

Timing Up A Lazy Sunday

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}
Saturday, October 31 2009 7:00 PM -

With nothing really happening on The Reservation, let's bring in Paulie C to go back to the events of Wednesday night, when CP Lee basically acted like he was pitching against the Royals on a random weekday night in May while all of the North Coast cried into their Dortmunders that were meant to dull the pain. Paul hits on Cliffie, the growing gap in MLB between the "haves" and the "have-nots", and the pitchers the Indians hope can fill in the gaps left by C.C. and Cliffie in the 2010 rotation.



After hitting two kids' Halloween parties in the afternoon, then traipsing around West Park last night with the only 2-year-old in a Santa costume (yes, the DiaperTribe was dead-set on that costume selection since Labor Day), followed by the lamentations associated with the fact that the aforementioned 2-year-old does not grasp the concept of the "extra hour of sleep" that everyone looks forward to when the clock "falls back", let's get loose on a Lazy Sunday before needing that "extra hour of sleep" catches up with a vengeance, probably around 1 PM or so today...nothing else going on then, right?

With nothing really happening on The Reservation (unless you count the not so surprising news that [Torey Lovullo wants to be a MLB coach](#) instead of going back to Columbus, that somebody named [Tim Tolman, or maybe Red Forman, could be on the coaching staff](#), and some [various roster housecleaning issues](#)

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), let's go back to the events of Wednesday night, when CP Lee basically acted like he was pitching against the Royals on a random weekday night in May (I mean, did you see

[this](#)

...he's just toying with them) while all of the North Coast cried into their Dortmunders that were meant to dull the pain.

But the pain was there, assisted by the FOX graphic showing the 2009 post-season records for both Lee and Sabathia accompanied by pictures of each still donning Chief Wahoo, with the title "You Still Have LeBron"; delivering the final knockout punch to an unwitting city that once again was forced to come to grips with their second-class status.

It seemed that everyone had an opinion on the match-up between CC and CP and most of them were painful to read and difficult to ignore, but the ones of note (not surprisingly) that took the "big-picture" view, instead of just taking potshots at Cleveland, came from some natives of the North Coast, well-versed in the pain of being a fan of Cleveland sports. To that end, and on that notion of "second-class status", my fellow South Euclid native Joe Posnanski offers [a tremendous piece on the Game 1 match-up of Lee and Sabathia from the perspective of the disparity in MLB](#) :

This is the hard reality of the World Series. It is not a celebration for everyone. Year after year, it is also a time for fans of losing teams to see their old stars, and remember the promise, and think about what might have been, had ownership been a little wiser and had a little more money to work with.

--snip--

*The Indians never really got to cash in on having developed two of the best left-handed starters in baseball. Baseball is funny that way: **For teams without big payrolls the key is not just developing good players: The timing is also crucial.** In the last eight years or so, the Indians have had young versions of Sabathia, Lee, Victor Martinez, Travis Hafner, Grady Sizemore, Jhonny Peralta, Brandon Phillips, Milton Bradley, Coco Crisp, Fausto Carmona ... all of whom at one point or another looked like future stars.*

Some became stars, some did not, but the Indians have an overall losing record

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over those eight seasons and on Wednesday night Indians fans are left with their noses pressed against the restaurant front window, left standing in the rain while their old heroes Cliff Lee and CC Sabathia try to set the tone for this World Series.

The bolded sentence was done by me and is perhaps the most troubling part of the whole issue at hand. But before getting to that, and allowing the "noses pressed against the restaurant front window" analogy presented by Posnanski to sink in, here's [another terrific piece by Jay Levin at Let's Go Tribe \(posting at Yahoo\)](#) analyzing the situation in great detail and with tremendous insight, casting an eye towards the situation in Cleveland, how it relates to MLB in general...and that issue of "timing";:

As a tandem, that's all Indians fans ever got out of Sabathia and Lee - one nice season in 2005, and 10 dazzling but poorly timed weeks in 2008. As individuals, each guy delivered a Cy Young season, plus a couple other really good seasons. Sabathia never delivered anything in the postseason, however, and Lee never even got there. Should we blame the pitchers for not being at their best when we needed them most? Should we blame the team for not better capitalizing on their stellar seasons when they happened?

While that "timing" thing is still a major factor (and it's [the one that I addressed to a lesser degree in the context of the 2008 season specifically](#)), you can't ignore the disparity between the "haves" and the "have-nots" in MLB, despite the fact that the GM of the Indians didn't take the opportunity of the publicity created by the situation to point out that different teams in MLB are playing on different fields in [a piece from Bill Madden of the Daily News](#)

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"I just can't dwell on what might have been," Shapiro said by phone from Cleveland. "It is what it is. I've known one of those guys (Sabathia) since he was 18 years old, when we signed him, and the other one (Lee) since he was in Double-A ball, and I care deeply about both of them as people. That's what this game is really all about. The people. I just know we weren't going to be able to re-sign CC and I'm better off with LaPorta and Brantley than I would have been with just draft picks for him. It was the same with Cliff. Keeping those guys was never going to be an option and still be able to have a competitive club around them with our resources."

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Of course, Shapiro's not going to say that the Indians developed a plan to build a team around their tremendous starting pitching (on display for other teams on Wednesday night) and that their efforts to attain a World Series championship within their "window" of 2005 to 2009 fell short due to a variety of factors, some self-inflicted, some injury-related, and some created by the economic climate of MLB...but maybe he should have.

