

Lingering Items--Where Every "If" Comes True Edition

Written by {ga=gdbenz}

Monday, May 23 2011 6:00 PM - Last Updated Monday, May 23 2011 12:54 PM



The Cleveland Cavaliers got a bit of convenient redemption when they won the NBA's draft lottery last week. It wasn't even close to the top sports thought on the minds of Cleveland fans. The top thought, and spots 2 through 7 as well, was the Cleveland Indians.

I was talking with a friend on Sunday who theorized that the rapture did happen, perhaps earlier than planned, and that the town had collectively died and all entered the same room in heaven—a room that gets one channel, SportsTime Ohio, and the Indians play on a continuous loop and win each and every time.

It certainly seems that way at the moment. The Indians, a far less talented team, at least on paper, then probably half the league are more than 40 games into the season and still have the best record in baseball. More to the point, though, they've given no hint that they won't be able to sustain this level of play for the rest of the season.

Which gets me back to my friend's theory. This is kind of what heaven must feel like for an Indians' fan. It's a place where all your "ifs" come true, as in "if Justin Masterson can pick up where he left off at the end of last season..." or "if Asdrubal Cabrera can return to a higher level of play promised by his rookie season..." or "if Josh Tomlin can baffle hitters like few other young pitchers..." or "if Grady Sizemore can finally stay healthy...." Ok, not every "if" is falling the way it should, but you get the point.

Lingering Items--Where Every "If" Comes True Edition

Written by {ga=gdbenz}

Monday, May 23 2011 6:00 PM - Last Updated Monday, May 23 2011 12:54 PM

The Indians are a fascinating team by any measure you want to take. The roster is a patchwork of young, old, has beens and never quites. It's incredibly thin, which most rosters of teams with budgets like the Indians tend to be.

And yet, and yet, game after game, week after week this team keeps moving forward, playing with nearly unbridled confidence even as the usual bumps and grinds of every team's season approach.

Fausto Carmona, perhaps the team's best if not most mercurial pitcher, is having a mostly mediocre year and no one even notices. Carlos Santana, counted on for so much at such a young age, is barely hitting his weight. The Indians' one free agent signee, Austin Kearns, is hitting about as well as Austin Powers.

Still, the Indians are tied with the Boston Red Sox for the American League's best batting average and they trail only the Yankees in runs scored. All that could change if Sizemore and Travis Hafner, two players who have been key to both stats, don't return soon. You have to think those results would show up somewhere.

But perhaps that won't matter. This is the season where every "if" comes true and that means that Shin-Soo Choo is about due to go on a tear and even Santana and Matt LaPorta should soon climb back to respectability.

The Indians' offense has been great thus far as important to its success has been pitching. For proof, consider that the Indians are second only to Oakland in ERA but Oakland is two games below .500 while the Indians are enjoying life in the clouds.

The two worst regular pitchers on this roster have been Carmona and Chad Durbin. The former is a bit of a surprise, the latter not so much. Every one else above them has basically been unhittable. As good as the starting pitching has been, the bullpen has been even better. Chris Perez has the worst ERA of the group but it's still below 3.00 and he does have those 12 saves. His walks tend to shake the ghosts of Joe Borowski but they really aren't getting him into much trouble.

Lingering Items--Where Every "If" Comes True Edition

Written by {ga=gdbenz}

Monday, May 23 2011 6:00 PM - Last Updated Monday, May 23 2011 12:54 PM

When you see all these great statistics about the Indians in print, the fact that they have the best record in baseball is obvious. But it still takes a heavy case of eye wiping to actually believe what you're reading. You'd be hard pressed to find a team less spectacularly constructed playing so spectacularly well, in any sport.

The Indians are still about 50-60 games away from having to make some tough decisions about the direction to take this club in the season's latter stages. And it is still difficult to imagine this level of play being sustained through the mid-summer heat.

But this is the season where every "if" seems to be coming true so who can really say what comes next. Perhaps the Indians will falter as the thinness of its roster runs head long into a season that is, after all, 162 games long. At this point though it seems just as likely that the Indians will continue its steamrolling of the American League unabated because this seems to be the year when every "if" comes true.

And for once, the Indians marketing department got it right. What if indeed.

**

The Plain Dealer's Tony Grossi drew an unintentional chuckle in his weekly "Ask Tony" segment this past Sunday. A reader asked Grossi why, in the face of the lockout, he was even bothering to write about potential free agent signees. Grossi said that he was struggling to find something to write about other than the labor dispute.

See, this is funny because rather than write about news, Grossi would rather right about conjecture. It's a shame, really, when he along with Mary Kay Cabot, the Plain Dealer's two main football writers, all but ignore the lockout as if it is higher level calculus that they're never going to understand.

But on the other hand maybe it's a good thing they know their limitations. They could be like Mike Freeman at CBS Sports who recently wrote that Peyton Manning's silence on the whole thing was benefitting the owners and not the players.

Lingering Items--Where Every "If" Comes True Edition

Written by {ga=gdbenz}

Monday, May 23 2011 6:00 PM - Last Updated Monday, May 23 2011 12:54 PM

Manning, along with Tom Brady and Drew Brees, are the most prominent plaintiffs on the NFLPA-sponsored lawsuit against the owners in which they allege that virtually every activity undertaken by that cartel (their words, not mine) is illegal.

Freeman says that "the only" explanation for Manning's silence in this battle royale is to keep his image and his commercial earning ability in tact. Freeman essentially accuses Manning of being a shill for the owners and paying lip service at best to the players.

It's an explanation, but hardly the only one. You could start with the idea that the lawsuit, indeed the entire strategy employed by the NFLPA, was ill conceived from the outset. That Manning would put his name on the pleadings is actually more of an act of courage in this light.

Brees, certainly, has been the most visible player during this dispute and certainly acts as if this is a cause in which he believes. Brady, like Manning, has mostly been hanging out at home.

But this isn't about any particular players anyway and for Freeman to act as if any one of these three or any of the others for that matter are at the forefront of some groundbreaking struggle is ridiculous.

Like everything else that takes place on the business side of professional sports, this is an argument about money. The tactics employed in this case are extreme and incredibly polarizing but they're just that, tactics. It's about finding leverage in order to extract the best deal.

Brady, Manning and Brees are mere scenery to this operetta. They could be as overbearing as Chelsea Handler after a few drinks and no one would notice. They aren't being counted on to lead the charge. That would be the lawyers and the other fools who concocted this slow march to Bolivia, as Mike Tyson might say.

What Freeman and his ilk really need to see is that Manning is just being Manning. That he may be acting out of self-interest is hardly surprising. The first person on either side of this

Lingering Items--Where Every "If" Comes True Edition

Written by {ga=gdbenz}

Monday, May 23 2011 6:00 PM - Last Updated Monday, May 23 2011 12:54 PM

dispute that isn't acting out of self-interest will be the first.

**

Right now, Josh Tomlin and Justin Masterson are a combined 11-3 and gave given up 35 runs collectively. CC Sabathia and Cliff Lee are a combined 7-7 and have given up 55 runs. This week's question to ponder: Huh?