The Indians starting pitching has come back around, but what in the sam hell has happened to the offense? And is it time to panic? In his latest ... Paul Cousineau takes a look at individual offensive production of the Indians regulars pre and post All-Star break. And has the answer to what it is that ails the Tribe offensive attack.

As the starting pitching has started to come around for the Tribe in the last two weeks (aCCe, El Diablo, recent Byrd sightings, the return of the Jake we know and love, and...whoever), the offense has prevented the team from making a huge run and putting some distance between themselves and the rest of the AL Central as the offense has hit a collective rut and has been unable to take advantage of some tremendous outings from the starters.

Just to watch the team, or peruse a box score, is to know that the team is struggling mightily offensively. But how has this offense, which had developed into such a balanced attack earlier in the season, fallen into such a funk?

Sure, the team has the 2nd most K's since the All-Star break in MLB (one behind the White Sox heading into Tuesday's game), but they were pretty close to the top of the league (5th in MLB) in strikeouts before the All-Star break, so other factors must be at work.

The team that scored the second most runs prior to the Break (5.35 runs a game) has fallen to the back of the back in the league (down to 4.29 runs a game since the festivities in San Francisco) and the slump has not been limited to a couple of players.

To give an idea of how widespread the offensive funk has become, consider the differences in OPS for the Tribe, using pre-All Star OPS / post-All Star OPS /

difference:

Martinez / .936 / .722 / -.214

Sizemore / .864 / .818 / -.046

Hafner / .849 / .705 / -.144

Blake / .838 / .650 / -.188

Garko / .821 / 1.148 / +.327

Peralta / .812 / .742 / -.070

Gutierrez / .811 / .890 / +.079

Michaels / .795 / .561 / -.234

Nixon / .668 / .872 / +.204

Barfield / .626 / .459 / -.167

Not included in the comparisons are David Dellucci (.690) and Lofton (.606), but using the comparison, it's a .084 drop.

For traditionalists that feel that Batting Average, HR, and RBI are the only stats you need to know, consider the list of MLB leaders in OPS this year .

Looks like a pretty good stat to measure the offensive performance of a player that offers a quick and dirty way of valuing a hitter.

Perhaps an even better way to compare the drop-off would be to use Runs Created per 27 outs
, a statistic created by Bill James to measure how many runs a lineup of 9 of the same individual would in a game (27 outs).

Don't ask me how these numbers are figured, as I can't seem find my little green banker's visor that is necessary for any and all math questions.

If you're confused by RC/27, let's just say it's a pretty fair way to gauge how a batter is performing at the plate, taking into account multiple factors. If you don't believe me, again look at the list of 2007 leaders .

Suffice it to say, it's an awfully good indicator of offensive prowess.

Again, the first number indicates their pre-All Star RC/27 value, the 2nd is their post-All Star RC/27, then the difference:

Martinez / 7.57 / 4.05 / -3.52

Sizemore / 7.50 / 5.73 / -1.77

Hafner / 6.60 / 3.99 / -2.91

Blake / 5.88 / 3.27 / -2.61

Garko / 5.87 / 11.54 / +5.67

Peralta / 5.70 / 5.01 / -0.69

Gutierrez / 5.51 / 6.62 / +1.11

Michaels / 5.35 / 2.05 / -3.30

Nixon / 3.87 / 7.80 / +3.93

Barfield / 3.41 / 1.71 / -1.70

Again, taking Dellucci (3.90 pre-All Star RC/27) and Lofton (3.18 post All-Star RC/27) nets a 0.18 drop in RC/27 for the Tribe.

Looking at these numbers, it's obvious that the numbers for everyone (except Gonnie Garko, Frank the Tank, and the Trotter) are down...and in a pretty big way. But more important is to look at the first 3 hitters listed (The Stick, SuperSizemore, and Pronk) as their performance more or less dictates how this team fares offensively.

The Indians are built around Martinez, Sizemore, and Hafner and the lineup can

handle when one of them is slumping without completely falling apart. Some would say that Hafner has slumped all season, but prior to the All-Star Break, he was sitting on a .849 OPS - nothing to sneeze at, though certainly not Pronkian. Even if he was slumping, Martinez and Sizemore stabilized the lineup with steady play, so the offense still retained its potency.

As an aside, do you realize that Sizemore has one more HR, 20 more RBI, 10 more SB, and a higher OPS than Alfonso Soriano, whom is generally considered one of the top five players in baseball and has remained in the leadoff role as it best suits his gifts?

But I digress.

Back to the construction of the Tribe lineup, as when more than one of the pillars of the lineup struggle, it simply becomes too much for the rest of the lineup to absorb and pick up. The post-All Star Break numbers is where things get ugly for Hafner, as well as a precipitous drop for Martinez. Neither thumper in the middle of the Tribe lineup has cleared an OPS over .750 since the Break as their RC/27 have been nearly cut in half.

Without their steadying presence in the middle of the lineup, the dominoes have fallen as the other players in the lineup have followed suit with HUGE drops for the likes of Blake, Michaels, and Barfield (who has really fallen off the cliff in the past few weeks - a .459 OPS since the Break).

While these numbers and assumptions are only based on 24 games, that's still about 15% of the season, an awfully long time to have the team in a prolonged slump. The way this team is built, reliant on production from either (or both) Victor and Pronk, it's simply not able to handle both of them scuffling. Since that is the case in the past 3 weeks, the Indians' offense has slowed to a crawl, despite the best efforts of Sizemore and Garko. The arrival of AstroCab (who will thankfully fill the Rouse role as well as giving Barfield's mind and Peralta and Blake's body some much-needed rest) is not going to magically remedy this offense, nor will any other of the complementary players.

It comes down to Victor or Pronk.

Now, for about the 10th time, I will say that I hope Pronk's solid hits (including the laser beam HR) on Monday night is the harbinger of things to come.

It has to be, doesn't it?

Bueller?

Bueller?

Regardless of whether Pronk is ready to go completely wild and put the team on his substantial shoulders, until one of either Victor or Pronk is able to snap out of their funks, this team will continue to struggle to score runs because the Indians simply aren't built to overcome the concurrent struggles of both.