

Starting Off on A Lazy Sunday

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}

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The season is afoot and while the Indians have started the season at 0-2, two games are just that in the course of 162 – two games. What we've seen from the Indians is largely what was expected when the team left Goodyear – inconsistent starting pitching, promise in spots of the bullpen, and a top-to-middle-of-the-order that should hit and score runs – but again two games is just two games.

Generalized opinions will be made and premature conclusions will be reached after a couple of games (though you won't see them here), but there is a good deal of baseball to come in the 2011 season and while Carmona and Carrasco may have left...well, left a little to be desired in their first starts, it's important to remember that the baseball season is a marathon, not a sprint.

In fact, that marathon metaphor applies very well to Opening Day as the beginning of an Olympic marathon generally starts in a large stadium as throngs of people cheer the runners on as they make their way around the track and out of the stadium to get out onto the actual course. Once the runners get on that road course, interest wanes and TV coverage pulls away from live coverage, offering only look-ins to the race at various points of time as the race continues. People go in and out of following it until the end, when they rush back to see the finish, largely disinterested to see how the result came to be over the course of 26.2 miles, but ready to make large assumptions based on the results.

Think about Opening Day or the first few games of the season now in that context as it represents just a snippet of a season and as we all sit behind the guys on Opening Day that proclaim "we suck" after the White Sox 2nd hitter in the 1st inning and as the assertion that a 43-year-old Omar Vizquel is better than any of the current Indians float around the seats, the realization comes that most Clevelanders who follow the Indians are like those folks watching

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the marathon, enjoying the spectacle of the beginning of the race, but who will check the leaderboard intermittently over the course of the next few hours, until the leaders re-emerge into the stadium, preparing to cross the finish line.

With that notion reinforced by the lowest crowd in Progressive Field history on Saturday (announced as 9,853...which is paid attendance, meaning it was less than that) and probably outdrawn by the Gladiators across the plaza (announced attendance of 8,305...which is probably more accurate than the Tribe figure), there's little doubt as to how far the Indians have fallen on the Cleveland sports ladder.

Regardless, in terms of results on the field, the difficulty of finding context in the first few days/weeks of any season is that so much emphasis is placed on 1 of 162 games (or the equivalent of 6 minutes in an NFL game in the context of a 16 game season) and, just to further the marathon analogy – the MLB season begins when those runners get out of the stadium and the real race begins. To that end, Joe Posnanski has a great piece that gets to [the difference between Opening Day and what he calls "Day 2"](#)

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Opening Day is about being young. And Day 2 is about getting old. Stadiums in many places are now half-filled ... no child gets to skip school to catch the SECOND game of the season. The lifers remain. Scorecards are creased and smeared and abandoned by the fourth inning. The drumbeat sounds. The long march of the season begins. The three-hit first day, in the slow and sure way of inevitability, morphs into that .263 batting that was preordained by the martial law of 600 plate appearances.

Of course, the "half-filled" stadium in Cleveland was actually "quarter-filled" and there are serious questions as to how the Indians are going to draw this year or even in the coming years as the accepted narrative on the Indians is that they'll trade away players as soon as they get good, as ignorant and selective as that opinion may be. This is hardly a new topic if you've been floating around these parts, but Cleveland Frowns had an interesting line in [their "Season Preview"](#) by asserting that, "When the front office tells us that we can only hope to compete every few years, it makes perfect sense, and it's about as honest as any big league front office ever is about anything, which is hard not to appreciate."

While that may make sense to a small percentage of fans, that's not the universally accepted opinion on the Indians, their Front Office, or their owner, and the only real way for the Indians to change what has become the accepted narrative is for the team to go out and win in 2011, or to at least show the signs that winning is possible in the future with this group of players. Prior to Opening Day, Bud Shaw wrote [a piece about how the town is there for the taking for the Tribe](#), something

[Anthony Castrovince wrote back in January](#)

(more eloquently, I might add), but the fact is that the Indians do have the opportunity to capture the hearts of Cleveland with the NFL labor issues at our doorstep and with the Cavaliers legitimately a couple of years away from not being a perennial league doormat.

