Could the awful early season weather possibly have been the best thing that could have happened to the Indians? It seems to have fostered an us vs. them attitude that has allowed the Indians to develop a competitive edge not typically seen under manager Eric Wedge and has pushed the Indians to a hot streak that started two weeks ago and has continued into early May.

It all started with a cold snap.

The miserable early season weather, which included an unprecedented snow-out of an entire week of games in Cleveland and has caused the Dolans all manner of financial losses at the box office and concession stands, may actually turn out to be the best thing that has happened to the Indians in a long, long time. It seems to have fostered an us vs. them attitude that has allowed the Indians to develop a competitive edge not typically seen under manager Eric Wedge and has pushed the Indians to a hot streak that started two weeks ago and has continued into early May.

But it wasn't just the presence of snow and cold that did it. Breaking it down to a much finer point, the first person to get under this team's skin was, ironically, one of the better-liked individuals in recent Indians history, Mike Hargrove. Hargrove, as manager of the Seattle mariners, became the human snow delay by essentially preventing Paul Byrd from pitching an abbreviated no-hitter on a truly miserable opening day. In retrospect, it may have been better for Hargrove and the rest of baseball if Byrd could have at least finished pitching to Jose Lopez.

Most recall, of course, that Byrd had a 1-2 count on Lopez when Hargrove sauntered out on

the field to discuss the snow that was flying, again. Hargrove's sublimely-timed visit and the ensuing heated discussion allowed the intensity of the snow to pick up just enough that home plate umpire Alfonso Marquez and crew chief Rick Reed were forced to call for another delay. Ultimately this led to the game being called when the weather didn't much improve. The game, which was to start at 4 p.m. was officially called at 8:41 p.m. The Indians lost a sure victory and Byrd lost a probable, though severely truncated, no hitter. But in the process, an attitude began to develop.

The way the rest of that weekend played out only allowed this attitude to further percolate. There were endless questions from the media, locally and nationally, to Byrd and Wedge and others about what took place, particularly given the perception that Hargrove was responsible for what took place. While Wedge and GM Mark Shapiro were appropriately politically correct in addressing Hargrove's antics, Byrd was less gracious. In one of his milder statements he said, "the snow was coming for five minutes. If the count's 3-0, nobody is saying anything. They [Seattle] tried to get away with something, and it worked. Nobody was saying anything when I wasn't throwing strikes. I thought it was handled poorly."

As the snow continued to fly that weekend, the front office, the players and the fans began watching the Weather Channel as if it were CNN, trying to figure out what would happen next. As prospects dimmed for any real improvement in the weather with the Los Angeles-by-way-of-Anaheim Angels coming to town, major league baseball did what it does best and muddied the situation further by telling Cleveland, in effect, that this next home series would be played in Commissioner Bud Selig's hometown of Milwaukee. While not complaining publicly, you could almost hear the teeth grinding of Shapiro, Wedge and the players who now had to pack their bags. It would be hard for an attitude not to develop under this set of bizarre circumstances. Fortunately the Indians used this new found lack of respect for good and not evil by taking two of three from the Angels.

With a touch of swagger, the Indians were permitted to return home to play the White Sox, a key divisional rival made all the more hateful by a mouthy manager in Ozzie Guillen and an arrogant Chicago media breathing down their necks that is constantly compensating for the fact that they are not in New York. The Indians proceeded to take two of three from the Sox, just a week after taking two of three from them in Chicago.

Often the kind of edge that a team gets from such slights, perceived or real, is as easily lost as gained without something intervening to remind them why they were mad in the first place. As they embarked on their trip to New York, they knew they were facing a team decimated by injuries, particularly to their pitching staff. The Yankees were hardly barking, about the Indians or much else. Whatever edge existed seemed to be temporarily replaced by arrogance as the Indians laid a colossal egg, losing three straight. In fact, they really weren't competitive in any of those games. And it wasn't as if the Yankees were on a roll. In fact, that series has been the only high spot in an otherwise miserable early season for New York. Following those wins, the Yankees went on to lose 8 of their next 9 games.

