

The Cycle: Internet Debates Tribe Reality

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

Saturday, May 07 2011 12:00 PM - Last Updated Tuesday, May 10 2011 12:58 PM



Welcome to The Cycle, where we take a look at the most recent news items concerning Cleveland Indians baseball and just talk about them.

I now return you to Indians baseball. It seems as if the Shin-Soo Choo incident has come and passed over a lot quicker than I thought, especially thinking the [MLB News at BetUS.com](#) create a lot of buzz, but oh well, not this time. Perhaps a lot less people care about the issue than I thought and for those of you who were turned off by my effort, I'm sorry for the detour. I'll stick to what I know best and leave my beliefs to a different venue.

Let's talk about happy things, such as [the first place Cleveland Indians](#) , who are taking the Internet by storm. Mainstream media may just now be starting to pick up on the fact that they're on top of the standings, but plenty of heads are being turned to what the Tribe is doing.

I stepped outside on Friday morning without coat. I saw fellow Akron students walking around comfortably in shorts and t-shirts. This tells me one thing. While I'm not quite ready to commit to shorts, more than the two-to-three crazy people that wear shorts year-round are and the weather is nice. And since the weather is nice, you have no more excuses to not make a visit to Progressive Field for a few hours to take in some baseball.

Well, except for the fact that the Indians are currently on the West Coast.

But next week. Next week is when the season now officially starts for you people. College finals are wrapping up, the weather is nice, the season for summer is right around the corner, and guess what? The Cleveland Indians have been winning for more than a month. Get your tail down to Cleveland. You've run out of excuses.

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In this version of The Cycle we take a look at those first place Indians and their media attention, Josh Tomlin's home run numbers, and a farewell to a few farmhands.

[ARE YOU FOR REAL?]

Trevor Crowe, currently on the disabled list and with a whole lot of free time, brought to our attention via Twitter a very interesting point. He was listening to Colin Cowherd, whose name just forces people to involuntarily blurt out mumbles of 'buffoon', and the ESPN Radio host refused to talk about the Cleveland Indians. Why? As Trevor mentioned, Cowherd said [he will not discuss the Indians hot start](#) because the nation won't care about a team that Cleveland doesn't care about.

You have to hand it to Cowherd. As much as he may be a buffoon that you makes you mumble 'buffoon' the point is well put. But it comes with a stroke of ignorance on his part. As Crowe mentioned, it is hard to argue with him due to the attendance, but that doesn't exactly mean Cleveland doesn't care about the Indians. The in-person support is not there, that's fact and hopefully that gets better with the weather.

But to just dismiss that for Cleveland not caring? And for that matter, why should that deter you from talking about them? Maybe they're an interesting story, heck they're the best team in baseball right now. That in itself is a story considering no one, including all of Cleveland, thought they would be this good.

What I think this really was? Likely a listener from Cleveland or a fan of the Tribe asking Cowherd why he wasn't talking about Cleveland, and because Cowherd doesn't like to be told what to talk about, or because he failed to notice a good story, he made a snarky comment to attract heat. As much as he may be buffoonish to you and I, Cowherd makes valid points when he possess an argument, and 100% of the time, wrong or right, insane or valid, he sticks to those points. In that aspect, you have to hand it to him.

I guess that brings us to the whirlwind of Internet attention the Indians have garnered. I guess, despite what Cowherd says, the nation does care about this baseball team. Rob Neyer of

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SBNation posted a poll earlier this week asking what was the [most compelling baseball story in April](#). Of the five choices, the Indians, as of 625 votes, stand with 62 percent, far and away the reader's choice as most compelling story. That is majority, more than all the other options combined, and almost double the votes all the other options received.

So Cowherd, does the nation care?

I think they do, but the main question that seems to be coming up in all this. Are the Indians really this good? We keep pinching ourselves as followers of this team, and I know I personally keep tempering expectations, thinking that this run won't last, but they certainly have it in them to make this division theirs.