Perhaps it would have come off as sour grapes or would have opened himself up for second-guessing his own decisions instead of focusing on the issue at hand. But as reader Aaron Newman astutely asked, "Why is the leader of an alleged small market team not taking the opportunity to directly point out the inequalities of the MLB salary structure on a national basis while he has a temporary national platform. Why aren't Shapiro and Paul Dolan saying to the national media that it is wrong and unfair that the MLB economic structure forced the Indians to part with two Cy Young award winners?"

Regardless of whether we should have, the [conjecture that Clifton Phifer Lee could become the 5th pitcher in MLB history to sign a deal worth more than \\$100M](#) at the age of 31 (assuming the Phillies rip up his 2010 option and give him a new deal this off-season), not long after Carsten Charles signed the richest deal ever given to a pitcher, in terms of overall dollars as well as annual salary, is it any wonder why Indians' fans are lamenting the current situation, wondering why nobody seems to be taking up the cause of the "little guy"?

Two pitchers that made their MLB debut for Cleveland are about to make up 1/3 of the pitchers in MLB history to have ever signed for \$100M and Indians' fans are left to look at [the "layers" of arms now in place beneath the parent club](#) and hope that some of those arms become effective before the impact hitters (which looks to be in place or at least close) creep closer and closer to not being Indians anymore.

And...coming full circle now...THERE'S the timing thing again, as the Indians cannot change the current economic structure or what's been done to date at the corner of Carnegie and Ontario to put them in their current situation. Nor can they change too drastically the hand of cards they currently hold, so they need to somehow make sure that the window of opportunity that may be ahead of them doesn't close prematurely as it did in July of 2008. Not unlike most of MLB, the Indians need to hope that the pitching in place arrives with the hitting or else the

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vicious cycle starts all over again, with the pain and the regrets washing over the North Coast.

After years of waiting for the arrival of a "homegrown" ace, the Indians have developed three (remember Colon?) whose time in Cleveland overlapped for the better part of a decade, only to see them leave Cleveland without bringing a World Series trophy to the North Coast during their stay. Now not unlike most MLB teams, the Indians find themselves hoping that from among a group of arms that look to be slated to fill out the 2010 rotation, many of whom look to be middle-to-back-end-of-the-rotation arms (not that those aren't needed as well), there is one or two of these young players that emerges to become the top-of-the-rotation starter that seems to be lacking.

Masterson, Rondon, Huff, Carrasco, Laffey, Hagadone...

Maybe (actually that's a big MAYBE) one or two of them takes that step to the next level, but if they do...when?

When do any of those young arms legitimately project as front-of-the-rotation starters, after adjusting to MLB and developing the comfort level that [it took Sabathia a solid six seasons to figure out to legitimately be called an "aCCe"](#);

? It took Cliff Lee

[five years and one demotion to the minors to hit this current stride](#)

, so how long can this team wait for its youngsters to do the same, in light of the current economic conditions and the fact that the clock is already ticking on players like Sizemore and Choo (who Rob Neyer asserts is

[not much less valuable than Ryan Howard](#)

), who are inching closer to Free Agency or the trades from Cleveland that precede it?

If we're talking in terms of "hope" that some of these arms do pan out, it's irresponsible not to couple that with the "fear" that they won't and that the window that the Indians seem to be looking at, with solid offense and defense and (gulp) maybe even a bullpen with power arms, is going to be undermined by the growing pains of a young starting staff. Obviously, the Indians realize this fact as Shapiro states in the Daily News piece linked above that "for us next year, starting pitching will tell the tale." And while you could probably replace "next year" with "the next few

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years", the development of the internal arms and the reaction of the Front Office to that development is going to determine the immediate future of the Indians.

Don't take this to mean that the Indians should go out and sign John Lackey or look for another Carl Pavano for next year to "take that shot" in 2010 as the maturation of these pitchers and answering questions about the in-house options is probably the most important aspect of 2010 in terms of a sustained run of contention past 2010. Allowing a new coaching staff and a couple "fresh sets of eyes" sufficient time to deal with the pieces already in place and make judgments and adjustments likely preclude anything major from being done immediately, but the understatement of the year that "starting pitching will tell the tale" gets to the reality of the situation the Indians face and will continue to face.

That situation is the current economic climate that the Indians (and most of MLB teams) need to attempt to formulate that "perfect storm" once again necessary for small market teams to contend. Their pitching needs to mature and excel as their position players are still mid-stride in their development to keep the principals (all while avoiding injuries) in place for a period of time where contention (not only in the Central, but all of MLB) allows them to make that run (or runs) until it all gets torn down again and the building blocks go in place again. If the maturation of the pitchers ends up on a different arrival time than the peak of the position players, it's likely that we'll be looking at the offensive players leaving as the pitchers finally are ready to compete in MLB, just like we just saw the pitchers leave as the position players are ready to emerge.

While we wait for answers as to whether the pitching in place can arrive and succeed while the Indians' offensive talent remains in Cleveland won't be known for a good amount of time. Until those answers arrive however, all Indians' fans can do is watch their two former aces duel it under the bright lights of the World Series, complain about the variety of factors that led to that Fall Classic match-up and hope that brighter days are coming, while attempting to push the fear that brighter days aren't coming out of their minds.