Thankfully, though, baseball continued to pick on the Indians. First, major league baseball, under the skittish and indecisive leadership of the aforementioned Selig, continued to dilly dally around with the conundrum of how to reschedule four lost Indians home games against a team that is not scheduled to return this season. While major league baseball continued to fiddle with what was now apparently the hardest problem they ever faced, it wasn't lost on the Indians front office or the players that responsibility for this situation rested solely with major league baseball and its schedule makers who made sure that two west coast teams, one that plays in a dome and another who plays in near perfect weather, were making their only trips to Cleveland at a time when the weather is always iffy.

Although baseball still hasn't announced how the games will be rescheduled, word has leaked over the last several days out that at least one of those "home" games will be played in Seattle, bringing the total to four the number of games the Indians will not get to host this season. While that may be the best alternative among a set of really bad options, the fact remains that the major league front office created this mess and, in the process, gave the Indians another reason to believe that they weren't being respected.

On the heels of this came the bizarre happenings in the game against Baltimore last Saturday night. Unquestionably, the home plate umpire made a mistake in waving off the run that had scored prior to centerfielder Grady Sizemore doubling up Miguel Tejada who, resembling one of the Indians, forgot how many outs there were and ran on contact and failed to return to first base after Sizemore's catch. But it also is unquestioned that neither Baltimore nor the umpiring crew realized the blunder for several innings. When it was finally brought to their attention, the umps didn't claim "rub of the green" as is usually the case. They put the run back on the board and Baltimore now had a 3-2 lead. You wouldn't be alone if you were left with the feeling that this was something you've never seen before.

This eventually led to the protest that the Indians lost. While acknowledging that the umpires made a mistake, the essence of the Indians protest was that Baltimore didn't lodge a timely complaint, which was true. This was a legitimate argument that has decent support within the rule book. Perhaps it didn't help their protest that the Indians buttressed their argument by claiming that by putting the run on the board it caused Wedge to manage differently. Anyone with a set of eyes and the patience to watch this team through Wedge's tenure knows that this may be theoretically true but realistically impossible.

Though denying the protest, Selig and crew did the Indians a favor by failing to discuss the basis for the denial, as if the protest was so frivolous that it didn't warrant a two-sentence explanation. This only led to the perception that baseball either didn't want to uphold the Indians argument on a technicality (the failure of Baltimore to timely complain) or simply didn't want to have to reschedule still another Indians game, which seems more likely. Whichever, this gave the Tribe still another reason to believe they were being disrespected and allowed an edge that may have been dulling to once again sharpen.

If you witnessed either Wednesday's or Thursday night's game, that sharp edge was on full display. On Wednesday night, shortly after the protest was denied, newly-rich Jake Westbrook had to leave the game early due to an abdominal strain and the Indians trailing The bullpen kept the game close and the Indians ultimately prevailed in extra innings on a bloop single by Travis Hafner. Thursday night marked Cliff Lee's return to the rotation and he promptly put the Indians in a 4-0 hole, although a shaky defense helped that cause. But a close play at the plate in which Toronto catcher Jason Phillips blocked the plate from Josh Barfield led to a few choice words from Phillips to Barfield and the intercession of David Dellucci, who was coming to bat. Dellucci took offense at Phillips irrational exuberance and a bench-clearing nearly ensued.

Following that exchange, Dellucci promptly made a stunning catch in left field and followed that up in the bottom half of the inning with a double. In the process, he personally took a whetstone to the edge that has now clearly developed on this team and that led to another victory, a 7-1 homestand and a streak that has seen the Indians win 10 of their last 11.

It's hard to know whether these series of early season slights will continue to occur as timely

as they have thus far. But even if they don't it may just be enough for this team to at least develop a personality, something it has never done under Wedge. And that, just as much as anything else, is necessary if this team is going to be a serious contender this season.