This is what I call must see TV. The Yankees, winners of 21 of 29 since the All-Star break, scoring what seems like 15 runs a night ... coming to the Jake this weekend for three with the Tribe. The weather is supposed to be beautiful, and the two teams are in a fierce battle for one of the four elusive AL playoff spots. Cris Sykes previews the series for us.

It's time to begin to separate the men from the boys in the chase for American League playoff spots.

The hated New York Bankees will invade Jacobs Field for a three game series this weekend. Since the conclusion of the All-Star break, the Indians strength has become its starting pitching. The Indians team earned run average of 3.73 since the break is good for third in the American League. They will need to be even better for this series, because the Bankee offense has begun to click on all cylinders. Over the 28 games since the break, against some pretty light competition, the Yankees have scored 60 more runs than the second best team. They also have a team batting average of .324, they are slugging .554 and have an OPS of .949. For some perspective, no other team is hitting over .300, the next highest slugging percentage is.459 and the second highest team in Ops is .817.

Good thing for the rest of baseball New York cannot get anyone out. Their .292 batting average against is 11th in the American League and they have allowed the fifth most runs scored since the break. The question is, can the Indians offense turn things around against this pitching staff? The Indians are currently 12th in the AL in runs scored, 13

th

in batting average, 13
th

in slugging and 12
th

in on-base percentage since the All-Star break.

Friday, August 10th, 7:05 PM

Fausto Carmona (13-6, 3.17 Earned Run Average) vs. Phillip Hughes (1-1, 5.87 ERA)

Remember these two names. They could be battling it out for Cy Young awards for the next decade, as they are two of the best young starters in baseball.

Fausto Carmona has been so much better than anyone (except Peter Gammons maybe) could have hoped for, let alone expected. As good as he was in his first 17 starts, before the All-Star break, he has been even better since those three days off. In five starts since the break, Carmona has allowed five runs. The Indians offense has cost him two of those wins, posting zero and one run in his last two starts, or we would be staring at one of the leaders for this year's Cy Young award.

Carmona has lost six times this entire season, and a lot of that blame also falls at the feet of this beleaguered offense. Fausto has been, uh, supported by a total of 13 runs scored in his 6 losses. Take away the two losses he actually "deserved", when he pitched poorly, the Tribe scored 11 runs in those two starts and he has gotten two runs scored in his other four losses. How good would these numbers look...17 wins and only two losses is they could have scored him a few runs?

Carmona made a start at Yankee Stadium in April. He pitched well enough to win, holding the Bankees to two runs over six innings. He did not win. Something about Joe Borowski, first base being open and Alex Rodriguez at the plate ended that hope. Hey, I just found an 18th win for Fausto this year!

Phillip Hughes is the Bankee version of Adam Miller, without the arm problems. He is a big, power pitcher with serviceable complimentary pitches. As he gets those into major league shape, he is going to be one of the biggest stars in New York.

He has only made three starts in this, his rookie season. He struggled in start number one, allowing four runs in

four innings, striking out five. His second start was on the path to possibly some historic stuff, before the hamstring injury that cost him most of the season derailed him. Hughes had worked six and one third no-hit innings against the Texas Rangers before his hamstring made like Matt Miller's elbow and landing him on the disable list for three months. Still trying to get his legs under him, his first start since being activated was a lot like his first start of the season. He allowed six earned runs in four plus innings to the Kansas City Royals. Being the anti-Indians though, the Bankee offense got him off the hook by scoring 16 runs.

Saturday, August 11th, 7:05

Paul Byrd (10-4, 4.13 ERA) vs. Mike Mussina (7-7, 4.66 ERA)

There are only 19 pitchers in the entire American League with an ERA better than Paul Byrd.

I have a hard time believing that, so here it is again:

There are only 19 pitchers in the entire American League with an ERA better than Paul Byrd.

After his complete game shut out against the Minneosta Twins, the 15th and fifth times in his career he has accomplished those, respectfully, Byrd achieved a tenth win in a season for only the fifth time in his career. Shutting out the Twins is not exactly worthy of Guinness, but that is exactly the type of reaction Byrd has grown accustomed to. Everything he does appears to have a bit of a "no big deal" fell to it. At the end of the day though he gets the job done.
The Indians have won seven of the last nine games started by Byrd, at a time when wins have been hard to come by.

Byrd will be making his eighth career start against the "Evil Empire". He has only recorded a victory in one of those starts, to go against three defeats, despite an ERA of 3.28.

Mike Mussina will oppose Byrd on Saturday evening at the Jake. Mussina is another Yankee starter who has lost some time on the disabled list in 2007. I guess that is what you get when your rotation is made up of a bunch of geriatrics.

Mussina will enter the start having won his last three starts. He has allowed six earned runs in those starts, averaging almost six innings per start. That is one of the biggest changes we have seen in Mussina in recent years, he is no longer the workhorse of a rotation that can be

counted on for seven plus innings each time out. He has only pitched past the sixth innings four times in 2007 covering 19 starts. That is a long distance away from the guy who was in the top 10 in the AL for innings pitched eight out of 15 seasons.

Mussina, as I was surprised to find out, is only 10-9 against the Indians in his career, with a 4.90 ERA. It kind of shows you what suggestive memory can do. I must only remember the days where he struck out 73 guys in the sun. A lot of the damage against him has come over the last few years, where he has won twice and lost twice against Cleveland, with a 6.35 ERA. At Jacobs Field, since 2004, Mussina has made three starts, and allowed 12 earned runs in 15 innings. For his career at Jacobs Field, Mussina holds a 6.35 ERA.

Sunday, August 12th, 1:05 PM

Jake Westbrook (3-6, 5.00 ERA) vs. Andy Pettite (8-7, 4.00 ERA)

You better not be teasing us Jake. We have all been sitting around, some patiently, some not so patiently waiting for your 2007 season to turn the corner. You have done just fine in slowing down the offenses of the White Sox and Rangers and Twins over your last three starts, but this time is going to be a little different. If you can hold your own against the Yankees, you will have the fans truly excited about the possibilities of this rotation for the next couple of months.

Westbrook, a former Yankee, has been on fire. He has only allowed three runs and nine hits over his last three starts, accounting for 21 innings of work.

Of course, the Yankees are a slightly larger animal. Way back in April, before the Yankees were even clicking offensively, they tore through Jake like a hot scalpel through a Browns offensive lineman's knee. Westbrook allowed three home runs and eight runs in total, in only one and two thirds innings. New York has been a tough match up for Westbrook historically, only winning twice in nine career appearances against them. There are only two AL teams who Westbrook has a higher career ERA against than the Yankees.

Andy "I Love Roger Clemens" Pettite will take the mound for the Sunday afternoon series finale. This is now the book on Pettite. He is going to allow three runs and pitch 6 innings. Sometimes he is a little better, sometime a little worse, but most days that is where he will be. You can afford to be patient against him, because he stopped striking people out after his stint in the National League. He has also allowed the 10th most walks in the AL this year, so he will put you on base if you let him.

Pettite does like the Indians. Only Seattle causes him more problems, but they are limited to three starts against him. His 4.66 ERA versus Cleveland is his worst against any team other than

Seattle and he has a sub .500 record (5-7) over 15 starts against the Indians.

His numbers do improve against the Indians when he pitches at Jacobs Field. He has won four decisions, losing three, in eight career starts at "The Jake". His ERA drops over one half of a run when pitching against the Tribe in Cleveland, compared to his career numbers against them.

Scoreboard Watching:

Detroit: Home vs. Oakland

Seattle: @ Chicago

Minnesota: @ LAAAAAAAA

Up Next: Detroit for 2 at Jacobs Field