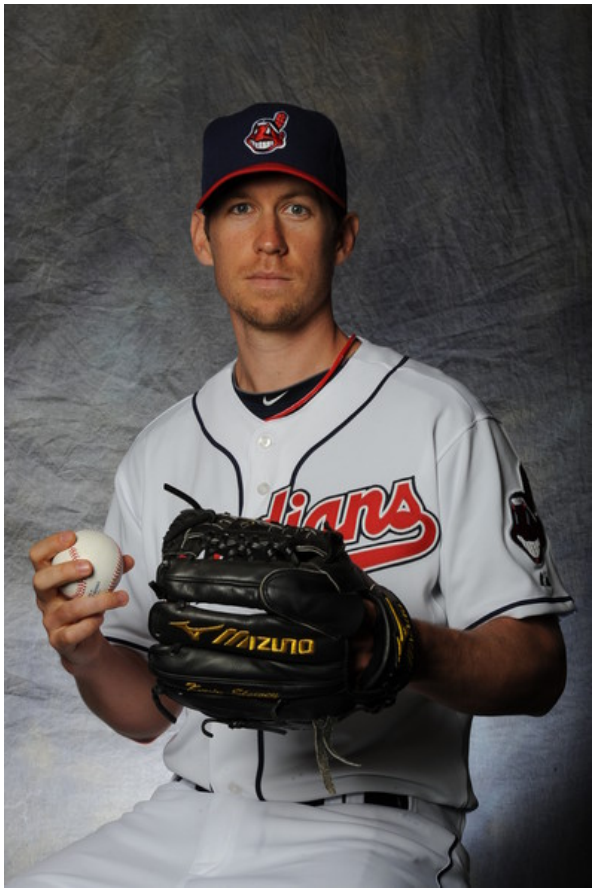

I rotate my desktop backgrounds, because Windows 7 is cool like that. As I usually do, I make my own backgrounds because I'm an amateur Photoshop type of a dude and well, I sat here at the computer on Sunday looking and simply shaking my head.

Manny Acta, very prominent on the background was flanked by Carlos Santana, Shin-Soo Choo, and Ubaldo Jimenez. I know, what was I thinking putting someone like Jimenez on the background? One one would expect that Jimenez, either a favorite player of mine or someone who would be the key to an Indians playoff run.

Yeah that was my mistake. If it isn't buying a shirt jersey (shirsey as Anthony Castrovince recently coined, brilliantly) it's my desktop wallpaper ultimately dooming someone. I'll just stick to regular Indians shirts for awhile and take the path the Indians do by putting old memories and Indians legends on the background.

But then I looked at it with the pictures of Feller, Tony Pena, Kenny Lofton & Omar Vizquel, Sandy Alomar Jr., and Larry Doby all faded into the background and of course, my optimism

gave in and I put Jason Kipnis and Vinnie Pestano prominently on the front.

I really hope I didn't screw with anything by doing that.

[BRANTLEY UNDERGOES SURGERY]

Welcome to the offseason where there are two things that are for certain.

The first is that there will be several players who undergo surgery since they have roughly four months to recover. The second is that any and all news is used as a way to feed our baseball hunger by using many words to discuss things that ordinarily would be a foot note within the season.

Not that **Michael Brantley** having surgery would be a footnote within the season, but in the realm of "concerning things" this is not really one of them.

Yet we're here to talk about it, analyze it, and likely over-discuss and over-analyze it. Brantley & nbsp;underwent surgery last week
to fix a sports hernia issue. The recovery period is short in the long offseason, with him being ready to go in three to six weeks. Which is plenty of time for him to condition in the offseason and be ready to go come February.

What this really means is that Brantley was playing hurt or at least in some discomfort, other than what kept him in and out of the lineup down the stretch. The fact that he continued to play is a hat-tip in his direction.

"I'm very proud of that," Brantley said at the end of the season. "I was going out there each and every day and battling with my team and staying healthy. That's something I needed to do. It was something that was in my goals at the start of spring, and it's something I'm looking forward to doing, hopefully, for many years."

Brantley remaining relatively healthy was just as big as the season he had, perhaps because him remaining healthy is a reason he had the season he had. A healthy Michael Brantley will do this team all sorts of well as it fills such an important position in center field and, I'd say if they get the pieces to go around him, a top-of-the-lineup bat.

[WINTER BALL HEATS UP]

Here is the complete listing of Winter Ball participants.

Dominican Republic

Tim Fedroff (OF - Aguilas)

Kevin Slowey (SP - Azucaeros)

Juan Diaz (SS - Estrellas)

Fabio Martinez (RP -Toros)

Puerto Rico

Rob Bryson (RP - Criollos)

Roberto Perez (C - Indios)

Matt Langwell (RP - Gigantes)

Joe Colon (SP - Gigantes)

Gio Soto (SP - Gigantes)

Venezuela

Toru Murata (RP - Navegantes)

Gregorio Petit (IF - Leones)

Jesus Aguilar (1B - Leones)

Hector Rondon (SP - Leones)

Obviously some are just playing to play while others are playing to make up for lost time. Hector Rondon is probably the name to watch the most as he tries to continue to build up in his return from Tommy John surgery.

Perhaps the guy to keep your other eye on though is **Kevin Slowey**, who has become a forgotten man in this whole grand scheme of figuring out the mess of a rotation. Slowey was acquired after the Indians found out about the artist formerly known as Fausto Carmona. He lost the fifth starter battle to Jeanmar Gomez and got hurt in Columbus before Gomez imploded, making 2012 a lost season for the 28-year-old.

