

Fools Gold or The Real Thing?

Written by {ga=riverburns}

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We all have our calendars, even if we don't look at them on a regular basis; we all know that it's mid-May. For most intents and purposes, it's far too early to think about late September while we wait for what the summer of 2012 has to offer. For the second year in a row, Cleveland Indians fans should try and ignore their calendars to check out the Sports Section to see their beloved Tribe on top of the American League Central Division in the standings.

Of course, every wet blanket from the south side of Chicago to that state up North is going to attempt to rob you of any joy you may have in regard to your first place Indians.

The point isn't whether or not they have a point; they do, but to steal a line from the Indians marketing campaign, what if? What if, as in, what if their point is invalid? What if sitting atop the Central Division, just a game or two over .500 is their dry spell?

Going into the day's action on May 15 a year ago, the eventual Division Champions were 22-18 and looking up at a smoking hot Division leading Indians team.

Of course, that Detroit team turned out to be for real, while the Indians hot start turned out to be Fools Gold.

There were signs that it would be, but I chose to ignore them, and I wasn't alone. Cleveland

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needed the Indians to be like that, if only for a little while.

It has only been a year, but it's soothing to think how much better things are on the sports scene in Cleveland today than they were a year ago.

The Browns were still the same inept Browns team that they'd been, for the most part, since coming back to the league in 1999, and one of the darkest chapters of the post-Stepien era of Cavaliers basketball had just concluded.

After a quarter season of spectacular baseball in Cleveland, ignorance certainly was bliss.

Nothing about the way the Indians came out of the gate in 2011 was real, other than the actual numbers. Granted, those actual numbers, the ones that reflect the number of wins and losses, are very relevant numbers. The thing about it was that you couldn't really explain it with logic; you just had to believe it was the truth. To the Indians credit, they battled to sweep Detroit at home during the final weekend of April, but the pitchers of record in those games were

[Chris Perez](#)

,
[Tony Sipp](#)

, and

[Chad Durbin](#)

Their only other opponent to reach the post-season in the first two months of the season, Tampa Bay, took 4 of 6 from the Tribe.

Like I said, it was better to ignore things like that and focus on what was good. A fourth win in four tries over the Boston Red Sox, my favorite to win the American League before the season, was quite the accomplishment.

That was before we truly understood the dysfunction of those Red Sox, but they were 25-22 after that loss on May 23, so you could only say, at very worst, they were functionally dysfunctional.

But forget about the Red Sox, the Indians were 30-15 with a seven game lead in the Central Division.

I can remember how spoiled I was as a fan, talking about going in to cruise control and speaking mildly of worst case scenarios. I'd discuss hot and cold starts with my friends in the

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know about our National Pastime.

Was it easier to recover from being 2-10 as that Boston team was at one point, or to have the bottom fall out if you were 10-2? |

I think we settled on those records probably being indicative of how good or bad you are, but concluded you are much more likely to slump to mediocrity than to climb up into it from the position of downright awful.

The Red Sox would prove us wrong, winning 90 games, missing the playoffs only with the assistance of a catastrophic September.

At the 30-15 mark, the Indians would only have to 60-57 in their final 117 games to get to 90 victories.

As it turned out, that wouldn't have been enough to best the Tigers in the division, or even catch the Rays for the American League Wild Card.

Alright, that's enough about the past. If we focus on the present, there's a lot less to be optimistic about on the surface, but if we pan a little deeper, we might just discover that there's some solid gold to be found with this team.

As [Paul](#)

[Cousineau revealed over the weekend](#)

, a good look at some offensive numbers and American League rankings can reveal that we might just have a real live first place team occupying the building at Ontario and Carnegie.

As Cousineau pointed out in "*Living in the Now on Lazy Sunday*":

"Certainly, there are question marks and points of concern that may be distracting, but outside of that team from Arlington (that the Tribe took 2 of 3 from) that is lapping the field in the AL West, most MLB teams have question marks and concerns."

All I can say is that when you have some of the problems that the Indians do, like players under-performing at the plate or so-called Aces throwing batting practice during the games, they tend to be very First World type of problems when you manage to squeak out enough W's to earn that "division leading". It sounds as though that leaves the door open for the rich to get

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richer.



The pitching staff has had its bright spots. Even Jairo Ascencio has settled down since the calendar flipped over to May, shutting opposing hitters down to just a .069 batting average this month. In Cleveland, [or Heaven](#) , as Indians starter Ubaldo Jimenez calls it, the former Colorado Ace has an ERA under 3.

Away from home, Chris Perez is 8 of 8 in Save chances.

Actually Perez has been golden regardless of the locale since his Opening Day meltdown. No one expected Derek Lowe to be 5-1 after 7 starts, and only the most loyal optimist could have expected Nick Hagadone to be this solid out of the gate.

Jeanmar Gomez has shown flashes of brilliance at the back of the rotation, despite dealing with [the consequences of playing old school baseball in a new school era](#) . Those are just the surprises; if some of the disappointments start performing like they are expected to, the immediate future can be bright.

We don't know what tomorrow has in store, and it is easy to look at the glass as half empty when recalling the 50-67 finish that followed the incredible start a year ago, but with plenty of wiggle room to go up or down at this point, maybe it's okay not to anticipate doomsday here. The issues may be easy to see, but the positives are tough to ignore.

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We might have just stumbled into gold here.