



When I was a kid, there was a clothing line brand called No Fear. Apparently, as my Wikipedia search indicates, they filed for Chapter 11 earlier this season. I'm going to assume that's directly correlated to the fact that I have not seen a No Fear brand t-shirt or hat in probably fifteen years. Now that I think about it, I have seen an energy drink of that brand, but unless there's Jager or vodka in it, I don't do energy drinks.

My everyday hat wearing habit was born at a young age and I used to wear a black No Fear hat that had just a pair of eyes on the front of it. They were colored red and appeared focused and determined. Amazing what you remember from your childhood, but I recall this hat as if I still own it. I have no idea where it is. Even if I found it, I wouldn't wear it again. Not because I don't agree with the message, but because it would never supplant my Indians hat.

Watching Carlos Santana shy away from contact for the tenth (or more) time this season during Friday night's game, visions of this hat and clothing brand popped in to my head. Totally random, I know, but sometimes this is how my mind works and especially when I am trying to come up with a weekly theme for my column. Carlos Santana is about as gunshy as one can get without having been previously shot at. Ever since the Ryan Kalish slide that took away the Axe Man's 2010 season, I had concerns of what a major injury like that would do to his ability to play the position.

At his best, Santana is an average catcher. He is a good receiver of the ball, but is fairly lazy shuffling side-to-side to block pitches in the dirt and his footwork when throwing out runners is hardly Astaire-like. But, if we factor in this fear element which has prevented him from blocking the plate or catching a bouncing throw while anticipating contact, Santana is a below average asset at the catcher position.

To be at the top of your game as an athlete, you cannot be under the influence of fear. This ranges from golf to hockey to baseball to basketball and everywhere in between. Being that this is a baseball column, I will focus on fear in baseball.

Babe Ruth once said, "Never let the fear of striking out keep you from playing the game." Since the Indians have struck out 687 times this season, we can reasonably assume that fear of striking out is not an issue for this bunch. I do, however, see fear in other aspects of the game from certain players and I will elaborate on the View from the Porch's thoughts on that.



As I mentioned above, Carlos Santana is very afraid to experience any sort of contact at the catching position. This is somewhat understandable in the wake of last year's incident and having seen what happened to Buster Posey this season. I have no way of knowing if the mandate has come from above, from the Indians front office, or not, but Santana's apprehension is hurtful to the team. Not having the necessary position to block the plate or the wherewithal to catch a throw with a runner bearing down costs the team runs. With their periodic (being generous here) struggles to score runs, every run they allow could be critical to the outcome of the game.

The Indians are caught between a rock and a hard place in regards to Santana's fear at the position. I can't imagine that they want to tell their highly-touted catcher to put his body, health, and ultimately, career at risk by blocking the plate, but this is not a short term scenario. Either Santana's going to continue to develop bad habits at the position or he will be treated with kid gloves and the Tribe will keep allowing runs that should not score.

Furthermore, with the injury to Shin-Soo Choo, they probably cannot afford to replace Matt LaPorta in lieu of Lou Marson. If Santana played nightly at first base, LaPorta's bat would be taken out of the lineup for Light Hittin' Lou. LHL is a phenomenal defensive catcher, one of the best in all of baseball. With so many inconsistent bats already in the lineup, adding a slap hitter

with less power than a lame duck politician cannot be a recipe for success.

Quite frankly, Santana seems terrified of being hurt in any facet of the game. He jumps back like there's a King Cobra in the batter's box any time a pitcher throws a fastball on the inner half. Usually, when called a strike, he will subsequently bitch at the home plate umpire. If there's a hint of venom in this entire blurb, I'm not surprised. His shtick is growing old on me, and it starts with his shortcomings as a defender.



I'm an old school guy when it comes to catchers. For me, offense is secondary. The two most important things to me are handling the pitching staff and controlling the running game. I realize that Santana is a converted third baseman. I realize that this is just his second year in the bigs and he has just 132 games under his belt, 98 of those coming behind the dish. Maybe I was just spoiled by Victor Martinez who is the penultimate teammate and field general. Santana lacks a lot of the tools I look for in the position and I have rarely seen signs of him making adjustments. At some point, if the Indians can develop a catcher who can hit a reasonable .260 with a little pop and play good D, Santana will be an everyday first baseman.

I implore Santana to face his fear and block the plate properly. He left himself exposed when Kalish nearly made his leg face the polar opposite direction. Kalish did slide late, but Santana's technique was off. I would love to see Santana conquer this dilemma because if it comes down to him blocking the plate in that final weekend against Detroit, he damn well better do it.

My other scaredy-cat to focus on this week is, who else, Grady Sizemore. It's probably not nice

to beat up on him every week in this column, but, to be completely honest, outside of Michael Brantley, there's no better view from the porch than of Grady Sizemore. Sizemore may be putting it back together a little bit at the dish, seeing as how he has seven hits in his last five games. He even walked twice (!!) in Thursday's game against Baltimore.



Where my issue lies with Grady Sizemore is that, to quote a phrase from Mike Piper (LeadPipe), former TCF writer and resident realist TCF forum poster, "Guy's losing tools faster than John Bobbitt". While Grady Sizemore was never a five tool player because Battlebots have more accurate throwing arms than #24 and he really hit for half-a-tool worth of average, the two things we could always rely on were speed and good defense. We can no longer realistically expect these two elements of his game.

Sizemore has reached base 77 times this year via hit, hit by pitch or walk. I can't find how many times he's reached via fielder's choice (shame on you Baseball-Reference for missing one stat!). Regardless of the handful of times that might be, Grady Sizemore has attempted all of two stolen bases. He's also been caught twice. In his defense, 31 of his 54 hits are extra base hits, which are not conducive to stolen bases. But, we are looking at a guy who cannot push the envelope.

To me, he's scared to test his knee and have to slide in to the bag. He also has taken major steps back as an outfielder, reading balls incorrectly, and not laying out for balls he could catch. He looks to be playing in fear. We all admired his fearlessness and he grew a cult following due to that (and his apparent good looks).

Like I believe I've said in VftP before, I have always held Grady to a higher standard because of his athleticism. The kid used to be a freak of nature when it came to talent, skill, coordination, and everything else defining an athlete. That doesn't change just because he is banged up. I probably should lower my standards given his injuries. I just don't want to.

I wonder if the fact that he is in a contract year has directly led to losing his balls-to-the-wall attitude. To me, it's reminiscent of the plot surrounding Rick Vaughn in Major League 2. He is career-centric rather than not thinking and just instinctively throwing heat. The notion of leaving it all out there. Grady Sizemore just doesn't look like an instinctive player anymore. He looks like a guy playing with a plan. To protect the investment he has in his body, even if it costs the team.

Maybe I'm way off base. Maybe this is complete overreaction on my part. But, when I see that a tremendous athlete has two stolen base attempts in 59 games, after entering the season averaging a stolen base once every six games, I raise an eyebrow.

You simply cannot perform at the top of your game when playing with fear. It is impossible. It puts instincts on the backburner. I can't besmirch a guy for a split second decision not to dive for a ball or block the plate with somebody like David Ortiz bearing down on them, but I expect confidence to trump fear. Confidence in ability. Confidence in the amazing scientific specimen that is the human body. No fear.