

Tomahawks A.S. (After Strasburg)

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}

Wednesday, June 16 2010 9:00 AM - Last Updated Wednesday, June 16 2010 9:06 AM



Is there a way for us to adjust our calendar to re-classify everything that happened before Sunday as “Before Strasburg” and everything hereafter as “After Strasburg” because the way that the media, both local and national, handled Sunday's game, you would have thought that Strasburg was going to wear flowing white robes and sandals to the mound instead of a uniform and cleats. None of this is Strasburg's fault obviously, and I appreciate an exciting prospect story probably more than anyone, but the 24/7 media (particularly one that calls Bristol home) has a way of overexposing these kind of events to the point that it becomes difficult to be excited because you're being TOLD to be excited instead of just letting your own emotions take hold.

That said, I had butterflies driving on the Inner Belt on Sunday afternoon heading down to the game and couldn't wait to see Cy Strasburg myself. Before getting into this Strasburg thing however, let's get some Tomahawks in the air to see if we can get them to land on that spot on the mound that the Indians' ground crew should somehow name after Steve Strasburg.

Get 'em in the air...

As the local media takes their swipes at the Indians for only being able to draw people to the ballpark to see an opposing pitcher, perhaps something has been missed in terms of placing the proper context of the 2010 season against recent seasons. Much has swirled around that this is rock-bottom and that THIS is the worst Indians' team people have seen in X amount of years and that the talent on this team simply isn't there as it has been in years past.

Check this...

Cleveland Indians After 62 Games

2010: 25-37 (10.5 games back)

2009: 27-35 (7.0 games back)

2008: 28-34 (7.5 games back)

No, seriously.

As much hand-wringing and gnashing of teeth that's been happening, the current Indians are 2

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games worse at this point than the 2009 team and 3 games worse than the 2008 team. Lest you forget, both of those teams had reigning Cy Young Award winners and each season started with the expectation that the Indians would compete for, if not win, the AL Central title and more.

The 2008 team was 62 games removed from the 2007 ALCS, with CC and Lee in their rotation and was 28-34 at this point. That 2009 team that had added Kerry Wood and Mark DeRosa in the off-season to make one last push at it was 27-35 at this point.

This team, with few expectations and disappointment everywhere on the roster is 25-37.

That's not brought up to point out how the current team is overachieving (they're not) or to assert that there's more much more talent on the 2010 club than they're getting credit for (there's some, but it's still a roster in flux); rather, it's meant to point out how absolutely soul-crushing the starts for last two years have been for this team and how those two records shown above from 2008 and 2009 are the VERY reason that this team is where it is today.

Is it at rock-bottom?

It depends on your definition, but more importantly, your feelings on 2010 reveal how you contextualize disappointment in a team. Perhaps 2010 is the low point or brings to a head the failures of the last two years with the team on the field being the constant reminder. However, in the context of what was expected in 2008 and 2009 against what transpired on the field, 2010 ranks pretty far down in the category of disappointment. This season has arrived as a result of the previous two years and the performances of the players acquired over the past two years (plus those already in the system, both in the Majors and the Minors) will determine how quickly (or slowly) this team makes it back to some level of contention. Regardless of that timeframe, to characterize 2010 as the ultimate disappointment and as the worst year in recent memory does not put the horrifying disappointments (and the dominoes that fell as a result of those disappointments) into proper perspective.

Has watching the 2010 team been difficult to watch?

At times...absolutely, but certainly no more difficult than watching teams that were built to win RIGHT NOW lose game after game (for a myriad of reasons) and sink lower in the standings, as the Indians did in 2008 and 2009. When things went wrong to start the last two years, the idea that the team would turn it around because of the talent on hand lent some level of optimism for near-term success and while that optimism may be further out in the distance, I would say that the Indians acted decisively to make major changes to their roster (whether you agree with them or not) instead of simply trying to squeeze one last bit of success (however unlikely it seemed) out of a team that hadn't won consistently in two years. Whether anything positive comes out of that decisiveness remains to be seen, but to say that 2010 is as bad as it gets comes only if you're blocking out what happened over the past two Aprils, Mays, and Junes.

At the end of the day, it becomes about expectations versus results – 2008 and 2009 were wildly more disappointing (and should have been more difficult to watch) because MLB-proven talent and mature players were losing at the same clip that the young talent on hand in 2010 is putting forth – and whether that makes you feel better or worse about 2010 depends upon how you contextualize your disappointment in the team.

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Back to the hot topic of the weekend, despite spending Sunday roasting in the hot Cleveland sun (which are not three words you see strung together too often) and me forgetting that a day in the bleachers at the corner of Carnegie and Ontario regularly turns my skin red, the pain on the tops of my knees and top of my head (where a proud community of hair once resided) is a small price to pay to watch Steve Strasburg in Cleveland in the Tribe Social Deck.

My brother and I arrived down there about 12:30 (for the 1:00 game) and proceeded to Will Call, where our tix were waiting for us...with tickets for what must have been about 2,000 other people. After a Colt McCoy sighting (by the way, he's my size, plus about 25 lbs...and I'm 5'10", \$1.50 soaking wet), the marvelous Rob Campbell of the Indians located our tix for us and we made our way into the Social Deck area in the bleachers.

