

The Hornless Rhino has cut Eric Wedge more slack than most dating back to the team's epic collapse to end the 2005 season. But even the Rhino is starting to waver on Wedge now. After preaching the importance of fundamentals to anyone that would listen this spring, the Tribe has been even worse than last year in executing the basics of the game. And that, says The Rhino, may be grounds for termination.



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I've always kind of liked Eric Wedge, but I'm starting to waver. With yet another one run loss [Sunday](#), the Indians are on a pace to go 69-93 -- the exact opposite of last year's 93-69 mark. Injuries and crappy pitching are to a large extent beyond a manager's control. Fundamentals and defense are in part a function of effort, and that's something over which a manager can exert some influence.

It's unfair to tag Eric Wedge for everything that's gone wrong with the Indians this year, but it's fair to point out that the areas most under a manager's control are also some of the areas where the Indians' performance has been most disappointing. I think that's the point that Terry Pluto was getting at in [his column](#) on Friday, although he beat around the bush an awful lot.

To me, nothing makes that point quite like the Tribe's continuing problem in one run games. It isn't just a 2006 problem; the Indians won 93 games last year despite losing more one run games (36) than any AL team since 1968. But as of this year, they've played fewer one run games, but they've done even worse as a percentage, winning only 9 of 28 games they've played.

The Indians' record in one run games is [the worst in Major League Baseball](#). Why am I bothering to single this out with all of the team's other woes? Well, because this was one of the club's major points of emphasis this Spring. Check this out:

Now the club must take the next step, simple as that sounds. And the Indians know that step really has to be made in nail-biter ballgames, where they were dismal last season.

It's about one-run games.

The Indians played a lot of them last season (58, to be exact), and they lost a lot of them, too (36, to be exact). The loss total was the most in the Majors and the most by an AL team since 1968.

To ensure such heartbreak is not endured in '06, the club has put extra emphasis on the game's fundamentals this spring. Bunting, situational hitting and controlling the running game have been as much a part of the players' spring routine as golfing, fishing, and baking in the Florida sun.

That's from a story that appeared on the Indians' own website last March. (Read the whole thing [here](#)). Just to bring you up to date, so far in 2006 the Tribe has made 80 errors, second most in the AL, and also ranks next to last in the AL in fielding percentage. As for the supposed emphasis on "bunting, situational hitting and controlling the running game," they were joking, right? Let's see, they also rank second to last in the AL in throwing out baserunners attempting to steal, and recently ended an impressive [0](#) [-19 streak](#) with runners in scoring position (but still managed to strand five runners the night they did it).

This club has failed miserably-- and in just about every way imaginable -- at what supposedly was a top priority going into the season. Eric Wedge watched all this unfold, and while he never dodged a question about it or tried to shirk responsibility for it, he also doesn't seem to have done much to try to stop it.

Shapiro appears to want to fall on his sword for everybody this season, but I think Wedge bears a big share of the responsibility for the team's failures on this front. Should they fire him? Not this year, but I'd give him a very short leash next season if all he does when Jhonny Peralta boots a ground ball is blink out an SOS signal.