



You have to give it to the Cleveland Indians: they do keep increasing the degree of difficulty as this summer gets going and the baseball season continues. And keeping with form and the theme, the Cavaliers also appear hell bent on making things extremely difficult for themselves as well.

The good news is that Ohio State has already wet the bed and the sheets are being changed while we wait to hear how long that bastion of integrity and consistency, the NCAA, grounds the Buckeyes.

So yes, once again, it's a joyous and upbeat look at a weekend of Cleveland sports.

It wasn't enough to start the season without Grady Sizemore. It wasn't enough to see Travis Hafner and Grady Sizemore on the disabled list at the same time. It wasn't enough that Fausto Carmona is being out-pitched by everyone on the staff and that promising rookie Alex White was lost for the season with an injury far too similar to the one that derailed the career of one time phenom Adam Miller.

It wasn't enough to watch Shin-Soo Choo and Carlos Santana, two key figures in an Indians lineup with or without Sizemore and Hafner, struggle horribly during the first two months of the

season.

None of it was enough to keep the Indians from sprinting out to an early and big AL Central lead and continue to this day to hold on to at least a share of that lead.



But the broken left thumb that Choo suffered Friday night might just be enough to cripple the Tribe.

That might do it. That might just be enough.

Choo was hit by one of many errant pitches by the Giants Jonathan Sanchez Friday night and you knew he and the Indians were in big trouble when Choo laid prone on the dirt at home plate for a few minutes in obvious pain.

X-rays confirmed the break in the bone and Choo is set to see a hand specialist (who I imagine by this point is on some type of retainer and who lives in a really, really nice house with an Adam Miller Room and a Broken Hamate Garden) today or tomorrow to see if surgery is needed. Either way he's out until at least the middle of August.

And if it takes Choo as long to get his swing going after the injury as it did out of spring training then maybe he can help the Indians if they're playing in the ALCS. But make no mistake, Choo was starting to finally swing the bat and produce like he has for the last couple years right when Sanchez buzzed him.

This isn't what the Indians needed right now. They've lost four of their last five games and every

single one of them has been a run. Saturday they were shutout 1-0 because Justin Masterson was pitching and the Indians simply refuse to give the guy a run or two when he takes the mound. Naturally the Giants only run yesterday scored on a balk.

Friday night the Giants runs scored because Carlos Santana wears ping pong paddles where his glove and throwing hand should be and that makes it difficult to actually pick up a ball and throw it.

Jack Hannahan is Jack Hannahan again meaning he's an excellent late inning defensive replacement for a hack like Santana at 1B except you can't use him there because he's busy hitting .220 with no power and an OPS of .637 (an OPS+ of 81) at 3B in the starting lineup each night.

Actually Hannahan is hitting .218 so he needs a couple knocks to get to .220. He'll get them. The problem is he will have accrued an additional 25 ABs in order to get those couple hits which, well, he's just not a good hitter and his defense IS NOT ENOUGH to keep throwing him out there.

The real problem with that even if we can agree on the premise is there's really no choice now. It's the same at either C or 1B depending where Santana and his frying pan are positioned each night. Lou Marson doesn't hit and Matt LaPorta is hurt and doesn't hit (a truly useless combination).

Choo was starting to hit and help cover for the Hannahan's and Marsons of the club. Now his ABs will go to Austin Kearns and Travis who, well....umm...they don't hit.

I said before the Choo injury that the Indians would likely be in this race all summer mostly because the division is bi-polar by nature. The Tigers have cooled, the White Sox are like an electro-therapy patient and the Twins alternate between losing Joe Mauer and Justin Morneau every couple weeks.

But the Choo fracture really, really hurts the Tribe. Nick Johnson will likely be the guy that

comes up to help fill the void but (stop me if you've heard this before) he's not hitting in Columbus as he rehabs from (stop me if you've heard this before) a hand and wrist injury he suffered last season.

The Tribe is truly pushing that 'Team of destiny' thing to the limit. They need the pitching to pick them up and they'll need different heroes every night offensively to score runs. It's made even more difficult when you go on the road to NL parks and lose Hafner for 9 straight games other than for a daily PH appearance.

These are the ugly and dark days for sure in the 2011 Tribe season. But even with all that said the Indians are still playing meaningful games every day to this point. So how dark can it really be when you compare it to last season or 2009?

Let's just hope we can say that in a month.

Thud

That's the sound of jaws around Cleveland and the country hitting the floor after the Cavaliers fourth pick last Thursday night.

Cavaliers fans were excited a month back when the team won the first and fourth picks in the 201 NBA Draft. Visions of Kyrie Irving and a big guy to go along with him filled their heads and they had visions of at least making some large strides toward respectability.

Irving and Enes Kanter would have been nice. Irving and Jonas Valanciunas would have been just fine. A skilled little guy and a skilled big guy were essential to this whole 'respectability' thing.

Then Thursday came and ruined everything.

Because while the Cavs came away with Kyrie Irving (I'm convinced this was due solely to the fact there was no possible way to screw this one up) they decided to use the fourth pick in the draft on a 2nd Team All Big-12 selection named Tristan Thompson.

