(Readers Note: This is my first improvised column of the 2012 Indians. It's also my last.)

Attention Indians fans and baseball fans alike: Do you work for a living? Go to school? Caretaker? If so, you probably don't have the time or patience to compare player's win-loss records, ERA's, HR's, RBI's and batting averages. Not many do. So take a load off and look only at one simple stat... W.A.R. Or as I like to call it, "The Three Letter acronym that stands for "Addicting Fun."

For those who don't already know (about WAR), I'll keep this explanation extremely short and simple for you. WAR takes a player and computes every statistic imaginable, and poops out one simple number. The higher a guys number is, the better he is. That's all you need to know for now.

Since 1995, Highest Cleveland Indians Individual W.A.R.s for Season.

Translation: Here are the 31 best individual Cleveland Indians' seasons since '95.

(* indicates a current player.)

8.0: Jim Thome-2002

7.4: Roberto Alomar-2001

7.2: Jim Thome-1996

6.8: Manny Ramirez-1999

6.8: Albert Belle-1995

6.5: Cliff Lee-2008

6.5: Grady Sizemore-2006

6.4: Roberto Alomar-1999

6.3: Charles Nagy-1996

6.2: Manny Ramirez-2000

6.0: Grady Sizemore-2008*

6.0: C.C. Sabathia-2007

5.9: Fausto Carmona-2007*

5.7: Grady Sizemore-2007*

5.7: Jim Thome-1997

5.6: Travis Hafner-2006*

5.4: Dennis Martinez-1995

5.3: Jhonny Peralta-2005

5.1: Shin Soo Choo-2010*

5.0: Shin Soo Choo-2009*

5.0: Manny Ramirez-1997

4.8: Manny Ramirez-1998

4.8: Victor Martinez-2005

4.7: Travis Hafner-2004*

4.6: Omar Vizquel-1999

4.6: Bartolo Colon-2000

4.4: C.C. Sabathia-2006

4.4: Asdrubal Cabrera-2011*

4.2: Chuck Finley-2000

4.2: Rafael Betancourt-2007

4.1: Carlos Santana-2011*

Hopefully that got your interest sparked. Unfortunately, the rest of what you'll go on to read has little-to nothing to do with any of the information laid out above. That was just my gift to Indians fans. For the majority of us, looking at this teams past is always more more exciting/rewarding/awe-inspiring than looking at the present and/or future. Especially right now.

Hey, This is an Improvisation.

What was supposed to be the third of four quarterly installments, will now be the last. This morning, my editors approached me with some despairing news, saying this would be my last Indians column of the season. Like the Nationals with Strasberg, they've kept a close eye on my Indians watch-count all season. (You know, to look out for my long term health.) As of right

now, I've watched 358 total hours (approximately) of Indians baseball in 2012. My limit was set at 500 hours, but with the teams recent—well, whatever you want to call it—struggles, they've decided it best to just shut me down early. It's simpy getting too messy. So there you have it; I won't be watching the Cleveland Indians anymore, and as a result, I won't be writing anymore columns. And thank God.

But the damage is already done. I spent 300-plus hours with zero payoff in the end. If you're reading this, perhaps you did as well. It's distressing when you think about it, really. I mean, all along we knew this thing would likely come to a unruly end. But by the beginning of August??? I certainly was prepping for it back in July.

It Is What it Is

Fans are up in arms, expressing concern for both the near, and long-term future of this team; it's a innate reaction in response to an accumulation of experiences, but it's also warranted. Have you seen this team lately? With Choo entering his final year and others quickly approaching that eerie arbitration word, we know next year could be one of the last. The team could be "all in." What's insulting is that we pretty much know this team won't (and probably can't) do anything significant to improve themselves this offseason. So yea, so much for a true "all in" season.

We were disappointed with the turnout of the trade deadline and have lost much respect for the party(s) responsible for the entrapment of Matt LaPorta. But that's water under the bridge. The impending reality of this teams bleak future is what stings above the rest. We've suddenly had a abrupt, change of heart towards Antonetti. Plenty have gone as far as giving Manny Acta, the Romeo Crennel treatment—completely forgetting that a manager has less than one percent of an effect on a teams marginal outcome over a 162 game season. But of course... we're really just fed up with...what else, the ownership.

