



By now, you may already have heard. I do hope it was from me, on Twitter. (What a kick it would be, for an old history guy like yours truly to “break” a “story.” Ha, I know. Humor me.)

If you follow the Cleveland Indians, this day is yours. Live it, love it, speak of it proudly. For September 12, 2013 is the fifty-ninth anniversary of the largest crowd ever to witness an Indians game live. At the time, it was a major-league record. On the afternoon of Sunday, 9/12/54, 86,563 fans – several thousand of who purchased standing-room-only tickets – flooded Municipal Stadium to watch a scheduled doubleheader * between the rival New York Yankees and the Tribe.

What a scene that must have been, live. The old barn (as one-time Indians announcer Joe Tait has described it) was much maligned, for several good reasons. But when full, it was electric. The Indians, heading into that day at 102-40, were very good for most of the period in the post-WWII years, from the late 1940s through the '50s. But the Yankees usually were better. However, late in the 1954 season, the Tribe appeared to be distancing themselves from the powerhouse from the Bronx. Leading the way were four of the eventual top six vote-getters for the American League MVP Award: CF Larry Doby would place 2nd; 2B Bobby Avila would flirt with hitting .400 and place third; starting pitchers Bob Lemon and Early Wynn would place fifth and sixth. 3B Al Rosen, hampered earlier in the season with a thumb injury, was the MVP in 1953!

The visual draws a sharp contrast to the sketchy fan attendance of the 2013 Indians. Locally prominent media folks have whined and begged recently... The tack they seem to currently favor has transitioned past disgust, to the conferring of shame. On Twitter, it's become reduced to trolling of the fans by long-time newspaper writers. I am not very fond of that.

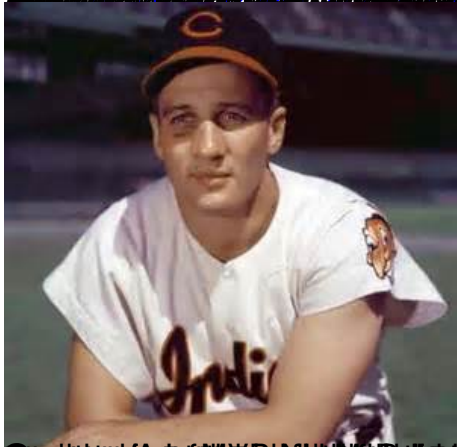
From us fans, excuses and explanations abound over how we got to this point (the Indians board on this site currently hosts a running discussion). Certainly, the dwindling season ticket base is a key. Various viewpoints focus on the loss of such stars as CC Sabathia, Cliff Lee and Victor Martinez (Victor cried with us, for crying out loud!). Some blame the economy. Or the typical lag time between winning and attendance (just like the lag time between the start of a losing trend and dwindling attendance). The utter futility in beating Detroit, the second half collapses we've seen recently... those don't help. People talk about the 1990s teams; I think a couple home run hitters on this team would capture the imagination of the casual fan (and kids). The awful job the Indians front office does in promoting the young players through the winter is regrettable (a guy like Jason Kipnis needs to be the face of the team). And recently, the off-season timing of ticket sales has hampered those who might purchase tickets for Christmas.

Some wonder about the fatigue of all the losing we've seen, among all our professional sports. But that does not jibe with the ongoing support of the Browns...

Fans point to the team's television ratings. They are up over 30% this year, so my contention is collectively, we are engaged. Close to the tipping point of coming out to the ball park en masse. To me, the bottom line is Wild Card or no Wild Card, we just don't believe in the Cleveland Indians as a bona fide World Series contender. Hopefully, the improving farm system will remedy that in the near future.

But this is a day of observance. A day to celebrate our past, and our potential. To express appreciation for watching The Show live.

Let's look at that doubleheader in 1954. And since our fair city loves its Rock n Roll, I thought it would be fun to start a series of Cleveland sports history articles that also handles loosely-related music topics. We'll see how that develops over the next several weeks. Today, we'll give a nod to my favorite live rock albums by also looking at three of those (check them out on YouTube!).





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