake Erie wind becomes a factor in, say, Week Three.

Give the Browns credit - few teams can make themselves look silly over how they handle the kicking position. But once again, they've broken new ground and made us proud.

**JINX MAKERS:** *Sports Illustrated* has now taken its jinx abilities to a new level. In case you took a gander at last week's pro football preview issue, you noticed that SI is now no longer satisfied in just targeting one player for a disappointing, likely injury-riddled season, but rather four.

Depending on where you live, **Andrew Luck**, **Robert Griffin III**, **Colin Kaepernick**, or **Russell Wilson** is on the cover, leaving only the question of which one will go down first.

We're particularly touchy about this topic 'round these parts since last week marked the 25th anniversary of **Bernie Kosar** gracing the cover of *Sports Illustrated*'s 1988 preview issue. Five days later, Bernie injured ligaments in his elbow and missed the next seven weeks, paving the

way to a rocky season that resulted in **Marty Schottenheimer's** departure, and, if you follow all the dominoes, the collapse of the franchise from which we're still sifting through the rubble.

**TOUGH MONTH:** After toying with the possibility of finishing August with a winning mark, the Tribe closed it out appropriately and came in with a 12-16 August record. That being said, a year ago, the Indians were 5-24 in August. Progress often comes slowly.

Had they won more games than they lost this August, it would have marked the first time they had winning records in June, July, and August in the same season since 1997.

**BAD OMEN:** Two other times in their history, the Browns have opened a season on September 8. Both times the result was a loss at home on the last play of the game: in 1985 in overtime to the St. Louis Cardinals and the **Dwayne Rudd** game against Kansas City in 2002.

**HARD TO BELIEVE, PART 1:** A notably inferior Indians team went 10-8 against the Tigers a year ago. They were the only American League team against whom the Tribe posted a winning record.

**HARD TO BELIEVE, PART 2:** The Indians won their last game with the Tigers this year and

two of their first three. Incredibly, in between, they lost 14 out of 15 games against Detroit.

**HARD TO BELIEVE, PART 3:** The Indians have defeated the Tigers in four of their last six meetings in which **Justin Verlander** was Detroit's starting pitcher.

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