



BASEBALL IS BACK!! Despite what 2007 showed us about winter, the return of baseball should mean the end of the annoying white stuff flying around Northeast Ohio and summer nights at the ballpark are just a couple of months away. The Home Opener is this Thursday, April 5, and it truly is a joyous occasion. The start of a new season always brings optimism, even if you're a fan of the team with the second-longest World Series Championship drought in baseball. Even Cubs fans get optimistic this time of year.

Thursday will mark my ninth straight Home Opener, a number that began during my sophomore year of high school and one that I plan to continue until I'm not breathing for the Home Opener. It really is Cleveland's holiday. Obviously, 2007 is the most memorable of Home Openers due to the horrendous weather and the start of a truly magical season. I remember freezing through rain/snow mixes, standing through chilly sunny days, overcast days with looming snow clouds but no precipitation, little, bitty stinging rain, and big fat rain. Pretty much everything except severe thunderstorms.

And I wouldn't trade any of it for anything.

It's a day that I wait for from the time the last pitch of the season is thrown. I don't sulk about the past season, 2007 excepted. I instead start focusing on the future, looking to see how the team can get better and move forward. I like to think that's how our front office works as well. I think we're a better team this season than we were last season. I think things are moving in the right direction. Outside of the perks associated with becoming a season ticket holder, the reason I wanted to lock in a ticket package was the playoff priority that came along with it. The way things are shaping up this season, using playoff priority as a factor in my decision making shows my optimism for the season. Over 162 games, anything can and will happen. It's just a

matter of more good things than bad happening to the Cleveland Indians.

Since the season begins before my next installment of the View from the Porch, there's no time like the present to give you my VftP 2012 Cleveland Indians Season Preview. It will be full of statistics that will exemplify why I think the Indians will be a surprise team this season. At the end, I'll focus just on the month of April and I hope to preview the next month of the season with my final column of every month.

Happy baseball season everybody!

On January 23, I was really happy with the Indians' offseason and the way that things were progressing. The Indians had brought in Derek Lowe on a bargain deal where the Braves covered two-thirds of his \$15M salary and only wanted a Single-A reliever in return. Hopes were high that the Indians would get one of Derrek Lee or Casey Kotchman to fix the hole at first base. The Indians added depth through minor league free agent signings of guys with Major League experience. We'd have a full year of Jason Kipnis. Michael Brantley and Shin-Soo Choo had no lasting effects from the injuries that cut their 2012 seasons short. The team had just added Kevin Slowey into the mix after the Roberto Hernandez Heredia fiasco and had solid starting pitching depth. Unfortunately, our old friend Victor Martinez had torn his ACL and would miss the season. Sad for him, but it definitely boosted the Indians' chances in the AL Central Division.

The next day, the Tigers signed Prince Fielder. For the low price of nearly three times the Indians payroll, Cecil Part Deux became [my public enemy number one](#). In an instant, the happiness I felt about the Indians roster melted away. My first thought wasn't about how awful the Tigers defense would be or how Alex Avila and Doug Fister were due for some serious regression, it was "Damn it, that team's going to outslug everybody."

In the two-plus months since that day, I have wavered back and forth about what to expect from this year's Tribe. As is par for the course here in Cleveland, every scenario of us contending begins with an "if" statement. "If we stay healthy", "If Ubaldo returns to form", "If Verlander ruptures his Achilles in a trampoline accident" (sorry Joba the Hut Chamberlain, too soon?), "If Chisenhall can hit", and so on and so on.

For as long as I can remember, the Indians have failed when expectations have been high. Even in the 90s, the team's glory years, they never won it all. In 2006, the season after the Indians had collapsed in the final week, costing them a wild card berth, the team fell flat on their faces like a drunk chick on a college campus who doesn't see the curb in front of her. In 2008, when the front office inexplicably failed to plug the holes that 2007's overachievement had masked, the team was out of the race by June, ending that month 10 games out of first. There have been no preseason expectations since.

Expectations for the Indians this year are mixed, both with Indians fans and media members alike. Some people are enamored with the Indians 30-15 start to 2011 and view that as a more accurate gauge of the team than the 50-67 record after the first 45 games. Some look at the injuries that the Indians had to deal with last season and think that a healthy bunch can be a contender. Others view the Tigers as an insurmountable foe, towering over Cleveland as the embodiment of 48 consecutive years of sports despair.

For me, I see both sides. I have my doubts that the Tigers can, in fact, be dethroned from their preseason position as winning the AL Central with ease. Vegas oddsmakers, based on opening over/under betting lines, projected the Tigers to win the Central by 15 games. I also have my hopes and dreams. My hopes that Alex Avila will drastically drop off from his unsustainable .366 BABip (batting average on balls in play or Hits / (At Bats – Strikeouts)), that Doug Fister will not continue to have a 10/1 strikeout-to-walk ratio like he did after the Tigers acquired him in July, and that the Tigers infield is, quite possibly, the worst defensive infield ever constructed. My hope that Miguel Cabrera will run head first into a brick wall and have a career path like that of Justin Morneau's, mired by concussions and the unreasonable expectations of "Past MVP" hanging over his head. My hope that Jhonny Peralta will remember that he is actually a .270 hitter with average power and a horrible defender.

The Indians winning the AL Central Division would not be like Buster Douglas knocking out Mike Tyson or like the 1980 US Men's Olympic Hockey Team beating the Russians. It would certainly be an upset, but not of epic proportions. It can happen. There are ways that we can enjoy playoff baseball. It starts with the 2012 Cleveland Indians roster.



