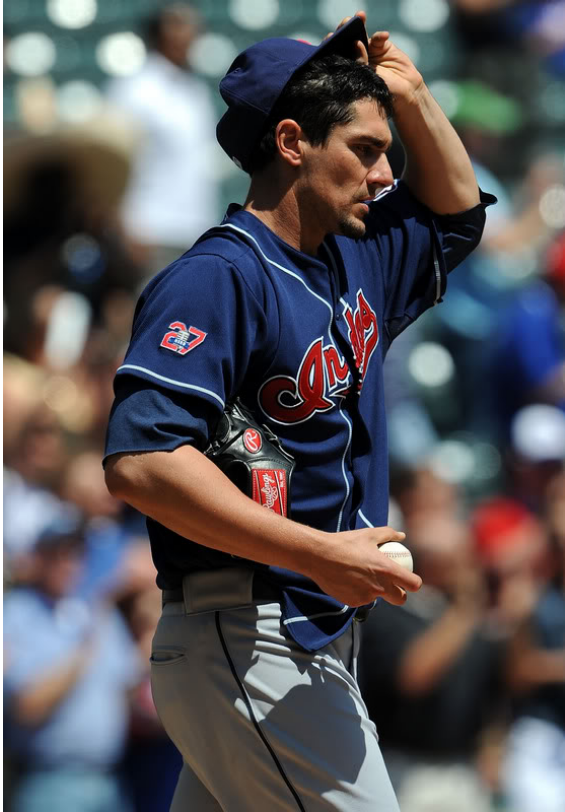


Well that's not how the season was supposed to start, was it? The Tribe was swept out of Texas this week, starting the season 0-3 for the first time since 1996. The pitching staff was brutalized, giving up 29 runs to the potent Rangers offense, and the concerns about the starting rotation are now glaring ones. Enter Paulie Cousineau to make sense of this all, and talk us down off the ledge. He hurls some Tomahawks at our readers in his latest column.



Well, this isn't how this season was supposed to start, is it?

Getting swept at the hands of the Rangers (THE RANGERS?!?) is not the ideal start to the season and while, yes, this is just the first three games of the season...yes, on the road, certainly some things that were a concern prior to the season reared their ugly heads and made us all the more aware of what to look for over the course of the next two weeks to see if some of the problems in the rotation early on are simply aberrations or...well, if this is what we're looking at.

Particularly concerning was the performances from the front two in the Indians' rotation (remember, the ones we supposedly "know" about or at least have some semblance of expectations for) as Lee and Carmona allowed 13 ER in 10 innings while allowing an average of 2 baserunners per inning pitched. Say what you will about one start, first start, and on and on - that...that's not a formula for success at the top end of the rotation.

Past them, you had the man who is vying to be heretofore known as Carl Pav-OH

## U-G-L-Y Tomahawks

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}  
Wednesday, April 08 2009 7:00 PM -

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NO, if 1 inning of work (and I use the term "work" VERY loosely) can teach us anything. Look, I thought Pavano was going to be bad. I didn't think he'd make it to the end of May, but what he did today was an abomination...and I have no use for that, particularly from the pitcher purported to be the #3 starter in the rotation.

As much as I truly hope that Pavano bounces back from this and proves me wrong, it must be said - let the Carl Pavano Death Watch commence....now.

Of course, the bullpen didn't fare much better as it's saying something about your pitching staff when Kobayashi, The Zach Attack, and Joe Smith were the most impressive pitchers in the first series.

Quick show of hands, who had that troika locking down the bullpen?

Sadly, by the time the offense finally found that Arlington jet stream, most of the games were out of hand or became untenable as Ranger hitters launched bomb after bomb into the Texas night. We all knew that the Texas offense was dangerous, but isn't the idea that most teams should be able to stay with them on the scoreboard in these pinball games?

OK, breathe...and...nevertheless, the season is underway and it's time to let those Tomahawks fly:

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While the hand-wringing and gnashing of teeth has started with C.P. Lee's outing in the Opener, let's take a quick step back and see how Lee and the other pitchers that finished in the top 5 in ERA in MLB in 2008 fared in their first outing. While I know that ERA is an imperfect measure of a pitcher's performance, due to things that can happen after a pitcher leaves a game among others, I'll simply use it to illustrate a point as the pitchers that finished in the top 5 were obviously among the best 6 or 8 pitchers from last year.

Here's how each fared in their first 2009 appearance:

**Johan Santana (2.53 ERA in 2008)**

5 2/3 IP, 1 ER, 3 H, 4 BB, 7 K

**Cliff Lee (2.54 ERA in 2008)**

5 IP, 7 ER, 10 H, 1 BB, 5 K

**Tim Lincecum (2.62 ERA in 2008)**

3 IP, 3 ER, 4 H, 3 BB, 5 K

**CC Sabathia (2.70 ERA in 2008)**

4 1/3 IP, 6 ER, 8 H, 5 BB, 0 K

**Roy Halladay (2.78 ERA in 2008)**

7 IP, 5 ER, 6 H, 1 BB, 2 K

Outside of Santana, the other top pitchers of 2008 laid eggs in their respective Opening Day appearances. Lincecum went 3 innings, Halladay gave up 2 HR, and CC...well, more on that in a bit. The point is that very little can truly be gleaned from one regular season start (even under the bright lights of Opening Day) and even if you consider that Lee had a lousy Spring, he was awful in Winter Haven last year, so what can truly be taken from Spring Training numbers and one start?

Is it fair to take into consideration that Lee's career ERA is now 8.56 in Arlington, worst among all parks he's ever pitched in and worst by a long shot (5.91 in Yankee Stadium and 5.79 in Fenway being the next worst road ERA), and took a ball off of his pitching forearm, which may or may not have affected his performance, directly or indirectly?

