Paulie Cous has spent this entire weekend at The Jake, and says that it's hard to fathom that the Yankees and Indians have identical records right now as he watched the Bronx Bombers run roughshod through the Wahoo Warriors. In Paul's latest piece he says that the Tribe can't wait any longer ... it's time to wake up. And tries to identify what the team can do to wake up the bats.

After spending Friday night down at the Jake, the disappointment exiting the ballpark was palpable and the trip home couldn't have been more painful. Click here to walk a mile in my shoes and to get a good grasp of the overwhelming feelings down at the corner of Carnegie and Ontario. Yesterday was even worse.

What's going on here?

The Indians and Yankees have now played two games at the Jake and the worst fears have been realized. The potent Yankees' offense is hitting on all cylinders, running roughshod over the Indians' pitchers while the toothless Indians' offense has mustered all of three runs.

Watching the games, it's hard to remember that the Yankees and Indians are

sitting on nearly identical records as these two teams seem to be heading in opposite directions…and the Indians are not the ones going north.

The team is struggling and have found themselves mired in quicksand, as the more they try to break free the deeper their problems become. Offensively, the team has become far too aggressive at the plate, leading MLB in K's in August (89) while having the 4th least BB's in the month (20). For a team that prided itself earlier in the year on working counts, wearing out pitchers, and taking advantage of opportunities presented to it, the drop-off has become difficult to watch.

Yes, it is only two games in August, but the warning flags are being pulled out of the cabinet and the flagpole is being manned. Very simply, the offense has been unable to capitalize on ANY situations, incapable of manufacturing runs and reliant on HR. Since the timely hitting or HR simply aren't happening, the offense has put undue pressure on the pitching staff to pitch perfectly, knowing that any runs allowed could be enough to doom the game.

While the Tribe pitchers have been tremendous (a 3.02 ERA in August to lead MLB before Saturday's game), the offense has sabotaged the success that the Tribe SHOULD be having and have ruined the opportunity to put some serious room between them and a Tigers' team that thinks that it's 2003 again (6.75 ERA, 4.33 runs per game in August). Thankfully, the Tigers have fallen apart to keep it close in the AL Central, but the Yankees and Mariners didn't get the memo that all of the contenders are supposed to fall apart.

So what can be done?

It's not as if moving Kenny Lofton and Franklin Gutierrez to the top of the order is going to be the balm that cures the offense's problems. Lofton has a .292 OBP after the All-Star Break, while Frank the Tank bests him with a .297 OBP. Not exactly the number you want from a leadoff hitter, particularly when Grady's sitting on a .326 OBP in the same timeframe. .326 OBP is no great shakes, but it's better than the alternatives.

The chorus of “Frank, not Trot” has quieted a little as both players have participated in the team-wide struggles (Gutz - .509 OPS in August, Trot - .462 in August), but I'm still ALL for the idea that Trot should be in the clubhouse during games…maybe looking up pie recipes online. Regardless of Nixon's performance

against RHP, his presence in RF versus what The Tank brings to the party is apples and oranges.

Garko-my-God-did-you-see-how-far-he-hit-that's been put in the clean-up spot in Pronk's absence (which, thankfully…I think…won't last nearly as long as was once reported), so the hottest player on the team is right where you want him. That hasn't done much to help, though.

Perhaps Asbrubal Cabrera, or the newly acquired Chris Gomez, could give Josh Barfield a break at 2B to clear his head. Maybe the Indians could put Cabrera in against some good MLB pitching to see what they have in AstroCab going into 2008. Maybe Cabrera can outperform what Barfield has done at the plate recently (which is not much), but he's still only 21.
But we're concerned about this year, not evaluating prospects for 2008!

A lot of maybes out there:

Maybe a slump is just a slump and not a downward trend.

Maybe the team just needs ONE game to break out of this funk.

Maybe it's time for one of these players to challenge the team's heart or, perhaps, manhood.

Maybe the Indians are simply regressing to the mean, showing their true colors.

Maybe the vulnerability of this team (reliance on a few superstars) has been exposed.

Maybe the Tribe's coaching staff hasn't been able to identify the adjustments necessary to bust out.

Maybe other teams have figured out how to pitch to the Indians, rendering them ineffective.

Maybe we're just all grasping at straws.

One thing is for sure - the Indians are not playing like the same team that put themselves in the position that they are right now, still on top of the AL Central,

and the answers need to be found before the rest of the AL (and even the rest of the Central) catches up and erases all of the good feelings that have surrounded the season thus far.