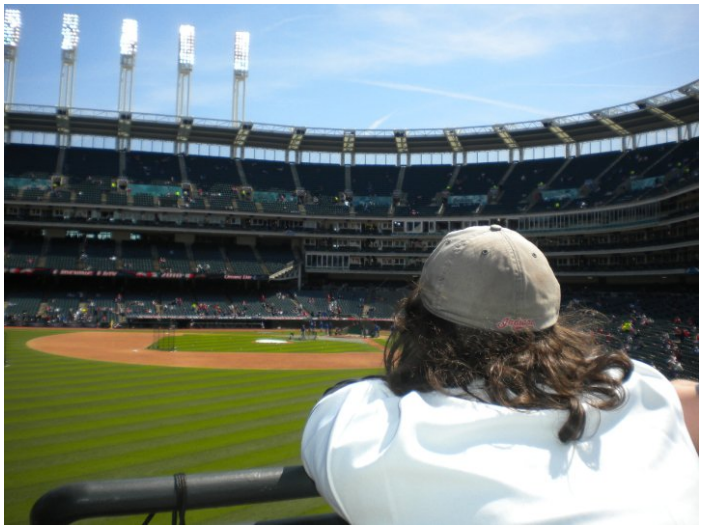

The Indians didn't so much fire Manny Acta as they mercifully let him out of his contract a year early so that he didn't have to suffer through another 85+ loss season next year. Acta is doing and saying all the right things following his dismissal, not throwing anybody under the bus, shouldering the blame, and talking with the media, just the same as he always did while managing the Indians. He easily could have let a lot of frustration pour out like a water main break at a major intersection. But, he didn't. Maybe he should have.

Rumors and reports are circulating everywhere that Acta's message simply fell on deaf ears as the wheels, bumper, and muffler fell off during the team's epic collapse this season. The team soured on Acta, who almost always exhibited an even-keel demeanor in the dugout. He rarely came out and argued in an animated way. He was never seen berating a player in the dugout. He didn't throw his players under the bus. He hinted at front office accountability, discussing what positions the team needed upgrades at for next season, but never played the pity card.

Acta was a good soldier for this organization. As a man who has a very progressive ideology, believing in numbers and matchups rather than gut feelings and whims, Acta knew the situation that he was walking into when he was hired following the 2009 season. Somewhere, in that bald dome covered by a trademark fedora, Acta hoped things would be different than he envisioned them. They never were. He worked miracles from time-to-time, vaulting a team of replacement-level and below players into contention for stretches of the season, but the hump was just too high for the team to overcome.

Naturally, Acta must be disappointed to be fired, even though it means more time with his family and less time with a sinking ship, devoid of orders coming from the wheelhouse. In his heart of hearts, Acta knows he didn't fail. He was given crayons and told to reproduce a Monet. He was

given fingerpaints and sent up on scaffolding to redo the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. There's not a manager alive, or dead, who could have used enough infomercial adhesive products to patch the holes in this boat and watch it float into the playoffs. He was dropped off at the base of Mount Everest wearing a Speedo and told to climb to the top without freezing to death. (Sorry for the visual)

Managers always talk about accountability. They always talk about accountability from themselves and from their players. But, discussing accountability from the front office is incredibly rare. Like any business, when something goes south, the CEO, CFO, and COO are all safe. It's the people below them who bear the brunt, as if they're somehow to blame. In this case, the blame should fall on Mark Shapiro, Chris Antonetti, and their respective staffs. Everybody wants to point fingers at the Dolans, which is understandable given the financial resources needed to be a consistent competitor in Major League Baseball. But, they cannot make money appear out of thin air. The only option is to sell the team and that hasn't seemed like a viable solution, as there has been no indication of that happening.

Acta is a casualty of the ineptitude of Shapiro and Antonetti, and, of course, to an extent, the Dolans. Would Manny Acta still have his job if Drew Pomeranz and Alex White were at the back end of a starting rotation that has been one of the worst in Indians history? Would Acta be filling out today's lineup card if Josh Willingham were patrolling left field? Consider that Acta had to replace two incredibly key members of his coaching staff when pitching coach Tim Belcher stepped down and bench coach Tim Tolman stepped aside to focus on health issues. Belcher was highly regarded for the strides he made with the Indians' pitching staff, and, in particular, Justin Masterson. Scott Radinsky, the replacement pitching coach, didn't even last the season.

All of this blame to go around and the people who are responsible for the bulk of it are still in their offices without repercussion. Meanwhile, Acta is hoping he will get an interview with another team this winter.

The whole Acta discussion brings another question to the forefront. How much does a manager even matter? Talent speaks for itself. Good teams win, in spite of how the lineup is constructed. Players naturally fall into roles based on how good they are. Bad teams lose, because they have no talent and it doesn't matter how creative a manager tries to be. The mismatch in skill will always come to the forefront in a game predicated on individual battles between hitter and pitcher.

To me, the manager only matters when the talent level is high enough to compete. The Indians' talent level is not high enough to compete. Offensively, the Indians are average. Defensively, the Indians are average. Pitching-wise, the Indians are well below average. There's only so much that a manager can do with a roster that has so many shortcomings. But, if the Indians had competitive talent, then a manager could be the difference between wins and losses.

It's obvious that bad teams have fewer options. Where good teams have bench players that are viable options and don't have to burn out the same bullpen arms every game, bad teams have no luxuries. The best nine position players play every day. The top relievers appear in 75-80 games. No help can come from below because anybody who is almost ready for the big leagues is already there.

That makes it hard for a manager to play matchups or try to get an edge. There are no wrinkles in the gameplan. Bad teams can't risk giving up outs on the basepaths. It really handcuffs what a manager can do. But, there are countless examples of one manager outfoxing another come playoff time or during a pennant race. Having the necessary playing talent puts a manager in a position to use his talent.

It'll be a long time, probably, before we can find out if Manny Acta is a good manager or not. I outlined in the August 18th   View From the Porch how much of a talent deficiency Acta has had to operate with during all six of his seasons as manager. Depending on his next gig, if he gets one, it's unlikely that he will have the talent it takes to be a contender. Managerial openings with good teams are few and far between. Acta could walk into the right scenario where he has an owner willing to spend money to improve the ballclub.

It's hard to say that Acta deserved a better fate because this was the only possible ending. Every manager gets fired at some point, unless they retire, and Acta is just 43 years old. Frustration caught up with Acta and he probably did burn some bridges behind closed doors, both with his superiors and his subordinates. My lasting impression of Acta, though, will be of a guy who is a case of wasted potential. I firmly believe Acta had the mind and personality it requires to be a manager.

There's nothing left to do but wish Acta the best and hope that changes come from the front office. No matter how loved Sandy Alomar Jr. is from his days in Cleveland, he, too, will fail as a manager unless he is given the tools he needs to do the job. The biggest tragedy in all of this will be if we never get the chance to see what kind of manager Sandy Alomar Jr. can be. I'm not

convinced we ever saw what Acta was capable of. Unless this roster is drastically improved, we'll never know with Alomar either.