Happy now, asks Gary Benz? To those who proclaim allegiance to the Cleveland Indians but continue to find reasons not to support them, the 1-0 loss to the Toronto Blue Jays on Sunday, which dropped the Indians into second place at the All Star break, had to be a welcome relief. All that time the Tribe spent in first place during the first half of the season was starting to become a real impediment in these fans persistent refusal to buy into the remarkable turnaround from last season's debacle.

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This is, of course, typical of the Cleveland mentality. To most fans it seems that the two worst things in life are not getting what you want (a winner) and getting what you want (a winner). Now that the Indians are "mired" in second place, there is something legitimate to scream about, like the inability of Grady Sizemore to execute a sacrifice bunt or Jhonny Peralta to get a clutch hit when he was up

3-0 in the count with the bases loaded in the ninth inning.

No question that the Indians seem to be out of gas heading into their four-day break. They've lost two straight series while the Tigers, who beat the Tribe two out of three earlier in the week, pulled off a sweep of the Boston Red Sox and now seem to just starting to flex their muscles. But it's also true that there are two and a half months left in the season and whether or not the Indians wind up in first place or as an also ran is more likely to be determined by what happens in the next 74 games than what happened this past week and, more specifically, by what moves the Dolans allow GM Mark Shapiro to make with the trade deadline looming in a few weeks.

I wrote a column earlier in the week discussing the relative lack of support the Indians have received thus far from their fan base. I received a fair amount of feedback on the subject with many suggesting a variety of theories, including the notion that the smoking ban at Jacobs Field was at least partially responsible. All decent thoughts. But the most common reason cited was fan bitterness toward the Dolans. I had mentioned this in my column as well but as the lack of support subject continues to be debated, it is becoming more apparent to me at least that this backlash is playing a greater role than most realize, particularly the Dolans.

Dozens of articles and columns have been written about the paltry payroll of the Indians. I've certainly written my share. With Art Modell now a distant memory, Larry Dolan is officially the cheapest person in Cleveland. But thinking back on Modell, it wasn't so much that he was cheap as it was that he was undercapitalized. Modell's best business move was scraping together a syndicate to buy the Browns in the first place. But when you have to scrape and scrounge to gain entry to the club, maybe you never belonged in the first place. That ultimately played itself out in Baltimore when Modell squandered the financial largesse of the state of Maryland and the city of Baltimore and was forced to sell to Steve Bisciotti.

The Dolans, on the other hand, are undercapitalized, too, but for vastly different reasons. They overpaid to get into the club and have been finding ways ever since to make their purchase work. Too often, though, it's been at the expense of a sufficient payroll to achieve what Larry Dolan promised in the first place: a team that would perennially contend. That's what every owner wants, presumably, and while a high payroll certainly doesn't guarantee success, a low payroll is an even much more difficult formula. It's this rub that the fans constantly deal with and appears to be at the heart of a serious undercurrent of discontent that is taking its toll where the Dolans can least afford it: the box office.

You have to make money to spend money just as surely as you have to spend money to make money. Too often, though, the Indians appear to their fans to be the cat that is constantly chasing its tail. They have a very solid minor league base which comes in handy because of their inability to find and sign big-time free agents, their own or otherwise. As one reader noted to me, the best thing the Indians could do at this point is sign Travis Hafner and C.C. Sabathia. True. Very true.

According to reports, the Indians have made some headway in their negotiations with Hafner and it wouldn't come as a complete shock if they get a deal done during the All Star break. That would be nice. But the conventional wisdom is that Sabathia will be the more difficult signing which was essentially confirmed when talks broke down during spring training and aren't set to resume until after the season.

But now that the Chicago White Sox have signed Mark Buehrle to a contract extension, the Dolans and Shapiro are running short of excuses if they can't find a way to get the Sabathia contract done soon.

Buehrle is probably the most comparable pitcher to Sabathia in either league. He is only one year older but is otherwise the statistical equal to Sabathia and has been for years. They are both in their seventh full season with their respective teams. Buehrle is 99-69 in that time while Sabathia is 93-59. Buehrle has a 3.77 ERA while Sabathia's is 3.97. Buehrle is even more of a workhorse than Sabathia, having pitched in almost 200 more innings and 30 more games than Sabathia.

If anything, Buehrle has the edge over Sabathia and thus his four year $56 million contract sets a high water mark. Of course, Buehrle was in his free agent year and Sabathia still has a year to go, which requires a bit of guess work on the part of both sides. But either way, it is unlikely that Sabathia's contract will be much different.

The question then is whether the Dolans have the stomach to absorb that kind of salary and, if so, how soon? Right now, Sabathia already is scheduled to make $9 million next season thus if his contract is re-worked to add $5 million more to it, one would think that wouldn't be much of problem given the fact that the Indians have one of the smallest payrolls in the entire major leagues.

But adding $5 million next year isn't the issue because a new contract for Sabathia will be an extension not a re-working. To the Dolans that is the equivalent of adding $14 million more to payroll than is currently projected for each of the four years thereafter since Sabathia isn't signed after next year. That is a much larger chunk to take on when you need to keep your payroll low and you have young arms in the minors like Adam Miller. Moreover, it's a four year contract, which is starting to push the outer limits of an acceptable length for a pitcher's contract, at least according to most general managers.

In the end, these kinds of decisions are either as complicated or as simple as you'd like to make them. And given how the Indians have operated under the current ownership, there is no question that the decision whether to sign Sabathia, in light of the Buehrle signing, will have them tied up in their collective shorts for weeks, if not months, trying to answer all these questions.

This is really the reason, I think, that the Indians, despite their record, continue to frustrate their fan base. It's one thing not to sign a hitter to an outrageous contract. It's a whole other matter to turn your back on pitching. The White Sox, struggling every bit as much this year as the Indians did last year, look to be dumping payroll soon. Some even felt that Buehrle would be available. But ultimately White Sox ownership decided that it needed to do something to send a message to their fans that they understand how championship teams are built. Let's hope the Indians, who find themselves in the odd position of fielding a top tier team with an alienated fan base, can find a way to tell their fans the same thing.