



I have to wonder after watching the weekend series the Indians played against the Chicago White Sox whether or not baseball in Cleveland is dead.

At best it seems maybe it's on life support. And it's not just the team on the field. That didn't change much from Friday to Saturday as far as I could tell.

But after the trendy and traditional opener on Friday in which 42,000 revelers showed up to watch the Sox kick the Indians' ass, the Tribe set an all-time Jacobs Field/Progressive Field attendance low on Saturday when just 9,000+ showed up on a sunny and decent enough April afternoon.

That record was short-lived because it was broken on Sunday when only 8,200 paid to watch the Indians get their first win of the year.

I know we're talking about the Jake (or the Prog) and that the park still seems young compared to the old joint but that park is now 18 years old and there's a large enough sample size of good teams and bad to have played there that setting new attendance lows on back to back days of the **opening weekend** is alarming.

Personally I've grown to really dislike the opener itself. Not the underlying fact that baseball is back, I love that part, but more for the fact that it's the one game a year that most of those in attendance will see all season. To me it's become St. Patrick's Day with a ballgame following the bar hopping. It's an excuse to take half a day off work, get lit on E. 4th Street or elsewhere and then go freeze your ass off for 6 innings or so while sucking down enough \$7 beer to keep

the buzz alive. You can call it tradition or whatever you want. I used to try and make it down there too and take my now 16-year old daughter down there as part of a 'tradition'.

But if you ask me attending game number two and three and pretty much any one after that first one shows that you're a bigger fan than participating in the bacchanalia of the opener. The Indians play and attendance has become very much like it was 30 years ago when I'd hop on the 39 bus downtown to E 9th Street and walk up to an empty ticket window 10 minutes before first pitch, buy a ticket in my own personal section down in general admission and then be sitting closer to the hitter than the 3rd base coach by the 4th inning.

Every year you'd have 65,000 for the opener and pretty much 6,500 announced for the next 81. And believe me; those 'announced' crowds aren't really reflective of how few people are actually in the park and watching games. Take the announced crowd and divide by two and you have a more accurate reflection of how many people are actually there.

But what's actually up with attendance? There were years when a large number of games were sold out before the season started and when for 455 games straight the Jake was jammed. Why not now? Is it the team? The front office? The economy? Is it, more likely, a combination of all of that?

The biggest issue is the team itself. They don't win all that often.

The next biggest reason in my opinion is the marketing of the ball club itself. All day, every day you hear about 'small market economics' and 'windows of opportunity' from the front office personnel. Well, after a period of time with the front office reducing payroll, repeating 'small market economics' like a mantra and telling us that the team is hoping to be competitive in a year or two why the hell wouldn't people who are pressed to find any money in their entertainment budget just choose to spend it elsewhere and maybe look to the Indians again down the road when their 'plan' takes shape and bears fruit?

"Hey fellas, I have very little cash to spend and you're basically telling me I'm a moron if I spend it on you now as opposed to down the road when you're competitive. Thanks for the heads-up."

The 'What if...' ads the team is airing make no sense to me. What are they trying to say? What they should be doing is involving Tribe fans in the effort to take on the big boys. They should be appealing to the 'Us against the world' crowd with an aggressive marketing campaign that seeks to use the bad economy and small market to take a David & Goliath stance.

"What if the 90's were just the 90's?"

What if the marketing department didn't have its head up its ass?

The tradition you refer to is ancient, wasn't all that happy and has nothing to do with when this club is going to be competitive again. Make people partners in your crusade to take down the big boys and they'll start to relate. You need to appeal to the generations that will carry you forward, not try and win back people who were either never with you or never left. My 16 yr-old doesn't give a shit about Andre Thornton or Frank Robinson. And to be perfectly honest, neither do I because they have nothing to do with the current state of this team.

Just to summarize, it would seem the position of the front office appears to be, "Remember back to the days when no one came and we blew. Remember too when we were okay but won nothing of consequence and...oh yeah... we don't have the cash or the initiative to compete like that again for a few more years. But come on out Wednesday for magnetic schedule night when we'll take on another squad that out classes and out spends us every damn year."

8,276 people on Sunday afternoon of the opening weekend. On a day when the weather was chilly but nothing compared to the weather people cook in, drink in, eat in and revel in when the Browns have a game on Sunday.

If 8,276 doesn't say something to the Indians front office then I'm not sure if it will stand too long as the Progressive Field all-time low.

I'm not even sure that dubious record will last until May arrives.

Oh Yeah..They Actually Played Ball

If the Indians were hoping to suck people in and take advantage of the annual surge of optimism that spring training evokes they got off to a really bad start. I think it was in the 5th inning of the opener, Fausto Carmona being long gone and Justin Germano having just thrown napalm on the fire, when the Indians trailed 14-0. Talk about taking the wind out of the sails? Yeah... 14-0 will clear a room quickly.

Carmona was horrible. People will look at the fact he walked no one and tell you that's a good sign but Fausto had no clue where the ball was going in the strike zone.