Shit Happens

For me though, I'm still sulking on the fact that, between July 27th and August 7th, this team lost 11 straight games. That skid is the only reason the Indians aren't playing meaningful games. And it sucks. An 11 game slide is a freak occurrence for any team, no matter how bad. It's

something that doesn't exactly happen every day, as evidenced by the fact that they nearly tied an 80 year old franchise record for consecutive losses. When you're a token .500 team, you can't recover.

There's really no legitimate rhyme or reason for it happening, it just did, and we're suffering the consequences. Sure, it's easy to sum up the season and the Tribe's rapid decent from contention, stating how this team was always inherently flawed and destined to crumble. But honestly, did you know the rotation was going to turn out as terrible as it did? After that momentum swinging win over Verlander and the Tigers, did you see them immediately being swept by the Royals and Twins in consecutive series'?

If you want to talk about flawed teams, look at the Angels, Tigers, Dodgers, Marlins, and Red Sox, among others. I mean, if you've got a $160 million payroll and you're struggling to compete or out of contention entirely, you have to be considered flawed, right?

The Indians biggest flaw this season was that they were pretty unlucky. Derek Lowe wasn't A.J. Burnett. Johnny Damon didn't pan out. Santana slumped. Lonnie Chisenhall had an Anderson Varejao freak injury. Fausto Carmona was Rob Hernandez. Carlos Beltran wouldn't sign. This doesn't make them special though; plenty of teams are unlucky. Plenty are lucky too. The Orioles are one of the lucky ones. They've been outscored by 47 runs, yet would make the wildcard if the season were to end today. In games that go to extra innings, Baltimore is 12-2 (insanely remarkable) and 23-6 in one run games (equally crazy).

There's a ton of luck involved in this sport, more so now than ever before. Baseball talking heads and writers are all using the same lingo the Bill Barnwell's of the world use to dissect the NFL. Over the last couple of seasons, I've heard the terms regression, expected improvement, overachievers, under achievers, win/loss pythagorean expectation, tough losses, cheap wins, and blown saves more than I care to remember. In other words, the gap of disparity in baseball has considerably shrunk. It just has, that's what all these incongruencies mean. It's going to continue to tighten, too.

Why? Because Baseball finally got something right in the post steroid era.

They added an extra wild card.

In doing so, they gave the future of the sport a pretty entertaining prospectus—we get to watch a guaranteed one game playoff every year—but more importantly, they've now provided hope for franchises that have been on the "Window Plan." This is just year 1 with the 10 team playoff structure. It'll be some time before they reach NFL type of parity, but that's the target destination. A very possible target, by the way. The simple addition of the extra wildcard will prove to have remarkable effects on the game. At the end of the day, the Indians future isn't as bleak as we think. It's why I'm not currently having an anxiety attack over the abysmal looking future of this team.

By virtue of simple math, the wildcard expansion makes it easier for teams to reach the postseason, sure. But earning the right to play in a one-and-done elimination after battling through a 162 game season is more cruel than it is rewarding. (At least for the losing party) Really, the fact that it gives an extra team in each league a chance to win a World Series is just the surface. It's really not even a big deal. It's beauty is in the fact that it opens the floodgates to contention for so many.

With its fundamental structure, it naturally allows teams to contend further into the schedule of their season. We saw it this year in mid July when all but three AL teams were within 4 games of the last wildcard spot. This may or may not give certain teams a false pretense about themselves and their seemingly good situation as Keith Law and Eric Karabell are screaming "PEOPLE, THAT TEAM IS NOT GOOD!!!." But while this type of false pretense can end up hurting teams, it's a wonderful team for the league. Hell, there is no such thing as false pretense in sports. It's just hope. The presence of hope is followed by investment. Which in return warrants the incentive to actively pursue. (See: Ubaldo Jimenez) For a team like the Baltimore Orioles, this never used to be the case, as they were relegated to the gimp role in the AL East. Now that their lot in life has changed, every other small market team (or any team that isn't that good) will benefit. In trading for Jimenez last year, the Indians beat out the Yankees. Although we all know it turned out terribly—and the Yankees were the ones to ultimately benefit—the trade goes to show just how big of an impact a surprise contender can have on the market.

