When looking for deeper meaning, often we overlook the obvious. Exhibit A is the state of the Cleveland Indians these days. Exhibit B is the current state of the Cleveland Browns. The Indians are currently mired in the kind of slump that makes you wonder if they'll ever win another game. The Browns have a quarterback quandry. And as more and more people look for answers below the surface, the real ones have been staring them in the face all along.

When looking for deeper meaning, often we overlook the obvious. Exhibit A is the state of the Cleveland Indians these days. Exhibit B is the current state of the Cleveland Browns.

The Indians are currently mired in the kind of slump that makes you wonder if they'll ever win another game. They can't seem to bunch any hits together. Game after game, they don't advance runners. They strike out with such regularity it's as if they have a team aversion to putting the ball in play. They fail so often with runners in scoring position that even being down one or two runs amounts to an insurmountable hurdle. And now, they aren't even playing fundamentally sound. I'd research the last time a player got picked off first with the bases loaded and no outs, like Jhonny Peralta on Sunday, but I wouldn't know where to start. Although I'm sure it's happened before, suffice it to say though that if anyone can find another example, whether in little league, American Legion, minor leagues or Strat-o-matic, email me.

But that's the thing about this particular run with the Indians. Slump is just the generic term we put on it because it's far easier to describe it in one word than to undo what is surely a Gordian Knot by this point. But there are a few obvious points before getting all twisted up overanalyzing. Consider, for example, the

notion that the Indians have suddenly stopped hitting. Travis Hafner's struggles have been well chronicled, but the Indians' run-scoring prowess is actually more myth than reality.

True, the Indians were scoring a lot of runs prior to the All Star game. But only a few bothered to notice that the biggest contributor to all of that was the fact that the Indians were hitting a ton of home runs and not much else. They really haven't been very good at any point this year, except perhaps for April, in situational hitting. Advancing runners, playing small ball is not Manager Eric Wedge's make-up and thus the team has very little experience with it. That's why they can't seem to make it work now when it's needed most.

But the home runs aren't coming nearly as frequently. Prior to the All Star game, the Indians were averaging more than one home run per game. During the 20-game stretch between May 20 and June 9, they hit 33. In fact, the only 20-game stretch during the season when they didn't hit at least 20 home runs was June 10-June 30 and then they hit 19. But in the 30 games since the All Star break, they've hit 25 home runs overall. In the last 10 games, they've hit only five. In other words, the Indians ability to score was tied to the long ball and as that has become less and less frequent, so too has their ability to score runs in general.

Another way to look at it is to consider the team's on-base percentage. From mid-June through the All Star break, it was holding very steady at around .352. Since then it has been in a freefall and is now at its lowest point, .341. When combined with the lack of home runs, which had been their salvation, one can see why the Indians can't score runs. They don't get on base and thus the occasional hit they do get is almost always for naught. As for putting the ball in play and advancing runners, just know that in the 18 games since July 25, they have had double-digit strike outs seven times and two other games when they struck out nine times each. One could draw the same conclusion as well by pointing to the fact that they have only 12 sacrifice hits since the All Star break. Of course, they didn't have all that many prior to the All Star break, either, but it

just points to the fact, when combined with all the strike outs, that the Indians can't manufacture runs when they are otherwise struggling.

All this circles around back to the more obvious point: the Indians really haven't been a run-producing machine, despite what many might otherwise think. The patch they are going through now owes as much as anything else to the surprising lack of power. Perhaps that's the reason GM Mark Shapiro traded for Kenny Lofton in the first place. He needed someone to hit something other than a home run.

As for the Browns, so much kvetching is taking place in the media about the play of the quarterbacks. But simply wanting Charlie Frye or Derek Anderson to "step up" and seize the opportunity presented doesn't mean it will actually happen. The underlying assumption is that either or both have the talent to do exactly that. But that disregards what is probably more obvious: neither actually does.

One of the problems with pre-season games is that they are called "games" rather than scrimmages. They have a look and feel of a real game. There's a coin toss. The quarters are timed. There is a half time, a two minute warning and all of the other vestiges of a regular game. The Browns even charge for them, much to the chagrin of season ticket holders. The expectation is thus created that what is taking place is a game to be won and in a way that has some meaningful impact on what will take place during the regular season. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Never forget that preseason games are a forum for evaluating players and not a game to be won. Any team, including the Browns, can go 4-0 if that's their goal. All they need to do is play their starters all game. They'll win. Guaranteed.

But that's not what teams do nor should they. Filling out the 45-man roster with the best available players is the goal and simulating game conditions is really the

best way coaches have to accomplish that. But these are only simulated game conditions, at best. The established starters hardly play into the second quarter anymore and often don't make it past the first few series. That's true even for a team like Cleveland where the phrase "established starters" is more or less an oxymoron. When Frye is lining up with Syndric Steptoe and Josh Cribbs as his wide receivers, Buck Ortega as his tight end and Jerome Harrison is in the backfield this may be the best way to evaluate Steptoe, Cribbs, Ortega and Harrison, but it isn't necessarily the best way to evaluate Frye or Anderson, for that matter. The only way to properly make that evaluation is with extended play by the starters and alternating quarterbacks. Unfortunately, that isn't likely not only because of the risk of injury but, more importantly, it makes evaluating the rest of the team extremely difficult.

That all being said, it still amazes the amount of attention the so-called quarterback evaluation has gotten. Is Frye ahead? Is Anderson? How many throws did they complete in practice? Who looked better in the 7-on-7 drills? Put it this way, if GM Phil Savage really thought either Frye or Anderson was the long-term answer, he never would have traded next year's first round pick in order to get Brady Quinn. Even if he isn't saying it publicly, Savage already knows what should be obvious to the rest of us: neither Frye nor Anderson is the future. When Quinn is ready, and probably before that, he'll play and continue to play until he's hurt or proves he can't play in this league.

When the season opens on September 9 against Pittsburgh, it will probably be Frye at quarterback, if only because he was the starter last year. Frye performed on Saturday pretty much like he performed all of last year. He completed a lot of short passes, tended to throw behind his receivers as the length of the route increased and was good for a brain cramp or two. The real surprise was Anderson. He simply looked lost. But again, that's just stating the obvious, which is actually necessary these days. As more and more people look for answers below the surface, in the case of the Browns (and the Indians) the real ones have been staring them in the face all along.