The 'Yeah..But' syndrome when you lose is a sure sign your team is unfit to compete. When you're looking at a 15-10 loss and saying, "Yeah...but Vinnie Pestano looked good and Faust looked willing to battle through the bad innings' you're in trouble. Carmona is not Carlos Carrasco. It's time for Fausto to actually be the guy you talk about completely differently. He should be the guy you're saying "Yeah...but" when he wins an ugly game. Like, "Yeah...but it was nice to see Fausto win that game without his best stuff."

The Indians don't have enough of those kind of "Yeah..buts". They have a ton of those guys like Carrasco and Justin Masterson, et al. The "Yeah...but" guys with whom you're okay rationalizing a loss for the sake of the kids learning something.

I'm not saying that's not enjoyable to watch develop. Well, actually I am. I'm sick of watching guys in Cleveland that we're hoping and praying will come through and be productive major leaguers. I'm tired of watching Matt LaPorta (whose name in Spanish loosely translates to mean 'soft fly ball to left') and praying that he justifies the CC Sabathia trade. I'm sick of it but I go and I watch and I care because that's my DNA and that's what I enjoy.

But I understand why others don't go. Especially when the club itself tells them it'll be a few years before it's worth their while.

Anyway, it was really nice on Sunday watching Masterson completely lock up a very good White

Sox offense and salvaging a game in the three game set. He looked good and he looked comfortable. Masterson is 6'6" , 250lbs and many times last season it looked like every inch and pound of his was going in a different direction when he was delivering a pitch.

He looks like he's focused on keeping his delivery compact and on repeating it with every pitch. If he can do that consistently the dude is going to be just fine. He's got a ton of movement on his ball from the great arm action he generates and Sunday was as good as I've seen him. Maybe something clicked for him.

I also loved Tony Sipp coming in for the 8th inning and taking care of business in short order. Same with Chris Perez in the 9th. IF (IF IF) the starting pitching can keep the Indians in some games I think that bullpen is going to please you.

Sunday was salve on the wounds from Friday. 1-2 just feels a whole lot better than 0-3.

One Shining Moment

I don't care if you're a fan of Butler or Connecticut but you have got to admit that the run these two schools are on is impressive and maybe among the most impressive feats in college basketball history.

A mid-major school that plays in the same conference as Cleveland State is playing in its second straight national championship game. That's after losing their best player from last season, Gordon Heyward, to the Utah Jazz when he went early in the first round of last June's draft. Their Doogie Howser coach, Brad Stevens, has that team ready for seemingly every single situation they face and those kids execute extremely well more often they don't.

One more time: a Horizon League team that lost its best player to the NBA and that has an enrollment of 4,400 kids is playing in its second consecutive NCAA Division1 National Championship game.

Unreal.

UConn, on the other hand, is a premier college power that was supposed to be relegated to the bottom half of the Big East this season as they rebuilt. They didn't receive a single pre-season Top 25 vote back in November. The Huskies were a 9th seed and now they're playing for a national title. Oh... did I mention that 9th seed was in their own conference tournament?

UConn has now won ten straight tournament elimination games when you count their five games in five days Big East tourney title and the five NCAA tournament games they've played to reach the title game. They're led by a player who might be having the best March since Sherman went through Atlanta in Kemba Walker.

I have been thoroughly entertained during this NCAA tourney (with the exception of last Friday night) and I honestly can't come up with a championship game that is any better than this one if you're looking to sum up what can happen in March. I know some of you disdain the tournament because of that fact but the rest of us get a tremendous kick out of it.

I'm a dreamer at heart I guess. I'd love to see the kids from Butler cash this trip into a title. But if a kid like Walker is cutting down the nets I'm not going to be too bummed out.

The Cavs

They're still playing and they're still losing. With the exception of the shocking win over LeBron's Miami Heat last Tuesday (a game that validates the entire season in my opinion) the Cavs are doing all they can to hold off Minnesota from passing them in losses.

It's going to go down to the wire. If the Cavs offer themselves up to everyone like they did with Andray Blatche on Friday night they should outlast the Timberwolves. Blatche scored 36 points and grabbed 27 rebounds against Cleveland this past Friday night.

I heard he also walked into the Cavs locker room afterward and began to painfully snap the Cavs big men with their own towels, took their wallets and made off with their wives and girlfriends just in case anyone wasn't sure who the alpha male was Friday.

Fellas, you can lose all you want, especially after punking LeBron here on national television. But you don't have to look like a bunch of bitches while you're adding to the loss column.

Andray Blatche?

Feeling a Draft?

You NFL fans and draftniks are going to like what we've got for you starting this week. Jason Askew is a friend of mine who has way too much time on his hands and uses it to study the NFL draft prospects in depth.

Starting Monday we'll be running regular columns breaking down the 2011 draft including a primer on the role of scouts and GMs in the process and then breaking down the players by position groups while concentrating primarily on whom the home town Browns might look at. Jason goes further than the first round stuff and lists a number of players the Browns might consider early on, in the middle rounds and also later in the draft

You're going to see some depth in our draft coverage and invite you to engage Jason with questions or comments when you see his column starting this week.

After all, it might be the only NFL football related discussion that takes place this season.

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