

With pretty much everyone returning from an AL contending team that took the Red Sox to a seventh game in the ALCS, there was plenty of reason for hope and optimism that the Indians would finally win a ring this year. However, the start of the 2008 season has been rough for the Indians and for many fans those feelings of optimism have disappeared right along with the Indians hitting. With a little over a month of the season in the books, Regano takes the half full and half empty approach to assess ownership, the front office, the coaching staff and players.



This is our year to make a run at the ring. With pretty much everyone returning from an AL contending team that took the Red Sox to a seventh game in the ALCS, there was plenty of reason for hope and optimism. The start of 2008, though, has been pretty boring. Through a little over a month, here are a few ways to look at how all parties involved and how they helped get us to both last year's result and this year's feeble start:

OWNERSHIP:

Half-Full: The Dolan's have stepped up to the table, affording Mark Shapiro the luxury to lock up players that many felt were out of his price range. Larry and Paul have come through where many thought they would not. The Indians are spending enough to compete in the A.L. Central. Adding a missing piece probably would not be blocked by their veto.

Half-Empty: It is very difficult to have a gripe with the Dolan's at this point. With money available to acquire players and the ability of letting baseball people make baseball decisions, no one should be pessimistic about ownership.

MANAGEMENT:

Half-Full: Your General Manager has won GM of the Year now for two of the last three years. That is pretty remarkable, especially given his restrictions. He made a deal to spark the offense last year by bringing in Kenny Lofton, and had the patience to hold off on making any drastic moves by selling off prospects. The move rejuvenated the Indians without depleting the farm. Maybe he'll do the same if need be this year?

Half-Empty: For the second year after a 90+ win season, Shapiro did next to nothing in the off-season. The miserable platoon we were stuck with to start 2007 was back, and the offense remains in need of either another run producer or table setter. Is Shapiro just too gun-shy to make the major move to get this team over the top? It is a fair question.

ERIC WEDGE:

Half Full: Love him or hate him, Eric Wedge has the respect of his players. Preaching consistency in day-to-day work earned him Manager of the Year, even when many were calling for his job earlier the same season. After finally getting the Tribe to the postseason, Wedge can no longer be looked at as the guy who can develop young players but fails to win. His leadership last year should be considered a positive with the current state of affairs.

Half Empty: This guy loves his veterans. And by veterans, I mean anyone who has been around a while and is on the wrong side of 30. I think it is safe to say Andy Marte will never get a chance to play for the Tribe. Aside from the Pope and the Supreme Court Justices, does anyone have more job security than Casey Blake? You would think that the dismal offense would allow for Marte to get:

1. a few starts at third with Blake (two for forever) getting some time off.
2. a few starts at third, Blake moving to first, and Garko (three for forever)

getting some nights off.

3. play third base against lefties, with Blake moving to left.

And I am not even an Andy Marte fan! Is Wedge too set in his ways to make the adjustments needed to get back on track?

THE PLAYERS:

Half Full: Our starting pitching is flat out loaded. Hell, there are teams that would pine for Paul Byrd in our rotation, and all we do is bitch when it's his turn to throw. And as boring as it is to watch, it is much more important to have good pitching than good hitting. On the offensive side, the positives remain that these guys simply cannot be THIS BAD. Outside of Lofton, this is the same team that breezed through August and September and into the playoffs.

Half Empty: The longer the offensive struggles continue, the more noticeable the Indians lack of team speed and a big bopper become. Travis Hafner's confusion at the plate is into its second full year, and it is much harder for this team to be successful when you cannot count on the big three run homer. If he does not find it again, is it even possible to win? Is Astrubal Cabrera really ready to be a full-time major league second baseman? If not, where do we turn? Josh Barfield? Is HE a full-time major league second baseman?

It is still early enough to be an optimist or a pessimist. Where are you on May 6th?