Perhaps it could be argued that the Indians are in the midst of being a "league doormat", but

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that has to be what changes in 2011, as reasons for hope need to emerge from this Indians team over the course of the next 6 months. As much as there is an overreaction to the first few games and the “drumbeat sounds” as we wonder why “Opening Day Jack” Hannahan (hat tip to serial poster RM Jennings) couldn’t be more than just a placeholder at 3B on the strength of two games, that “long march of the season” that Posnanski writes about is just beginning.



There are ebbs and there are flows that are coming and as much fun as it is to see positive signs in Hafner hitting a HR and in Frank Herrmann and Vinnie Pestano missing bats out of the bullpen, who knows what the season is going to bring us. That doesn’t mean that a Hafner HR or a couple of these young arms potentially emerging in the bullpen aren’t reasons for optimism. Nor are those the only encouraging things that the Indians are going to put forth this season as Carlos Santana looks as if he certainly belongs in the middle of any lineup in MLB, stroking the ball all over the field in the early going.

Perhaps the Indians are “merely” a 4th place team, but the Indians are not without players that don’t elicit some serious excitement or for whom it doesn’t take too much imagination to picture them as building blocks for a franchise in need of them. The excitement may not be consistent (ahem...Carrasco’s first 2 innings yesterday), but the players on this team – while they may be generally unknown in Cleveland and perhaps underrated around MLB – have the potential to congeal into something that does excite.

That may be hard to see as the White Sox prance around the bases all weekend, but a top-to-middle-of-the-order with Cabrera, Santana and Choo with perhaps an effective Hafner around does have the potential to score quite a few runs. In fact, in his recent rankings of the top 32 players, [Joe Posnanski placed The BLC at #25](#) on the list, admittedly underrating him in

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the process:

Choo is a marvelous player. He hits .300 (exactly in each of the last two seasons), he walks a lot, he has power — 20-25 home runs and 40-or-so doubles power — he runs well enough to steal 43 of 52 bases the last two seasons, he plays hard and aggressively defensively and he has one of those throwing arms that make everyone in the stadium stop and gasp when he unleashes one.

However, the Indians are full of “what-ifs” past Choo and, particularly at this point in the season, nobody knows which players are going to emerge and which players are going to fall by the wayside as this team matures and evolves. To wit, Carrasco looked terrible at the beginning of his first start, then made adjustments and offered some hope that potential will become production for him this year. At the same time, LaPorta has looked atrocious in some of his plate appearances, while others have offered those rays of hope that he could become that RH power hitter that the Indians so badly need.

And those are just two players, and these are just two games...

To that end, it's important to remember that these things begin to reveal themselves in 40 games (or more), not two, in an MLB season as much as the whole team goes under the microscope in these opening days/weeks of the season. While a narrow view is easy to take, the longer view is what remains important and there are reasons for hope with more on the way. Interestingly, that message is even making it to the huddled masses that still rely on The Plain Dealer for their information as, prior to the Home Opener, the Indians' season was previewed in depth with Hoynes writing [a piece on pitching in the pipeline](#), something that's been written about here as far back as [August of 2009](#)

and as recently (and more in-depth) as

[the end of February](#)

, with the clearest comparison to what Hoynes wrote coming back in

[early January of this year](#)

. While it's nice to see Hoynes catching up, a number of those exciting arms aren't all that close to contributing in Cleveland, which makes patience a difficult virtue to wrap your arms around as the Indians drop the first two games of the season, done in by poor starting pitching.

Regardless, individual performance and development this year will carry the day as no rational Tribe fan is looking for that great leap into 90 wins, just some hope that the Indians are on something close to the right track towards contention. That contention isn't likely to come this year, but what needs to emerge for the Indians at some point this season is a reason to hope. Given the vacuum in local sports and given which tier they currently occupy on the Cleveland sports ladder, there should be no place to go but up.

The expectations for this team that existed on Thursday, before any game was played, still hold true on Sunday and the results of two (or twenty) games shouldn't really change that. However, the Indians need to provide a reason for hope to be rational and for Cleveland fans to buy (back) into the franchise.

Hope may not be a plan – but at this point, hope is what is needed from the corner of Carnegie

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and Ontario to show that there is a plan in place and that the plan will yield results as it has before and will again.