Let's stop for a second and get a few things straight:

__MCE_ITEM__ 1. I don't know Tristan Thompson from Emma Thompson (but that's actually part of the point)

__MCE_ITEM__ 2. I am not an NBA draft expert.

__MCE_ITEM__ 3. Tristan Thompson could prove to be David 'Sky' Thompson (without the debilitating cocaine issues I hope) and it wouldn't knock me dead from surprise.

__MCE_ITEM__ 4. Jonas Valanciunas may be the biggest bust in draft history when all is said and done.

But the Cavaliers process and explanation surrounding the Thompson pick leave a lot to be desired. Cavs GM Chris Grant said they had Thompson rated 'much higher' than fourth amongst the potential draftees. Really? Irving and Derek Williams were the consensus 1-2 picks. So if Thompson went 4th to the Cavs how many numbers are there between Williams and 'much higher'?

There was nothing Cleveland could do about Kanter going 3rd but the reports bouncing around as the Cavs weighed their options on Valanciunas were that the Cavaliers were really concerned about his buyout with his overseas club. That really impossibly technical and difficult issue was resolved between Toronto and Valanciunas's club team by 3pm the day after the draft.

That leads to me believe the cavaliers really liked Thompson. I'm just not sure why other than the fact he'd be available to play immediately and he apparently impressed Grant and owner Dan Gilbert in his interviews and workouts. That's really where we get to the heart of my issue with the pick in that moving a kid up to the Top 4 (even in an admittedly weak draft) based on his interviews and his workouts in an empty gym make my head hurt.

You know what the game tape and the accumulated statistics of Thompson say? They say he's a decent college freshman who plays better defense than offense (13ppg) and who's no threat at all from beyond the 3-point arc or from even 12-15 feet. At Texas he blocked an impressive 2.4 shots per game but he was also often in foul trouble.

On the offensive end he was around the baskets for dunks, lay ins and put backs and he also did a decent job getting to the line. The problem was when he got there he knocked down less than 50% of his free throws.



Thompson is 6'8" tall and weighs about 230lbs. He does have a 7'1" wing span so he's long but he's not freakishly athletic. So what you have is a young kid who's not an offensive threat but who plays pretty good defense. The issue being you may not be able to have him on the floor when you need a stop because at the other end the ball may end up in his hands and, God forbid, someone could foul him.

Were the Cavs looking for a defender at the power forward position? With the fourth pick? And if you wanted someone to defend, especially at the rim, why not take the chance on a much better and longer defender like Bismack Biyombo? Biyombo is a guy whose floor was Ben Wallace and whose ceiling is Serge Ibaka.

I'd rather have that than potentially a smaller version of Jordan Hill with my fourth pick. And are they collecting incomplete power forwards just out of habit or spite?

It's way too early to flush the Thompson pick and put it up there in the annals with Luke Jackson, DaJuan Wagner, Stewart Granger and Keith Lee as all-time Cavalier mistakes. But the thought process gives me real pause and concern.

They went safe and with a kid who will likely contribute but whose ceiling is likely low. I don't understand not taking someone whose floor is the same level as Thompson's but whose ceiling is much higher. Isn't that what you're looking and hoping to do with the fourth overall pick in the draft?

This just reeks of an overwhelmed and inexperienced GM being manipulated by an overbearing owner who didn't want to wait a year for a guy like Valanciunas when there are seats in 'The Q' and in the casino to fill. Never mind another season of losing while Irving breaks in and Valanciunas served his final season overseas would have been perfect to position them for next year's much deeper draft.

The Cavs can easily point to a weak draft as the reason they went how they went. But even in a strong draft having a GM with his owner's hand up his back that makes the GM's mouth move scares me to death.

Day of Reckoning Awaits

The NCAA has cleared out of Columbus with volumes of investigative materials and a couple months to formulae the punishment Ohio State will face.

It's not going to be good. I know Polly and Anna from Columbus would love to have us believe that there was nothing horrific happening down there. But the program is still smoldering from the bombs that dropped regarding Jim Tressel and Terrelle Pryor leaving.



Think about it: nothing is wrong when you lose a legendary coach and a two-time BCS Bowl Game winning QB without it truly being their choice? If it happened anywhere else in the country the same people defending this program would be laughing hysterically at the one undergoing those changes.

It's a constant battle between what seems like two polar opposite forces. You have the Buckeye haters fueled by ESPN personalities who won't fail to mention every recruit that backs out of their commitment from OSU while Buckeye backers and honks publish testimonial after testimonial about what a wonderful human being Tressel was.

The best part of the deal is that it's closer to being over. The Buckeyes who remain and their interim coach will pay the price for the sins of entitled and immature teammates like Pryor and Devier Posey. The Buckeyes will be fie this season. I'd be surprised to see them with fewer than 9-10 wins. I think the years after will be where the effect is felt. Scholarships lost, bowl games forbidden and the lack of Buckeye appeal to the next generation of entitled and immature kids will take a toll.

How long that remains true is up to the NCAA and OSU. The NCAA will set the bar but how serious OSU is about cleaning up the program will also make a difference. If they get away from doing what everyone else does (the lying, cheating, under the table payments, deals on houses and cars, etc) then they could be hurting for a decade.

If they get back to a reasonable amount of cheating but do so without bringing in kids like Pryor who flaunt it and bring about investigations then they should be okay in half that time.

Call me a cynic if you want to. Just don't call me naïve.