

## Riding The Waves

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}  
Tuesday, June 26 2007 7:00 PM -

---

Paul Cousineau has been a rock for us this year with his excellent insight on the Indians, and his latest column is more of the same. In it, he talks about the ups and downs of a baseball season. About how the fans were ready to riot after almost getting swept by the Nats, and then were talking World Series last night after The Comeback. Paul reminds us it's a long season. And this is a good baseball team.



After the Nationals' debacle over the weekend, the ledges of Greater Cleveland filled with Tribe fans ready to blow the season up and throw this team under the bus. Now, just as quickly after a 5-run comeback against the A's, all is well?

Stop the train...I want to get off.

Sure, the Indians blew an opportunity to capitalize on a soft part of their schedule; but even with the frustration that pervaded the Nats' series, it's time to take a step back from the ledge. It's a marathon, people, and there's going to be some ups and downs - the first two games of the A's series did a pretty good job of proving that.

Take a breath, break out the yoga mat and remember how this Indians team is built, where it stands as we approach the halfway point and have some faith in the big picture while not getting too wrapped up in small stretches of the marathon of

## Riding The Waves

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}  
Tuesday, June 26 2007 7:00 PM -

---

a 162-game season.

The current Indians are built on strong starting pitching and three excellent position players in Sizemore, Hafner and Martinez. The remainder of the lineup is designed to be filled with a mix of moderately productive veterans (Blake and Michaels) and emerging young talent (Garko, Barfield, and Peralta) while the bullpen is meant to maximize the hot hand until the right progression of relievers is found to solidify the back end of the bullpen, where Borowski and Betancourt have taken care of the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> innings thus far.

Up to this point of the season, even with its ups and downs, the team stands at 45-31. At their current clip, they would close out the season at 96-66. Because of the great start, even if they just play .500 baseball over the last 86 games, they project to finish at 88-74.

All of this with Cliff Lee and Jake Westbrook spending about eight weeks apiece on the DL, Jeremy Sowers and Andy Marte being sent to Buffalo for injury or ineffectiveness, Travis Hafner not hitting a HR for 19 games, and getting zero production from right field.

It could be argued that this team has not even played it's best baseball yet as the rotation finally looks settled (with an adequate 6<sup>th</sup> starter/long man on the pitching staff), the offense will likely fall somewhere between May's production (an MLB-leading 180 runs) and April (14<sup>th</sup>

in MLB in runs scored) and June's (15<sup>th</sup>

in MLB in run scored) production, and that the Indians have yet to have a true relief stud emerge from the bevy of relievers in Buffalo (though

Perez is making a case).

Despite an imperfect beginning to the season, the Tribe is still 3 1/2 games up in the Wild Card and tied up with the suddenly-cooling Tigers in the toughest division in baseball.

Have there been disappointments?

Sure, but let's table the "sports talk radio syndrome" and not just dwell on the negative as it's easy to sit there in the sniper's nest, picking off your poor targets one by one.

Everyone loved to tear Roberto Hernandez (with good reason), but he's gone. Move on.

Trot Nixon is a complete dead weight on the offense, but Frankie Gutierrez has started 6 of the last 9 games and it seems that he's working his way into the rotation.

Can we look at the half-full glass for once in this town?

C.C. has taught us that ace can be spelled with two C's, Fausto Carmona has established himself as a top-of-the-rotation starter, and while Westbrook, Lee, and Byrd have all had varying degrees of inconsistency this year - the rotation looks to be settling in. Does anyone realize that the Indians are 2<sup>nd</sup> in the AL in Quality Starts, behind only the Angels and ahead of that vaunted Red Sox rotation?

Why can't we focus be on the rebirth of Casey Blake, who keeps hitting wherever they put him in the lineup?

Or the return of Jhonny v.2005?

Or how about the fact that Garko, Barfield, and Shoppach have established themselves as legitimate MLB players or that Victor Martinez is a legitimate MVP candidate in the AL?

Or Hafner, not at full speed, having 50 RBI and looking like he's broken out of whatever has hampered him?

It's true that the bullpen hasn't been pretty, but Joe Borowski has 21 saves, to rank 2<sup>nd</sup> in the AL, and has only blown 2. Rafael Betancourt has been one of the most effective set-up guys in MLB, with a 1.36 ERA and 15 Holds, while only allowing one inherited runner (among 19) to score all year. While it's true that the rest of the bullpen has been a work in progress, there's at least some arms to work with in Tom Mastny and Rafael Perez, with the idea that uber-prospect Atom Miller helping out in a Wainwright/Papelbon role is not as far-fetched as once thought. Luckily for the Tribe, bullpen help is actually available from non-contenders without having to give up the farm.

Rather than moaning and pulling your hair out about Paul Byrd's June or Trot Nixon and his .659 OPS in the lineup against RHP (remember that he is the only LH OF on the team not named Grady), or proposing ridiculous trade proposals to "shake things up" - let's all get our fingers off of the panic button, and watch an excellent Indians' team make a push for the playoffs.