

The Courtship of Cleveland

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}

Tuesday, May 24 2011 10:02 PM - Last Updated Tuesday, May 24 2011 10:31 PM



Despite the Red Sox breaking the 4-game winning streak on Tuesday night, Indians' wins have been falling from the sky all year at a rate nearly on par with the rain that has been ubiquitous on the North Coast since seemingly early April. While some remain concerned about what the national media thinks of the Erie Warriors or fear a bottoming out of unprecedented levels over the next few months, perhaps it's time to remember some words that ran in this space some time.

Nearly two months ago, some hack's words came popping up on your computer screen, [suggesting something that seemed absurd at the time](#)

, as it was written after the Indians had just won their 6th straight game on April 9th, running their season record to 6-2. Regardless, here was the "suggestion":

It's time to enjoy the ride that a group of young, talented players can take us on...

It's time to fall for this team, full of potential and promise, small sample size considered...

There is a line in a Mark Twain quote that may be applicable to what Indians' fans are experiencing, with the memory of past heartbreaks too close to ignore, when he wrote to, "love like you've never been hurt."

Indians' fans – despite the hurt that you've endured, it's time to fall in love again...

That was the beginning of April and since that time, they've gone 24-14 and are 14 ½ games ahead of the Minnesota Twins (the prohibitive preseason favorite that has only 16 wins on the year) in their division. If you're not "enjoying the ride that a group of young, talented players can take us on" or haven't fallen "for this team, full of potential and promise", well...your excuses have run out.

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The Indians have swept the Reds and have split the first two games with the Red Sox (against Buchholz and Beckett) and this sense that falling in love is OK once more has become pervasive...and it's not a feeling that's limited to those who simply root for the team.

To wit, after Monday night's improbable win against the Red Sox (and Mother Nature), SportsTime Ohio had Mike Brantley on as their post-game interviewee, on the strength of his game-altering AB to spur the team to victory. Upon the completion of his final answer, Brantley looked up above the cameraman to the obvious crowd that had gathered in his line of sight. With his earphones and microphone still on, but with the interview now complete, Brantley pointed past the camera, began to clap, and yelled, "Thank You Cleveland Fans", before giving a one-man salute to the assembled crowd, pulling off the headphones and retreating from view.

The moment was so genuine, so unusual in this world of professional sports in which we occupy, and so revealing that it brought something into focus regarding the relationship between this team and this town – as much as Clevelanders are regionally programmed to be bitter and wary of success, this Indians team WANTS the town to love them. After every game in which the stands are filled, the game recaps are flush with quotes from players stating that they need to get the town's attention and how they need to get people excited about this team.

Thus far, their efforts to entice their as yet unrequited love have been Herculean as the 35K that went to the corner of Carnegie and Ontario a few Fridays ago bore witness to a 9th inning walk-off from Hafner and the full house on Saturday saw Travis Buck play the role of the hero, presumably because it was his turn to wear the cape in that particular game. Following both games, players alluded to the idea that they fed off of the crowd and that they wanted to prove to the city of Cleveland that the team was worth their time, their attention, and perhaps even their affection.

Compare that to other teams in this city that either expect your love or manipulate the psychology of the city to garner goodwill, with a local media all too willing to fall in lock-step with their adulation or in toeing the company line. Conversely, this 2011 Indians' team entered the season with jokes from the beginning of "Major League" (this guy here is dead...who are these effin' guys) passing off as "analysis" of the team. Yet, here the Indians sit, with the largest divisional lead and the best record in baseball with a roster full of impossibly likable players just elevating themselves (and their team) into the elite of MLB.

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