Cliff Lee is my favorite Cleveland Indian.

Lee is not as impressively productive at as young an age as Jhonny Peralta. He is not as forceful a personality nor throws as hard as C.C. Sabathia. He is not as unusually productive for his position as Victor Martinez, is less single than the heartthrob Grady Sizemore, is not as large and gregarious as Bob Wickman, nor as possessive of a memorable nickname as Travis "Pronk" Hafner. Regardless, he is a good young left-handed pitcher, and he is my favorite player.

This is good news for Cliff Lee, who now knows that he has a fan who is neither related to nor married to him, and to whom Lee is the fan's FAVORITE player.

This is bad news for Cliff Lee, because he is MY favorite player.

My first favorite player was Chris Chambliss. Chambliss was a slick-fielding first baseman who could hit for average, and although not exactly a Hall of Fame talent, stuck out on an early-70s Indians team largely devoid of interesting players. The only other real choice for me was third baseman Graig Nettles, but I could not bring myself to attach my emotions to a player who was unable to spell the name "Greg" properly. In the long run, it didn't really matter which I chose,

since they were both soon New York Yankees, and thus eliminated from Favorite Player consideration.

I needed a new Favorite Player, and it was then for the first time that my individualist streak came to the fore. Where my friends glommed on to Ray Fosse and Buddy Bell, I wanted to be distinctive. I wanted to have a Favorite Player that few others did, so that when he came through spectacularly, I would reap that much more cosmic currency for having had the wisdom to pick him before he was Everyone's Favorite. And thus I came to adopt the power-hitting left fielder, Charlie Spikes.

Well, I say "power-hitting" in the sense that when Spikes hit the ball well, it always looked as though it could be an extra-base hit. Alas, for whatever other skills Spikes possessed (he had very nice hair, as I recall ... I believe he was polite to grocery store clerks as well), hitting a ball well was not one of them. Okay, okay, Charlie Spikes was terrible. You caught me. Are you happy? You have now made an elementary school student cry retrospectively. I hope you're proud of yourself. (Significantly prouder than I was that Charlie Spikes was my Favorite Player, I would venture. He wasn't good.)

Sure, there were some very decent ballplayers for the Cleveland Indians of my youth. Dennis Eckersley was very impressive. Rick Manning was a very handsome fellow. Duane

Kuiper was ... what was it that Kuiper did again? Something, probably. Don Hood was my favorite player (lower case) for a while because I got his autograph. I have since squandered said autograph. In fact, if Mr. Hood is reading this, please contact me, as I would like your autograph. Sign it, "To my least responsible fan, Don Hood." Actually, as I recall, it looked a bit more like "D-m H--l", but autographs are usually produced at a rapid rate. Anyway, Eckersley was becoming my Favorite Player, then was shipped out of town.

Brett Butler was my Favorite Player, but he hated playing for Cleveland enough to hide from the front office after becoming a free agent. Rick Sutcliffe was my Favorite Player for his ability to be amongst the league leaders in strikeouts, until he mercilessly ripped the team and city on his way to Chicago and I still haven't forgiven him. (He was right, but he didn't have to say it so audibly.) Mike Jeffcoat became my Favorite Player for his ability to ... well, he led the league in appearances, which is kind of like the Perfect Attendance of major league baseball awards. He threw left-handed. Not particularly well, but particularly often. He was traded to Texas, meaning he actually achieved the Double Dip of misplaced fandom: he was neither good nor on my team. He was very good as an attributed imaginary Atari Baseball pitcher, though.

Then there was Doug Jones.

Doug Jones was a true rarity in my history of Favorite Players: he was good, and he did not leave immediately after people figured this out. Sure, he had to pitch in front of Mel Hall and Glenallen Hill and Brook Jacoby, but he was good and stayed anyway. (Given the choice of stinking or leaving, Julio Franco left.) Sure, Jones left eventually, but I got a lot more mileage from Jones than Charlie Spikes, I'll tell you that.

Before adequately latching onto Carlos Baerga for his unusual name and more unusual body shape, I grabbed onto Jim Thome. Manny Ramirez was objectively the better player, but Thome overcame using Corningware for a third baseman's glove and an inability to frighten outfielders into playing within sight of the warning track to become one of the elite hitters in the American League. I liked how he took a walk (I had become intrigued by the new-to-me concept of OBP at the

time). I liked how he hit Canadian restaurants. I tolerated his inability to say anything interesting whatsoever as a graduate of the Crash Davis School of Vapid Interviewing. I liked Jim Thome.

Who is, of course, a Chicago White Sok. Whom I hate. He is Graig Nettles, except that he does not spell his first name "Jym" or "Giam" or some such

rot.

So when we traded Bartolo Colon, I latched onto Cliff Lee. I have an unnatural affinity for left-handed pitchers. I liked Dave

Otto. I liked Chris Nabholz. I did not like Matt Young, but then, who did? I do not believe Matt Young was truly left-handed. Nor a pitcher. He was a fungus. But I like left-handed pitchers. My friend told me that Sizemore would be the

real catch when all was said and done, and of course Bran Bran the Muffin Man Phillips was supposed to be the jewel to the rest of the world, but I grabbed Lee.

Now Cliff Lee is a bona fide major-league starter. He is not a terrific starter, but he is good. (He is also on the thin side, and should eat more semi-nutritional food, but this is merely my opinion.) I latched onto a minor-league

player, and he became an important contributor! To MY team! This is a wonderful feeling.

So, when Cliff Lee begins sporting an 8.00 ERA or contracts

beriberi or is traded to Houston for Alan Ashby (he does the color for the radio here, honest), you know whom to blame. For now, I love Cliff Lee. In fact, if you're reading this, Mr. Lee, please contact me, as I would like your

autograph. Sign it, "To my least responsible fan, Don Hood." (Perhaps we can fool the cosmos this way.)