

## All Aboard The Bandwagon

Written by {ga=mrburns}

Tuesday, August 28 2007 7:00 PM -

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It seems that all season long, a significant portion of the Indians' fan base has simply been waiting for this team to implode. Nick Allburn admits to being part of this crowd through stretches of the season. But not any longer. Nick is enjoying the heck out of this playoff race, and has his posterior firmly planted on the bandwagon. In his latest column, he talks about this, as well as the Indians being the playoff team no one is going to want to face.



It seems that all season long, a significant portion of the Indians' fan base has simply been waiting for this team to implode. Admittedly, I've been a member of this not so exclusive club for several stretches this year.

Aside from the general doom and gloomers, there are several other factions that, while they have no problem with the Indians as a whole, take issue with specific members of the ball club. There are the "Won't Wedge Just Bunt?" (WWJB) folks, the Blake Bashers, the JoeBo Must Go crowd, the Ponderers of Pronk's Poor Play, and the Society of Supporters for the Silence of Matt "Carrie" Underwood (the SOSFTSOMU, for short).

There is certainly precedent for the Doubting Thomases among us. Under the Shapiro/Wedge regime, the Indians salted away a golden opportunity to qualify for the postseason in 2004, and suffered the epic meltdown of 2005. Not to mention, for the superstitious among us, the well-chronicled Cleveland Curse.

Personally, I've been one of the most loyal members of the anti-Wedge contingent. Today I'm here to tender my resignation.

In spite of how poorly the offense has performed since the All-Star break, the curtain is dropping on the month of August and the Tribe have somehow found themselves in sole possession of first place in the Central Division. It's time for everyone to put the petty differences aside, get completely behind this team, and, for better or worse, drink the Kool-Aid.

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We don't find ourselves in this situation all that often. The Browns have made the playoffs just once in the last 12 years, and have lost two games for every game they have won since their resurrection. Although the Cavaliers have recently returned to the upper echelon of the NBA, their recent rise followed a seven year playoff drought; lengthy by NBA standards.

Given the vast inequity of professional baseball's economic playing field, there are no guarantees that a small market club like the Indians will compete again in the near future. The very nature of baseball's playoff system stacks the deck against the Tribe even more; it is far more difficult to make the postseason in baseball than in any other professional sport simply due to the scarcity of available playoff spots (four per league, compared to six per league in the NFL, and eight per league in the NBA and the NHL).

That knowledge makes the Tribe's bid for the Central Division crown all the more impressive.

These aren't the 90's Indians. You won't find 30-homer studs up and down the lineup. Bell, Ramirez, and Thome, these guys are not. But the pennant-winning teams of '95 and '97 failed, and their weakness, starting pitching, is the unquestioned strength of the 2007 Indians.

Playoff baseball is all about pitching, particularly starting pitching. The bullpen is important, but if the starters can't keep a team in the game, the late-inning arms become irrelevant. A lack of premier starting pitching is why the Tribe juggernauts of the 90's could never quite break through, and it is that same lack of starting pitching which has prevented the hard-hitting Yankees from winning a title since 2000. Simply trying to outslug the opposition succeeds infrequently in October.

Postseason success is largely dictated by starting pitching, and in the playoffs, you basically only need three starters. At this point in time, I'll put C.C. Sabathia, Fausto Carmona, and Jake Westbrook up against any other starting trio in the league. If the Tribe gets into the playoffs, it's tough not to like their chances.

It's time to get behind this team. It's time for standing room only tickets at the Jake. It's time for playoff baseball with snow in the air. It is time.

I've made my decision, and I'm officially climbing onto the bandwagon. Feel free to join me. From where I'm sitting, it should be one hell of a ride.