I'm not trying to make excuses for Lee here (though looking at it, it certainly looks like I am), but can we wait until maybe the end of the month of April before writing off Lee's 2008 as a &quot;fluke&quot; and calling him a middle-of-the-rotation starter?

Doesn't the Cy Young Award the previous year merit some sort of &quot;grace period&quot; before Lee is decried as closer to his 2007 self than his 2008?

Didn't a wise man (or at least someone thought at one time to be a wise man), once tell us that [&quot;all we need is just a little patience...patience&quot;?](#)

OK, stop whistling and doing your Axl dance...

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Much more concerning than the performance of Lee was Fausto's first start as it looked eerily similar to the way that Carmona pitched in 2008, even before the hip injury put him on the shelf. High pitch count (95 in 5 innings), giving up walks (2 in the 5 IP), giving up too many hard hit balls that have no chance of turning into GIDP...it was all there again.

Remember how all off-season, I stressed that even more important than Lee coming back as closer to his 2008 than his 2007 was Fausto coming back like 2007, not 2008 (confused by those years yet)?

After one start by each, we got Cliff Lee v.2007 (the one that spent some time in Buffalo) and Fausto v.2008 (the one that walked more players than he struck out).

Again, it's early and these two have earned a longer look than to simply come to these snap decisions (unlike, say, that other guy that pitched - goes by Pav-OH NO!), but Carmona's performance in 2009 could determine whether the Indians have a steady top of the rotation or a shaky one. So, yeah, he's pretty important and his first outing didn't exactly allay many fears.

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Back to the Hefty Lefty, in case you missed the first overreaction by the NY media to CC's clunker, here's [the NY Post from the day after the game](#), forwarded by reader Carolyn Bushey, who seems to enjoy every misstep (or potential misstep) by the "aCCe"; even more than I do.

The wordsmiths in Gotham had just as much fun as the folks that come up with the pun-filled headlines (I'm sure there's an actual title for that position), as

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George A. King III led off [his recap](#) of the Opener in Camden with:

*Which was worse? The endless tease or the putrid first impressions?*

Good luck with that CC...

Actually, Yankee "fans", I wouldn't worry too much about CC's first start as he's a notoriously slow starter. What I'd be more worried about is that CC is at his worst when he puts pressure on himself or "pushes" himself to get better. Do you think that attempting to justify a \$161M contract might force him to put pressure on himself?

Even more than what presumably happens between CC's ears, what about that left wing and the miles it has logged over the past two year? Over the past two years, CC has led MLB in innings as he was one of only 13 MLB pitchers to log 200 innings or more in both 2007 and 2008. Take a look at the inning totals of those 13 pitchers in the last two years, including their post-season totals:

**CC Sabathia**

513 IP (19 Playoff IP)

**Brandon Webb**

476 (13 Playoff IP)

**Roy Halladay**

471 1/3 IP

**James Shields**

455 IP (25 Playoff IP)

**Johan Santana**

453 1/3 IP

**Dan Haren**

438 2/3 IP

**Mark Buehrle**

426 2/3 IP (7 Playoff IP)

**Gil Meche**

426 1/3 IP

**Andy Pettitte**

425 2/3 IP (6 1/3 Playoff IP)

**Javier Vazquez**

425 IP

**Matt Cain**

417 2/3 IP

**Bronson Arroyo**

410 2/3 IP

**Justin Verlander**

402 2/3 IP

Now, Bob Feller and his feelings on pitch and inning counts be damned, CC has averaged more than 250 IP over the last two years. Throw in the news that [Bran don Webb \(2nd on the list of IP\) is experiencing &quot;arm trouble&quot;; obvious enough for an insurance company to raise &quot;red flags&quot;; that caused the D-Backs to pull an extension offer off of the table](#)

and this CC-NY situation gets very interesting. Certainly, it's possible that Sabathia is that rarest of breeds, able to withstand the wear and tear of logging this many innings, but let's just say that if he's not...umm...those guys that write the headlines?

Yeah, they're going to have a field day.



Want some good news?

How about YOUR Akron Aeros winning their Opener 9-5 as Hector Rondon let up only one run 5 2/3 strong innings while notching 6 K, Carlos Rivero had 2 RBI and

Carlos Santana hit a 3-run HR and compiled 4 RBI.

It's been said before, but if you're in the vicinity of either the Aeros or the Clippers this year, the talent on those two teams is as good as it's been in the Indians' organization since the mid-1990's in terms of potential impact players. Obviously, a lot can happen between Akron and Cleveland (and I don't just mean driving through the likes of Brecksville on I-77), but some of these players in Akron have the potential to be very special, very soon.

I know...I hate looking for silver linings in AA too.

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Realizing that the popular thing to do after a few games is to declare a player "done" or say that two or three games is enough for anyone to take an educated stance on what 2009 holds in store for a player, this Travis Hafner evolution bears watching.

Watching his AB thus far, I'm confused about what he's trying to do with the ball - is he trying to take advantage of the shift by going the other way...or does that mean that his bat speed is down, is he trying too hard to turn on one...or is he only able to do that when the ball's not coming in over 90 MPH?

Obviously, it was nice to deposit one in the RF bleachers (meaning he turned on it, even if it was 84 MPH), but maybe the thing to watch with Hafner (outside of how long he stays in the #4 hole) that may lend a clue as to what people who are paid to know what's happening with Hafner or what to expect from an AB by him would be to see how long this shift to the right side of the infield continues.

If opposing scouts tell their teams that Hafner no longer has the bat speed to catch up to a fastball, the shift no longer becomes necessary for Hafner, who may be going the other way because that's what he CAN do right now. For me, if every team that the Indians play stops employing that shift, it means that our eyes aren't the only ones saying that Hafner's swing isn't what it used to be.

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