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Written by {ga=pup}

Tuesday, June 20 2006 7:00 PM -

The general consensus is that yesterday's roster shakeup essentially means the Tribe is throwing in the towel on the 2006 season. Cris Sykes looks at it differently. The way he sees it, it was addition by subtraction, and the youth infusion to the pitching staff makes this a better team. That may just have another second half for the ages in them.



What a day! Finally, Cleveland Indian General Manager Mark Shapiro stopped hitting the snooze button on the 2006 season. The alarm has been going off every fifth day for the last couple of months, but Shapiro kept on hitting that button and rolling over and going back to sleep. After watching Jason Johnson attempt to bedazzle opposing hitters with his lack of velocity, command or movement, even the most patient GM in baseball had seen enough and Jason Johnson has been designated for assignment. The Indians are expected to call up prized left-hander Jeremy Sowers to start Sunday's series finale against the in-state rival Cincinnati Reds.

Jeremy Sowers brings quite a resume with him. Going into his Tuesday start, he has posted an 8-1 record with a very impressive 1.27 ERA with the Indians AAA team in Buffalo. The Indians selected Sowers with the sixth overall selection in the 2005 Amateur Draft, right after Detroit Tiger rookie Justin Verlander and Anaheim Angel youngster Jered Weaver, out of Vanderbilt. In just over one year of minor league pitching, Sowers has amassed a record of 22-5 in 41 starts, with a sparkling 1.89 ERA. Sowers biggest strength is his ability to locate all of his pitches, change speeds, and throw any pitch in any count.

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The Indians also added some bullpen help to the big league roster by demoting Jeremy Guthrie and calling up Edward Mujica. All that it took for Mujica to do to earn the call-up was appear in 24 games, pitching 38 2/3 innings, and not allowing a single run. With the struggles of the Indians bullpen, it is a wonder what has taken this long to make the move. It was the addition of Fernando Cabrera to the Indians bullpen that seemed to instill new life into it in 2005. Could the addition of Mujica offer the same spark?

I have heard some talk from fans that the Indians are throwing up the flag on the 2006 season and going with the kids to get them some experience. I disagree with this notion completely. I think they are finally seeing the light and have made two very significant moves to improve the 2006 squad. The starting rotation is now significantly better, and the bullpen is stronger as well.

Am I being a naive, rose-colored glasses wearing fan, or could this day be the beginning of another unbelievable second half run? Let's take a look at where the Indians are right now versus where they were last year. In 2005, we didn't fall 15 games back for another month, but still were able to almost make up every single one of those games. If they can start turning things around in June this year, why can't the same run be made? Every year since the wild card became involved in the play-off race, some team has gotten hot around July 1st and came from nowhere to make a race out of the chase.

Last year, we had the pitching staff rolling along right about now, but we couldn't score runs to save a life. This year, we score plenty of runs, but can't seem to get anybody out in a big situation. Well, last year the offense finally caught up and the Indians were the best team in baseball for a couple of months. Why can't the addition of Jeremy Sowers stabilize the rotation and help the pitchers catch up with the hitters? In the bullpen, it appears that Eric Wedge is settling into the idea of having

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Fausto Carmona taking over the Bob Howry role? What is Rafael Perez is the lefty we have all been screaming for since Arthur Rhodes left town? Could Eddie Mujica become Fernando Cabrera? Most importantly, will the experience gained in 2005 allow them to better handle the pressure that comes along with the late season run?

I know 15 games are a lot to make up. In 2005, we couldn't quite make up all 15, but we just started too late. If the moves made by our Indians on June 20, 2006 are the spark plug for another run, we have almost a full month head start on 2005.