"Are they real" is such a broad question. Of course they are real. They're swinging the bats, throwing the ball, making the catches. They're all breathing and it is not a figment of our imagination. Kevin Kaduk of Big League Stew, a Yahoo! Sports blog [tackled the realness question](#) and answered it rather, quickly. Yes.

Kaduk makes the argument that I have made in regards to the Indians not fading back into the pack. Simply put, a team that is playing this well, for this extended period of time is unlikely to falter. Will they win the division? Well, as the lead keeps building that question keeps getting tougher and tougher to say no to, but they certainly are showing that they are simply more than just an average to below-average team.

And Kaduk points us, and the world, to the excellent site of FanGraphs, where they continue to make the point with some statistics. The FanGraphs readers projected 73 victories and ZIPS projected them to win 71 games. Dave Cameron, author of the post, says that mathematically, for that to happen, the Indians [would have to play .400 ball for the rest of the season](#).

So while 110 wins is improbable, so is 70.

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Cameron mentions the statistic of WAR, which doesn't remind me of baseball statistics when I hear it mentioned. WAR is a fancy way of convincing people that a player is playing well or they are actually producing in all aspects of the game. So fancily, the Indians second ranked WAR ranking and the fact that not even sucky Austin Kearns is operating at a negative WAR, should convince you that the Indians are for real.

At least offensively. Cameron notes that the pitching staff may be a different story. He uses more fancy statistics, like my eternal enemy BABIP, to claim the pitching staff is headed for a regression and that it is "simply not a great pitching staff."

I can buy that, but that doesn't mean they aren't a good pitching staff. And a good pitching staff with a great offense, plus a 21-9 start can equal a division title. I did the math, it works, trust me.

The ultimate statistic is wins. You and I don't need Albert Einstein to tell us that. And in the end, Cameron's projection with wins should make the entire case. Cameron notes that if the Indians were to finish the rest of the season playing .500 ball, and remember, it is unlikely they play below that from here on out, they'll finish with around 85 wins. For the Twins and White Sox to do that? They'd have to play .586 baseball.

In your face MATH!

And if you need a compelling case to be made without numbers, which is what I like to do more often than not, look no further than former Indians.com beat writer Anthony Castrovine to [make the compelling case for you](#)

. Armed with a quote from Shelley Duncan that was practically adding 'comma Keith Law' to the end of it without officially adding it, Castrovine notes that the club has won in every way imaginable.

"Through it all, they've piled up quality starts, demonstrated dependable defense and, for the most part, avoided bullpen blemishes."

And then the poll at the end that truly measures the belief that Cleveland itself has for this team.

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33.9% say there is a 60-79% chance the Indians make the playoffs. Over 34 percent believe there is a 80-100% chance, which tells you there is some series kool-aid being downed at the corner of Carnegie and Ontario.

So to go back to our original question that started this roll. Does Cleveland care?

Who cares... They certainly believe.

[RANDOM RUNDOWN]

All of the cases that I just recapped were mostly from before the Indians traveled out west to face Oakland. Now as they come off a series win and prepare for a huge showdown that will see three of the best, if not, the three best AL starters to this point go in three separate games, look at the "nation" start to perk up. Sports Illustrated's weekly power rankings give the Indians [an incredible push from fifth to first place](#) over Philadelphia, Colorado, Florida, and stumbling Texas.



The three aforementioned best starters in the AL to this point are really the three best starters to

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this point. Combined, they are 15-3 with a 1.77 ERA in 20 starts. Dan Haren and Jered Weaver account for all three of those loses, while Justin Masterson entered Friday's game spotless, one of three starters in the AL with at least five starts to do so.

One of those others to remain spotless in the loss column is Trevor Cahill, who defeated **Josh Tomlin**

in a battle of undefeated starters this week. This week, when all is said and done, we'll have seen the top three starters in ERA take the mound against Cleveland. And of the 12 probable starters that have pitched against or for the Indians this week, six of them rank in the top 20 of the AL in ERA.

