



The gray skies have not abandoned us yet here in Northeast Ohio, but the start of Spring Training games seem to have a certain affect on the sports fans who inhabit this area. Even though there are a large group of people who dismiss Spring Training matchups as being irrelevant, especially in the annual case of the Indians because the only position battles are the fifth starter and the bench players, there is something comforting about live baseball being played.

This week's big story has to be the trade of Aaron Laffey, no? I mean we got Matt Lawton for him. Oh, we got Matt Lawson? Ah, well, it's no longer that big of a story, is it? I guess it is for Aaron Laffey, his wife and his very young son, but not necessarily for the readers of TheClevelandFan.com.

Maybe this week's big headline should be that Grady Sizemore is not expected to be ready for Opening Day. What's that? You said that he hasn't really been ready for Opening Day in any of the last two seasons? Guess you are right about that. So, we will save that story for later as well.

I got it! Travis Buck is hitting .545 over 11 at-bats, which is excellent news for a team lacking left handed outfield bats. Michael Brantley, Grady Sizemore, and Shin-Soo Choo are left handed? Basically, we do not need another left handed outfield bat? Damnit. What am I supposed to talk about then?

Pitching. Pitching should be the overriding theme of everything going on in Spring Training this year. The backup catcher death match between Paul Phillips, Lou Marson, and Juan Apodaca may be stealing headlines somewhere, but not in my column. The 2011 Cleveland Indians, like pretty much every team in Major League Baseball, will go as far as their pitching will take them.

Starting rotation locks Fausto Carmona, Mitch Talbot, Justin Masterson, and Carlos Carrasco combined to go eleven innings this past week, allowing five earned runs (two each from Masterson and Talbot) with seven walks and six strikeouts. An awful spring debut for Justin Masterson skews these numbers considerably. All things considered, Carmona and Carrasco looked great while Talbot and Masterson struggled. (On a side note, good luck to the Carrasco family awaiting the birth of their first child. On a similar note, congrats to Rafael Perez and family for the birth of their new baby.)

Fifth starter candidates David Huff, Josh Tomlin, and Jeanmar Gomez have combined for nine innings of one-run ball, with seven strikeouts and zero walks. One would imagine that if David Huff pitches reasonably well, he should have the advantage of Tomlin and Gomez on account of the fact that David Huff throws left handed. The Indians currently have an all right-handed rotation. I know plenty of people with an all right-handed rotation and I would think this has to get boring after while. Sometimes you need to change it up. The Indians would be wise to have a left hander somewhere in the rotation.

The Indians pitching staff has allowed 20 earned runs over the first week of Spring Training games. Fourteen of the 20 runs have been scored off guys who will not be with the team on April 1 (one of them is off Tomlin, so that remains to be seen).

I find it difficult to put a lot of stock in Spring Training stats, both from the pitchers and the hitters. The ball travels far better in the March desert air than it will in Cleveland until at least June or July. Lazy fly balls are injected with #tigerblood while in flight and their trajectory is altered enough that they land over the fence. Phantom doubles occur when the burning ball of fire in the clear Arizona sky temporarily Stevie Wonders an outfielder and they are left hoping to avoid a concussion as the ball plummets back toward the ground.

Stats can tell you a lot of things. Some of them are misleading, some of them are surprising, and some of them legitimately embody what a player is doing. Take all of the Spring Training ones with a grain of salt. Certainly, losing a ball in the sun/lights can happen in any MLB Regular Season game as well, but they are far less commonplace. Wind-aided home runs do occur, but again, not as frequently.

That brings me to the guys swinging the wooden clubs. Does it bother me that Michael Brantley is 1-for-10 over four games with a measly single? Of course it does. Am I far from encouraged that Travis Hafner, Shin-Soo Choo and Matt LaPorta, the only real home run threats on the roster, are a combined 4-for-31 with six whiffs? You betcha. But, again, taking things with a grain of salt, the pitchers arrive at least a week before most of the hitters. They are further along. By mid-March, the hitters begin catching up and you see those batting averages creep up and the pitcher ERAs regress back to their expected values.

The Cabreras are 6-for-13 so far on the young spring. Jason Donald is 3-for-8. Taking Matt LaPorta out of the equation, it would be nice to get some solid get-on-base production from the other three infield positions. After all, these are the guys who are expected to set the table and advance runners. None of them will be called upon to drive in runs.

Perhaps the most encouraging sign of spring, thus far, has been Carlos Santana performing baseball activities with little or no problems. Well, one problem is that he has yet to learn that sliding head first in to home plate is a terrible decision. Other than that, Santana has run well and swung the bat well, notching two knocks in seven trips. Nobody has attempted a stolen base off Santana to this point.

This week's transactions: The Indians have made a couple moves this week, including announcing the signing of Chad Durbin to a major league contract worth \$800,000. As a result of needing a 40-man roster spot, the Indians made the aforementioned trade of Aaron Laffey, reuniting him with Eric Wedge and "What Chu' Talkin' 'Bout" Carl Willis.

Durbin fills a bunch of needs for the Indians. First, he adds a veteran presence to a very young roster. The Indians, with their expected roster, will be one of, if not

