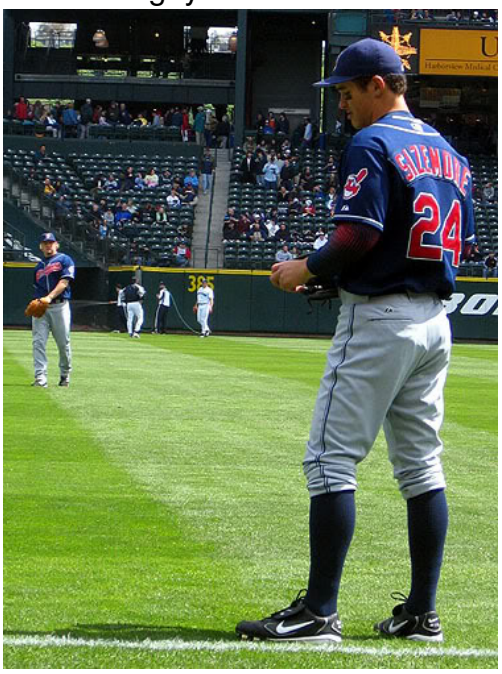
In Gary's latest column, he refers to the beginning weeks of baseball season as "a frustrating tease" and says that one downside of the length of the major league baseball season is that it is often difficult to drawn any conclusions for weeks. But that doesn't stop journalists from trying. Gary takes an amusing look at some of the beat guys from various teams around the league, and their early season overreactions.



One downside of the length of the major league baseball season is that it is often difficult to drawn any conclusions for weeks, unless you happen to follow the Washington Nationals, in which case the only issue is whether they will challenge the ’62 Mets for incompetence. Teams can go 1-10 and recover, though that was hardly true of the 1987 Indians, and teams can go 10-1 and fall apart, like the 2002 Indians.

This is why the beginning of the baseball season is such a frustrating tease. The Indians opened the season in Chicago, beat up the White Sox 12-5 in the opener, won the second game 8-7 and lost the third 4-3. Two players that struggled mightily in spring training, Travis Hafner and Grady Sizemore, led the offensive onslaught on opening day. In the victory on Wednesday and even in the loss on Thursday, Sizemore was again a key contributor, going deep now in three straight games. But Sizemore certainly won’t hit .429 for the season or hit 162 home runs, his current pace. Victor Martinez is hitting .500 after three games and has thrown out two would-be base stealers. But what can we really infer from any of this? Does it mean that Hafner’s and Sizemore’s spring training slumps have ended or is this just an aberration? Does it mean that Martinez has suddenly turned into Ivan Rodriguez? If the Tribe comes home and proceeds to lose three straight will fans suddenly wring their hands and assume this will be a long year?

While we're weeks if not months from understanding what turns this season might take, it was nice to see the Indians win the first game of the season, something they haven't done since 2002. If they go on to win the AL Central they can say they went wire to wire, like the White Sox in 2005. But beyond this small bragging point, there really is very little to be gleaned by early season victories or losses.

But that doesn't stop us from trying. For example, the performance of Sizemore, given his track record, probably indicates that we can expect more of the same. It is encouraging that Martinez has already thrown out two runners, if only for his confidence. It also allows us to consider what to make of Joe Borowski's performance in the first two games and to ponder Roberto Hernandez after his throwing error led to the Sox win on Thursday. Regarding Borowski, his role as the anointed closer makes him one of the keys to the season. His mop up duty in game one wasn't very impressive. He gave up two runs in one inning of work, which was the only blemish in an otherwise flawless game. His save on Wednesday was a high wire act reminiscent of Bob Wickman at his most aggravating. But again, does this portend anything for the season? As for Hernandez, because he couldn't keep runners off the bases in the 9th inning does this mean this is the season he finally starts showing his age?

Trying to find insight so early is part of the game and hardly a Cleveland hobby. In Chicago, a column in the Chicago Sun-Times following the loss to the Indians dispelled any suggestion that White Sox manager Ozzie Guillen's job is in jeopardy. If you're left wondering why such a notion needed to be dispelled there are probably a couple of plausible explanations. First, maybe the loss just aroused a latent concern among White Sox fans about Guillen that had been lingering since the Sox fell short last year despite seeming to have the best talent in the division. But this seems like a rather ridiculous premise so soon into the season so the more likely explanation is that Chicago has too many sportwriters with too little to do. In a pinch that seems to well explain away most of Bill Livingston's columns in Cleveland.