Thankfully, Cleveland missed Gio Gonzalez, 3-2 with a 2.70 ERA. My reasons for picking the Athletics, currently justified, if only they had some offense.

Josh Tomlin's battle with Cahill was quietly one of the better pitching duels in this early season. If not for former Royal and always-thorn in the Indians side, David DeJesus, we might be talking about a pair of 5-0 starters in Cleveland. The solo shots that DeJesus hit brought up a point about Tomlin that might make some worry. The kid is a master of control, but it tends to get him in [some hot-water with the home run ball](#) .

I'm glad Tim Belcher made the point, if not I would have made it for him. Sure Tomlin will give up the long ball, but how many of those will come with no one on base? The chances are high, because as of right now, he has one more walk than he has home runs given up. Simply put, matched with his AL second-best AVG against (.174) among starters, Tomlin is allowed to give up the long ball because he doesn't make foolishly put runners on base.

The philosophy works. Hit as many solo shots as you want, they only count as one. If those are the only hits Tomlin gives up, and he gives up three of them, he still stands a better than average chance to win the game if his offense supports him.

After **Jeanmar Gomez's** decent performance on Thursday, he may have bought himself a longer audition than just a few starts. After Alex White's impressive first outing, he may have pushed for a call-up that would have lasted more than just the two starts Carrasco was expected to miss.

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However Manny Acta indicated that he'd like to see Gomez more [in a way that could be taken in two ways](#) . The outing on Thursday opened up that he could outlast White when Carrasco, who is likely in-line for just one rehab start with Akron, eventually returns next week. I don't think this is the last of

Alex White

this season though. In fact I'd place money on him returning at some point. One of the reasons is the improved slider. He now has three pitches to combat hitters with after [it has developed so much](#) over the past year.

I think Gomez's outing makes things easier for the Indians to stick with him and give White more development time, but if he goes out and outduels one of the heads of the Angels two-headed monster, it might be a little tougher.

The Indians decided to waive **Jess Todd** to make room for Alex White last week and the Yankees [decided to claim Todd off waivers](#) . I don't think the Indians are that broken up about it, considering they got their closer out of the same deal that acquired Todd and plenty of high-impact bullpen arms have passed him in the pecking order.

The Indians also cleared more room at Columbus by trading **Jordan Brown** to Milwaukee. The club had become cluttered with infielders after Jason Donald was optioned to be an official member of their active roster and Josh Rodriguez was returned from Pittsburgh. Both Rodriguez and incredibly-hot Cord Phelps will likely see time in the outfield, which becomes slightly [less crowded with Brown's trade](#)

I have to say on a side note that Brown is a total pro and I think all Tribe fans should wish him well in Milwaukee. He was denied several times by the club and who knows, had he not got injured in spring last year, things may be different and he may have one a roster spot and changed his whole outlook. So many times Brown had a chance to be displeased with the Indians, but he never pouted and instead looked at it as a challenge. He deserves an opportunity somewhere, at some point, and hopefully he gets it with the Brewers.

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For those of you who follow the minor leagues, second round pick from 2010 **LeVon Washington** is

now officially a professional. Washington

[was called up to Lake County](#)

from extended spring training to take the roster spot of Jason Smit, who's been off to a red-hot start and is on his way to Kinston. The talent in this organization seems to be endless, especially with the Indians

[sporting the best Triple-A team](#)

in the land to go along with the best MLB team.

So yeah, if any of the major league pieces start to falter, or get injured, you have to feel good about the pool the club can pick from to replace them.

And finally just in case you missed it, make sure [you are on this trend before it takes off](#) , if it takes off. Remember claw and antler from the Texas Rangers last season? Well the Indians have a little signal of their own for a teammate homerun.

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*You can follow Nino on Twitter @ [TheTribeDaily](#) where he tweets about the **first place** Cleveland Indians. You should also like his*

[blog on Facebook](#)

because it is only there where you can witness the first official Manny Acta Golden Fedora celebration.