

Lingering Items--Eye Opening Edition

Written by {ga=gdbenz}

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Watching the Indians complete their sweep of the Baltimore Orioles on Sunday served, if nothing else, as a reminder of how easy baseball can seem at times.

In still another textbook example of the kind of baseball every team hopes to play, the Indians' victory, indeed the entire series, was a clinic of good starting pitching, timely hitting, and an effective bullpen. When those elements click, any team is unbeatable.

For now all of this stands in stark contrast to how we've been conditioned by the Indians over the last few seasons. In most cases, the Indians have seen at least two of those three elements, and too often all three, shut down at the same time as they've slept walk to one indistinguishable loss after another.

The Indians would seemingly go weeks without getting a timely hit. All too often the scenario played out exactly the same: the first batter would make an out. The next batter would hit a single. The next player would get a single but not be able to advance the runner to third. The next batter would ground out into an inning-ending double play.

If you want a measure of how different things are for this team at the moment, just consider Grady Sizemore's return to the lineup. First of all, he hasn't even been off the requisite year it typically takes to recover from microfracture surgery. Then in his first game back his swing looks nearly perfect as he crushed a ball for a home run. Finally, he still had enough speed to turn a ball down the right field line that didn't get all the way to the fence into a double.

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It was enough to make me look twice to confirm that his uniform said "Cleveland."

How exactly are Indians fans supposed to get used to that? We're used to things like Travis Hafner coming down with a shoulder problem that lasts longer than the tenure of most Browns head coaches. We're used to trading great players for projects. We definitely are not used to players coming back from a major injury sooner than they should and performing as if they had been healthy all along.

And then there's the stellar starting pitching. Watching Fausto Carmona get lit up on opening day seemed to fit like a favorite pair of blue jeans. Watching him throw strikes and baffle hitters in every start since seems to fit like a necktie around a shirt collar that's pinching you a little too tightly.

It's not just Carmona, however, that's causing this comforting discomfort. The relief pitching has been phenomenal. Is it just me or is every Indians pitcher getting ahead of every opposing hitter? By the time the 7th or 8th inning rolls around and the Indians are ahead, the bullpen comes in, throws more strikes and the outcome never much seems in doubt.

Even the obligatory standing ovation awaiting the third out has been going exactly as planned. It never crossed anyone's mind, for example, that closer Chris Perez wouldn't get that third out in the top of the 9th on Sunday, just as scheduled.

Now of course all anyone wants to know, including me, is whether or not there is any chance that the Indians can play this brand of interesting baseball for the rest of the season.

Fourteen games into a season is not a fair sample, certainly. Either is 24. But if the Indians are entering the month of June with 50 or so games under their belt and not much has changed, then it will be time to revise the forecasts.

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Mediation...