As defending World Series champs, St. Louis would seem to have little reason to have any concerns by its early season offensive slump. But because they're defending World Series champs, it was incumbent upon ESPN to have its underpaid interns dig through the record books to find out the last time a defending champ lost its first two games and scored two or less runs. As it turns out, such opening day futility hasn't happened since 1943. But the

postscript is that it was the Cardinals, coincidentally, who set the prior mark and that team ultimately went on to win 105 games and successfully defended its National League title, rendering an interesting footnote mostly irrelevant. So much for trends.

But sometimes the hand-wring is well justified. The aforementioned Washington Nationals are simply terrible. While not technically mathematically eliminated from the playoffs just yet, their opening-day loss was ugly and was followed by an equally ugly loss the next day. Conclusions can and should be drawn.

The Nats feature some promising young players but field a team so almost totally barren of major league talent that it makes one wonder why the D.C. area keeps begging for a baseball team if this is what they get. Tom Boswell, in today's Washington Post, got it just right when he observed : "The brightest memory of the day was a 10-foot Teddy Roosevelt mascot soaring down a cable from the top of the right field roof to win the Nats' daily Presidents' Race. Teddy -- shut out in 2006 -- watched the top of the fourth from the top of RFK as [John] Patterson got bombed, [Nook] Logan got hurt then limped slowly off the field and one Nats disaster followed another." Hopefully Boswell left something in reserve because one way or another it will be a long season for fans and press alike in the nation's capitol.

Another poor team, the Tampa Bay Devil Rays, suffered a similar fate, taking it in the shorts on the field and in the press opening day. Brendan Roberts, writing for The Sporting News , called the Devil Rays opening day performance, in which they lost to the Yankees 9-5 a "microcosm" of the entire team. But really, when you consider the definition of "microcosm", as Roberts apparently did not, it seems like an awfully poor use of the word. Perhaps in retrospect Roberts' observation might turn out to be correct, but with only one game in the book, it's a little premature, to say the least, to consider the loss representative of what the team will be like for the season. At this point, it's merely a prediction. But props to Roberts anyway because if anything is a microcosm it was his column. It exquisitely captured the insane practice of trying to discern patterns before they can be set.

Harry Schulman of the San Francisco Chronicle saw no reason for perspective in discussing the shut out the Giants suffered on opening day. Schulman wrote "the offense was comatose, Barry Bonds was tagged out at home on the Giants' best chance to avert the

dreaded Opening Day skunking, the defense let Zito down at a crucial time and the young bullpen was porous." While technically a description, it reads more like an epitaph, something that likewise seems just a tad premature after only one game. But when you have to cover Barry Bonds on an everyday basis, a little displaced anger is understandable.

Finally, you have this column from Richard Justice of the Houston Chronicle following the Astros opening day loss to Pittsburgh in extra innings. The loss was pinned on Brad Lidge, who blew the save opportunity in the ninth. Justice, apparently no fan of Lidge at this point, said "Lidge has had enough chances. Garner shouldn't allow one player to drag his team down. That's the lesson of this opening night, a night when a one-run ninth-inning lead turned into a 4-2 loss to the Pittsburgh Pirates in the 10th inning." If one save opportunity on the first day of the season constitutes enough chances, one wonders how badly this guy would have excoriated Eric Wedge last season after he trotted out Fausto Carmona as the closer for the third time in a week.

In the end, the reason these kinds of columns and stories get written is not so much out of laziness but because it appeals to our inner need to know now how the season is going to turn out. If only that were the case. For one thing, it would limit our gambling losses. For another, we could order post-season tickets now it it's supposed to go well or free up more time for golf if it's going to go bad. But the real allure of baseball is that it generally defies our needs in that regard, which is really a good thing for the best part of baseball is the mystery, hope and drama that develops over its 162 chapters.