Upon arrival, we grabbed some Summer Shandys (Shandies?) and staked out a spot with my friend Craig Calcaterra of [Circling the Bases](#) , Joel Hammond of [Crain's Cleveland](#) , and Ed Carroll of

[Deep Left Field](#)

. Craig has already posted

[a terrific blow-by-blow of the game](#)

(to which I would like to say..."this") as he details the excitement over "Strasmas", including the guy behind us who was heckling Josh Willingham, Adam Dunn accidentally lowering the boom on The Axe Man, and Strasburg's issues with the mound.

Going to the game, I wondered how the home crowd would treat Strasburg if he started mowing down hitters at a Kerry Woodsian clip, not quite sure if Indians' "fans" would be cheering him on to strike out Indians' hitters or if there would be that feeling of dread/excitement that was prevalent in the Galarraga Non-Perfect game. The question was never answered as the Indians worked up his pitch count with Hafner and Santana putting up solid AB against Jesus Strasburg and the rest of the lineup looking like...well, like the Pirates did in Strasburg's debut. By the time the grounds crew came out the second time (this time not carrying the giant watering can that they had used the first time), the crowd had turned on Strasburg for delaying the game and acting, some perceived, as a prima donna, particularly because the second visit from the grounds crew came after consecutive walks.

By the time that Strasburg had left, Trevor Crowe essentially put any thought of the Indians keeping it close out of the question by taking the worst route to a ball that I've ever seen by a MLB player (and we had the perfect view, so that is not hyperbole) in person as his unsurprising defensive deficiencies led to the opening of the dam, with Tony Sipp making sure the spigot remained on for the Nats until the end of the game.

All told, Strasburg was impressive with his lighting up of the radar gun and his "drop off the table" curveball, but the most enjoyable part of the day (which was purported to have the potential to be "history in the making") was watching baseball with friends who like baseball on a warm summer afternoon on the North Coast.

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Steve Strasburg or no Steve Strasburg, I'll take that any time I can...

Speaking of warm summer days, while I'm not sure that anyone even cares about this, the race to be named "Beer for the Summer" has been whittled down to three. After having dinner last weekend at Fat Head's in North Olmsted and enjoying some fine pilsners, I decided that a pilsner would be a suitable choice for the summer months.

One of the pilsners that I enjoyed at Fat Head's (Sunshine Pils by Troeg's) immediately vaulted to the top of the list, but I enjoyed a couple of Lagunitas Pils' throughout the course of the weekend and located some Victory Prima Pils on a trip to Heinen's on Sunday, so the race is on between those three for the vaunted (?) spot in one man's quest for the ultimate summer beer, circa 2010.

Having located a local source for each, let the games begin...

Moving on to more relevant matters, with the recent promotion of OF Jordan Henry to Akron, that means that three of the 2009 draft picks have already made it to AA, almost exactly a year after each was drafted. Henry joins Jason Kipnis (2nd Round), who has played 2 games in Akron and Alex White (1st Round) who has started 4 games for the Aeros already. Henry (7th Round) figures to make his debut soon and will likely join Kipnis (now a 2B) up the middle of the diamond to back Alex White (1.47 ERA, 0.88 WHIP, 19 K, 13 BB in 30 2/3 IP over his first 4 starts in Akron) for the rest of the summer at Canal Park.

Obviously, these guys were all college players and Kipnis (23), Henry (22), and White (21) are still just getting their feet wet in AA, but it continues the trend of the Indians pushing their prospects up the organizational ladder much more quickly than they had in the past.

It would seem that the Indians are loading up, as much as possible, their top two farm teams to line these players up (while competing at a "high" level of competition) for Cleveland. While some people don't want to hear about prospects and "what could be", with the influx of talent that has come from outside of the organization because of trades, it is positive to see players drafted by the Indians as recently as last year move so quickly through the organization to ascend to the upper levels.

Speaking of prospects (and it seems like I have a lot recently), since the Cliff Lee trade talks are going to dominate the national coverage for a while, let's revisit the CP-to-Philly move one more time as SI.com's [Jon Heymann puts a bow on it](#) when he talks about how Clifton Phifer is going to be traded at some point in the next 6 weeks:

Lee's value is pretty well set, having been traded twice in the past 12 months. In July 2009, the Indians dealt him to the Phillies for four solid-to-good good prospects and last December the Phils sent him to Seattle for three prospects of similar ilk. The value of top-flight prospects is so high now that last year the Red Sox turned down a straight-up offer of Lee-for Clay Buchholz, even before Buchholz raised his worth by being Boston's most consistent starter early this

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season.

This is not to make another assertion that it's too early to judge the Lee deal for the Indians, but rather to rebuff the idea that the Indians are merely given free reign over the selection of prospects, even if it does involve 1 ½ years of the reigning Cy Young Award winner. According to Heymann (and it was reported other places at the time), “turned down a straight-up offer of Lee-for Clay Buchholz” and the Indians likely entertained various packages before deciding to accept the offer on the table for Lee and shipping CP to Philly.

That being said, now that we're “After Strasburg” and before the real Trading Season starts, the Indians look to finish out their homestand on a high note as they attempt to slow the suddenly resurgent Mets down while showcasing one Jake Westbrook to the Mets' brass on Thursday night.