

Am I a Bad Fan?

Written by {ga=tommoore}

Thursday, September 19 2013 6:00 PM - Last Updated Wednesday, September 18 2013 8:39 PM



As the calendar has turned from spring to summer to fall, the Cleveland Indians have taken fans on an exciting and amazingly unpredictable journey, one that has the team right in the heart of the playoff race with a little more than a week to play in the regular season.

The Tribe's unexpected success has brought with it a season-long debate over the team's attendance at Progressive Field. Media members and bloggers have taken to lecturing fans about their responsibilities to support the team in person. In recent days, the debate has expanded to include speculation on the long-term viability of having a Major League Baseball team in Cleveland.

As we have followed the up and downs of the Indians this season we have struggled to quiet the little voice in our head that keeps asking a question that we are reluctant to answer:

Am I a bad fan?

Before we go about answering that question, let's review how we have reached this point.

With six home games remaining on the schedule, the Tribe is 28th in the majors in home attendance, barely ahead of just Miami and Tampa Bay. They have had the two smallest September crowds in Progressive Field history this month. The absence of fans has puzzled

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team officials and exasperated diehard Tribe fans.

In addition to fewer fans bringing in fewer dollars for the team to spend next season to try and improve the roster, some are starting to fear that the lack of support will eventually lead to the team actually moving to another city. The latest speculation came in Sunday's *Plain Dealer*, [w here Brett Larkin wrote that](#)

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Talk of – and concern about – the Indians attendance has been largely confined to the sports pages and baseball-related chatter. But that concern has now spread to government buildings, corporate boardrooms and downtown businesses.

“We should be worried,” said one prominent government official. “And if it continues next year, we should be extremely worried.”

And if this is the new normal, then another crisis over the Indians future here is inevitable.

It won't happen soon. The team's lease at Progressive Field doesn't expire for a decade (though 1995 taught us that stadium leases can be worthless). And it will never happen while the Dolans own the team.

But if attendance remains in the tank, eventually it'll happen.

Just as it happened here throughout the 1960s, when Seattle, New Orleans and Tampa all tried – and at times came perilously close – to steal the team. And just as it happened in 1990, when baseball's commissioner came to town and all but guaranteed that if voters rejected the “sin tax” to build Gateway, the Indians eventually would move.

This being Cleveland it is hard to say that a team could never move – after all, if the Browns can leave town then anything is possible.

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But talk the Tribe possibly moving misses a couple of key points. The first is that, unlike the NFL and Los Angeles, Major League Baseball does not have a large market that they can use to scare existing cities with. If the Tribe were to leave, exactly where would they go to find a better situation?

The second point is that, despite all the flaws with payroll discrepancies, steroids and all the other ills that plague MLB, the simple truth is that franchises don't move. The last team to leave its original city was the Nationals, who left Montreal as the Expos in 2005 and took up residence in Washington, D.C. Before that? The Texas Rangers, who left the nation's capital following the 1971 season – more than 40 years ago.

Finally, as this is area that Larkin pointed out as well, the Dolans are not moving the Indians as long as they are the owners. For all the complaining over the years from fans about the Dolans as owners, maybe that is one positive of them being owners.

Which now brings us back to the original question: Am I a bad fan?

To help answer that, we first need to make a confession: we have not attended an Indians game this season. We went to two games last year, our first games since 2008. We have not attended a Cavs game since LeBron James was wearing the Wine and Gold. Our last Browns game came during the Romeo Crennel era.

So ... am I a bad fan?

We haven't attended a game in person for a variety of reasons. Some have to do with opportunity; at this point in our life (and in the lives of the people we would attend games with) there are other priorities that occupy our attention.

The other reason is financial. My wife and I chose to place our daughter in a private school, which brings with it tuition bills. We made that choice willingly, knowing that it would have a

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major impact on our discretionary income.

Finally, the experience of watching the games at home on a large screen high-definition TV is an enjoyable and often practical alternative for someone who has to get up for work at 5:30 a.m.

So ... am I a bad fan?

Before you answer that question, let's look at what else we do when we are not attending games in person.

We watch as much football as possible – and watch every Browns game start to finish. (Don't judge.) We watch as much of every Tribe and Cavs game as we can; basically we only miss them when they are on the West Coast.

We are also not just a content consumer when it comes to Cleveland sports; we are also a content creator. We started our own website, RedRight88.com, and write for The Cleveland Fan because we want to share our opinions on the local sports teams and interact with other fans in a different way. We are also trying, along with a handful of other Cleveland-related sites, to raise the level of discussion and sports IQ above the back alley banality found on a daily basis on Cleveland sports talk radio.

We really want to be able to give that little voice in our head a definitive answer to the question, but we're not sure we can.

Am I a bad fan?

We're not sure, but there is one thing we do know. Maybe it is not about being a good fan or a bad fan.

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Maybe it is enough to just be the best fan you can be.

(Photo by The Plain Dealer)