Already, we've seen teams compete with scrappy, young rosters that are splashed with discount veterans, role playing specialists, and a handful of up and coming all stars. That's the A's, Orioles, Diamondback, Cardinals, and Pirates in a nutshell. Now it's going to be the Red Sox. Actually, that's the Indians, Jays, Royals, Brewers, and Mets as well. They're not that far off. V-ying for contention isn't as hard as some make it seem. This isn't just because of the wildcard expansion, either. It's got a lot to do with baseball's new CBA, and its nuances pertaining to compensatory draft picks and their effect on the entire market. It also helps that teams are becoming more and more sound in their scouting, and have had far more success

hitting on top draft picks. Thanks to the viral era of sabermetrics, a top 15 pick in Baseball's Amateur draft is far more valuable today than it was a half decade ago. A "to be named later" player in the backend of a trade is now more than it seems.

Back to the Indians

It's likely they go into next season without doing much of anything to upgraded the roster. But I can actually live with that.

The Indians can still contend next season. And the next year. And the next year. As fans, our biggest fear is that this team winds up like the 2010 team who were out of the race by the end of April, finishing with a 69-93 record. We would take a team that contends into August if it were given to us. That's what this team is capable of though.

As much as I hate saying it..... this team is still young. And the youth is pretty talented, by the way. Believe it or not, they're still better off than a lot of teams. Furthermore, next season they'll likely get a roster upgrade by default. Lonnie Chisenhall will undoubtedly be a giant upgrade over Jack Hanahan; he just will. Rob Hernandez, even for as bad as we know him to be, will be an upgrade over...well, pretty much anyone in the starting rotation except for Masterson. Carlos Carasco, the forgotten Cliff Lee trade chip whom Keith Law (

Hell, Brett Lillibridge might even be a legitimate player.

There lineup isn't as bad as it seems. They hold claim to 5 of the top 30 offensiveWAR's in the AL. No other team can say that about their lineup; not New York, not Boston, not L.A., not even Texas. In case you're curious, those five player's are Shin-Soo Choo, Asdrubal Cabrera, Michael Brantley, Carlos Santana, and Jason Kipnis. They don't have Miguel Cabrera in the middle, but 1 through 5 they're very formidable.

Unfortunately, for the greater part of the season they've proven to be what I consider "Garbage hitters." Meaning, they're good hitters who are valuable to the team—as illustrated by their offensive WAR—but they've got a terrible habit of stringing together hits and runs at all the wrong times.. They'll score 6 runs in a game when their opposition scores 9. Choo will always double into the gap with 2-outs and no one on. Santana and Kipnis will go 3 for 5 on the night but hit into a ninth inning, game ending double play with the bases loaded. Little Brett Lillibridge will launch a 3-run homer in the ninth in a 8-2 game. KotchmanIn other words, yes, they've been abominable when it comes to hitting in the clutch. There's reason to believe that this could change next year. Shit happens.

If they're in it at or around the trade deadline, they'll chug on with Choo and his expiring contract. If they're not, they'll dump Choo, probably Perez, and maybe even Asdrubal Cabrera. This isn't as bad as it sounds, though. It's not the end of the world. They would cash in considerably. It wouldn't even mark a completely "we're tearing this team apart" period.

Big spenders will continue to be greedy. They'll continue to have win-now mentality's. They'll give up whatever is necessary. This has always shown in the past; however, this year there was a giant holdup on the trade front. Teams we're caught up in trying to fully grasp the implications of the new CBA, while at the same time trying to handicap what the expanded wildcard means both now and later down the road. In the end, despite a multitude of reported hold ups, nixes, and cases of cold feat, the giant trade trips fell this year. How this will effect these teams now and in the future remains to be seen. There's still plenty of uncertainty with this new wildcard

It was reported that most of the holdups were because the potential buyers found themselves caught trying to decide whether it was worth it to pursue a trade for just the chance to play in a one game playoff (where anything could happen). But did Buster Olney, the one who reported this, forget about the sellers in this? They're at as equal of a dissonance as the buyers. After all, by keeping guys like, say, Dempster and Soriano— if your team can catch a few breaks, luck out on some low-risk signings, and find a couple pleasant surprises in their farm system—that team could find themselves in contention as early as next year.

Just know that we'll see fewer reluctant sellers; they know they're never that far off from contention. And more desperate buyers; they know they're just one or two players away from being in contention.

And then you'll have other teams like the Rangers, who still believe the acquisition of a interleague arm (hailing from a terrible team) will put them over the top in a five game series against a frisky A's or Orioles team where, just like the wildcard round, anything could happen.

(That's improv)