In Gary Benz's latest, he takes notice of some lazy reporting by the various newspapers Indians beat writers. In particular, Gary notes how several different outlets all picked up and ran with a near identical piece on C.C Sabathia the other day. Gary sees this latest "coincidence" as a microcosm of what's happening to the print sports media, whose reporting never gets any better while the competition's does daily.

Because it's the longest season, all of the participants in a team's baseball season inevitably become a bit clubby with each other. That isn't limited to simply members of the team and the coaching staff. To the contrary it applies to the extended family, including the media, at least as it's practiced in Cleveland.

Everyone, for example, is used to WTAM's talking troll Mike Trivisonno serving as the house shill for the city's professional sports teams. After all, WTAM pays huge money to each team for the privilege of carrying the games and all manner of pre and post-game shows. Consequently, it shouldn't surprise anyone when Trivisonno, while interviewing infielder Josh Barfield the other day in Winter Haven, referred to Manager Eric Wedge as "Wedgie." It's how the players refer to their manager and, hey, we're all friends here, right? But it did serve as a reminder that the relationship between the media and the sporting figures they cover is often more cozy than most of us would like.

But Trivisonno isn't a journalist. Heck, he's barely a broadcaster. So it's not exactly sporting to pick on such an easy target. But how, then, to explain it when similar symbiosis develops

not only among members of the media and the people they cover but among media members themselves?

There are enough stories arising out of spring training on a daily basis that would normally render the odds of any two reporters having exactly the same feature on the same day infinitesimal, let alone three reporters. But among the media elite covering Cleveland, convenience, cooperation and camaraderie are the rule. There was a time when they would be the exception.

If you are one of the dwindling few who happen to read more than one local newspaper each day, you've likely noticed this phenomenon but either didn't make the connection or just didn't care. When reading the various feature stories punched out by each newspaper's beat reporters, one is often left with an overwhelming sense of déjà vu all over again. But it's not because the same reporter is writing the same story again and again. It's because different reporters for different newspapers are writing the same stories, often at the same time, again and again.

Wednesday was the most recent but hardly the first or only example. The headline in the Plain Dealer for a story written by beat reporter Paul Hoynes was "C.C. Makes Pitch For Young Blacks." Sheldon Ocker of the Akron Beacon Journal countered with "Baseball Losing Black Kids." Andy Call of the Canton Repository checked in with "C.C. Wants to Do More to Boost Baseball in Inner Cities." The gist of each story was exactly the same: C.C. lamenting that young blacks are gravitating toward basketball and football and not toward baseball.

Only a fool would think it merely a coincidence that three reporters, supposedly competing (if only via their papers' internet sites) would happen upon the same story on exactly the same day. More likely, much more likely, is that sloth and laziness has replaced drive and initiative when covering what can often be a boring and mundane spring training. Maybe it was Hoynes this time that happened upon Sabathia and began chatting about the issue when Ocker happened on by. Call, seeing Hoynes and Ocker with Sabathia maybe thought something big was happening and listened in as well. Any other combination is just as likely as well. That's

the nature of how these things work and the fact that whoever had Sabathia's ear first and let the others stay is shocking.

This is not to suggest that the underlying story is unimportant. Indeed, if you happen upon a little league game in nearly any suburban city (good luck finding a little league program in the inner city), the make-up of every team is overwhelmingly white. That may be a reflection of the lack of diversity within the suburbs, but it's also a reflection of the fact that baseball does not hold the same appeal for young blacks as it does for young whites. But Sabathia's observations were hardly news. They were merely the kinds of statements, as a reporter, you hope to elicit from your subject when putting together a feature story. It's the kind of thing that hopefully sets your reporting apart from the competition.

It's important to contrast this with the job each reporter has to cover each day's game and the press conference thereafter and any other hard news story. When covering the same story, a certain sameness is inevitable. But those rules don't apply to feature stories. These are the kinds of interesting sidelines that are supposed to give readers a deeper and more thorough understanding of what is going on and why. That's what makes this such an odd and appalling development. It's pretty clear that Hoynes and Ocker in particular don't see themselves in competition for a story. If they did, then whoever got to Sabathia first would have made sure that no other reporter was around when Sabathia was talking.

It would be one thing if this was the first time this has happened. But it happens on a consistent basis and not just with feature stories. Hoynes and Ocker, for example, run nearly identical columns each Sunday that feature them giving snarky answers to the legitimate questions of readers. Clever. Cute. Derivative. You also see the same thing each week during Browns season, the same player seemingly being the subject of the same feature by different reporters for different newspapers on the same day.

There are probably a million or more reasons why newspapers are suffering, an observation noted here before. But one of the reasons on that list should not be reporter laziness. In some ways it seems that the Plain Dealer and the Beacon Journal go out of there way to alienate their readers and drive them to other sources for more information. Thankfully there are other resources.

This isn't meant to sound like simple shilling for The Cleveland Fan web site, but far and away the best coverage to date of the Indians preseason has been by Tony Lastoria. In various features he has broken down the starting rotation, the bullpen, the infield and the outfield. On his own dime he went to Winter Haven and his two features since his arrival contain far more interesting information than both Hoynes and Ocker have provided, combined. Hoynes, Ocker and Call are supposedly professional journalists. Lastoria is a rabid fan who, right now, is eating their lunch. You have to wonder whether any of the editors at the various papers are even paying attention.