Now he's healthy and pitching in Dominican league winter ball . The good news about his injury is that it wasn't arm related and that the stress fracture in his rib cage is healed. Slowey is arbitration eligible and since he was with the Rockies at the time, it was not the Indians that really were negotiating with Slowey last year. Now, he could be on the chopping block if he doesn't show anything in winter ball.

And if he does, perhaps the Indians can add a cheap option to their rotation options, because lord knows they will need all of them.

The Arizona Fall League is underway as of last week and as always, the Indians have their group of minor leagues in on it. They sent pitchers Shawn Armstrong, Trey Haley, Matt Packer, and T.J. House, and position players Alex Monsalve, Ronny Rodriguez, Tyler Holt, and Carlos Moncrief (taxi squad player eligilble to play on Wednesday and Saturday) to play for the Scottsdale Scorpions. Hitting coach of the Clippers Phil Clark is with the staff as well.

Thus far Ronny Rodriguez has played a considerable amount, going 3-for-12 while Tyler Holt has gone 2-for-8. Shawn Armstrong has tossed 2.2 scoreless innings with a pair of strikeouts and Trey Haley has had a little trouble, giving up a pair of earned runs in his two innings of work.

[RANDOM RUNDOWN]

The **Terry Francona** chatter has seemingly wound down since last week when the Indians made the official announcement. Plenty have chimed in and clearly there are many people that have praised the move, but have also thrown the point up that Francona can't do it without some sort of infusion of talent.

I'm personally done with it. I've made my stance clear (and it is rather close to what I just described) so we're going to move onto the rest of the offseason. There will be plenty of Francona news to bark about, I'm sure.

This bit is of course one briefly touched up on in the press conference, but is worth mentioning. **Justin Masterson**
is the one player on this current team who has experience in playing with Terry Francona. There is mutual excitement that the pair has been reunited in Cleveland and as if there was any question, Masterson will continue to be a starter. Francona said it was a "hard conversation" to have with Justin the day they traded him to Cleveland.

"Our choice for manager this year was between two excellent candidates," Masterson wrote in an e-mail. "I am excited to have Tito at the helm. He does a great job of communicating to his players and is very passionate about the game and about seeing all of his players have success. I've always had a great relationship with Tito and he showed me great respect and courage in my rookie year [2008] to give me an opportunity and keep throwing me out in the mix."

So there's that, and that's a nice little story. The story for me though is what Masterson did last season and how unacceptable it is for him to throw up another performance like that. Trading him at this point would be foolish, considering his value is down. So the Indians need to hold on and hope Masty bounces back. Not just for the sake of the rotation, but for all of our sanity in having at least one dependable pitcher.

There is nothing on the front of Francona's staff being rounded out. Of course the big piece that needs to fall is Sandy Alomar Jr.'s status and that is currently up in the air as he is likely to make the rounds for the few openings.

This isn't a question of if **Sandy Alomar Jr.** will be a manager, but rather when. It has been that question for a few years now as he's continued to get managerial interviews and it seemed like Cleveland was his best shot as any. So now we ask, when?

The Rockies are looking for a manager and well... color me confused as to why Jason Giambi, who is STILL playing is even a candidate for their opening , but he is. That just kind of shows you how much of a mess things are in Colorado right now. I'm not sure if Sandy Alomar Jr. will end up being a candidate, but I hope not. And it has nothing to do with him leaving Cleveland and everything to do with that just being a bad situation for him to walk into and be in charge of.

The other opening is in Boston and you could probably assume that after the failed Bobby Valentine experiment, Boston is more in-line to make a more low-key hiring. They're looking after Brad Ausmus, another guy with no experience, but he makes a little more sense than Jason Giambi. Ausmus has been a "special assistant" since retiring and is managing Team Israel in the World Baseball Classic qualifying rounds.

If you read into the cracks of one of Paul Hoynes' report, he has Sandy Alomar Jr. saying he "expects" to be back next year , but expectations can change if Boston comes calling of course. If not, it sounds like Alomar would be on-board for another year as the bench coach. So I would think that unless Boston opts to go with Alomar (and they did interview him last year, so maybe there's a realistic possibility he becomes a favorite there), Sandy could be back.

And then the rest of the dominoes will start to fall.

Voting is open for the Hank Aaron award , given to two players, one American League and one National League, that are the "best offensive player" in the game. Of course each team has a nominee and really this is what many vote for when they vote for the MVP, the best offensive player. The Indians nominee is Shin-Soo Choo. So if you think he out-shined the likes of Miguel Cabrera, Edwin Encarnacion, and Mike Trout, go ahead and give him a vote.

In case you missed it, the Akron Aeros are under new ownership . The team was sold to Ken Babby from the Agganis family. Should be a great move for the Aeros, who will stay in Akron but probably get a new name. The park is nice that is for sure, but it definitely needs some upgrades and that sounds like what will happen under Babby's ownership. Should be a fun time to see the Aeros progress and they have the winning lineage to go with it.

In HAWKMAN news, **Shelley Duncan** will be unlikely to return to the Cleveland Indians as he officially became a free agent when he elected for it due to him being on a minor league roster. Also electing free agency were Luke Carlin ("Snarlin' Carlin), and Dan Wheeler. Farewell thee Hawkman, farewell.

[WHAT'S COMING UP NEXT]

Offseason Rundowns will occur sporadically throughout the offseason recapping news and notes, but I will be busy, especially in the upcoming weeks. This week look for the start of my season wrap-up pieces with the first upcoming piece being the Minor League rundown. Also to come will be the annual All-Daily Team, End of the Year Feathers, and the start of the offseason previews.

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Nino has a blog! Give it a visit at The Tribe Daily , because Shin-Soo Choo will certainly be dancing 'Gangnam Style' somewhere there.

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