Great freaking piece from Paulie C this morning as he examines why Grady Sizemore is the most unnoticed and underappreciated star in all of baseball ... even amongst Indians fans. Ask any Indians fan who their team MVP is this season, and you'd get alot of CC, Carmona, Victor, and Betancourt replies and very few, if any, for Super Sizemore. Paul breaks down Grady's season in this latest piece, and also reminds Indians fans just how lucky we are to have him.

Ask an Indians fan to choose an MVP for the 2007 season, and the answers and reasoning will be varied and (for the most part) justifiable:

C.C. Sabathia has established himself as one of the elite pitchers in the AL, capable of winning EVERY game he pitches in.

Fausto Carmona saved the rotation in grand (and superlative-inducing) fashion from injuries to Westbrook and Lee, then the subsequent ineffectiveness of Lee and Sowers as he sawed off bats of hitters all over the AL.

Victor Martinez picked up the slack from Pronk's struggles to carry the run-producing burden on the team, while quietly improving his much-maligned defense and throwing.

Rafael Betancourt and Rafael Perez settled the back end of the bullpen, stepping forward to lock down the 7th and 8th innings, bridging the effective starters (who often went the requisite 6 innings…Cliff Lee not included) to Borowski.

Even Joe Borowski, who single-handedly increased the sales of Pepto-Bismal and TUMS across Northeast Ohio on his way to a potential record-setting season in

saves, could merit a mention as we've learned with closers that style points don't matter, just results.

Or how about Asdrubal Cabrera, whose promotion provided the spark to a lackluster offense and team, launching them on the run to the AL Central title. With his clutch hits and emergence as the #2 hitter, Cabrera became the X factor that the Tribe seemed to be waiting for, appearing out of nowhere to save the season.

A case can be made very well for all of these players, but a name seems to be missing in most of these discussions – the Indians' best everyday player.

Why doesn't Grady get the love despite another stellar season?

Is his omission simply an oversight or an indication that he's somehow unnoticed?

How could he be a quiet contributor – the SI Cover Boy with his own Fan Club, the Golden Boy whose 24 jersey continues to fly off the shelf in the Team Shop?

Have we already taken his projected contributions for granted?

Yeah, chalk him up for 25 HR, 100 RBI, 125 R, 35 SB, Gold Glove defense…yawn.

Perhaps it's what is perceived to be an off-year with his batting average sitting at .277 , as people fail to realize that Batting Average falls pretty far down the list of measurables for a hitter's performance as it doesn't take walks into account (as OBP does…and, as we all know from Little League, "a walk's as good as a hit"), or weight extra-base hits more than just hits (as SLG does as hitting a 2B or a HR certainly carries more weight than hitting a seeing-eye single) and BA certainly doesn't measure up to what many baseball fans have acknowledged as the preeminent statistic to measure a hitter, OPS (literally, OBP plus SLG).

So how does Grady look in these categories, not as well known by most baseball fans, but that serve as better indicators of a player's performance at the plate?

OBP - .387

1st on Indians
14th overall in AL
2nd among leadoff hitters in AL (Suzuki)

SLG - .466

3rd on Indians (Martinez - .503, Garko - .481)
26th overall in AL
2nd among leadoff hitters in AL (Granderson)

OPS - .853

2nd on Indians (Martinez - .880)
20th overall in AL
2nd among leadoff hitters in AL (Granderson)

Using the statistics that many people dismiss as “fancy math” (though they’re no more complicated than Batting Average) and just aren’t as well-known as Batting Average (the benchmark for a .300 hitter remains), Grady’s certainly not having an “off-year” by any stretch of the imagination.

Maybe it’s the perception that Grady is miscast as a leadoff hitter and that his best use for the lineup would be to sit in the #3 hole to maximize his offensive skills. Well, if his skills are scoring runs and creating runs for the team, built on pitching and the run-producing capability of Martinez and Hafner (the way that Soriano is able to lead off in Chicago, allowing Lee and Ramirez to drive him in) than the leadoff spot suits him at this point in his career.

Consider his AB in last Sunday night’s game in Anaheim, when he bunted his way onto 1B, stole 2B, and scored on a grounder hit to 1B. He essentially created something out of nothing and, at the leadoff spot where he’s assured to get the most AB of any player, what’s the harm in allowing Sizemore to remain the catalyst of the offense?

It’s not as if he’s lacking in the categories usually associated with leadoff hitters (obviously, see above for OBP):

R – 111

1st on Indians
3rd overall in AL
2nd among leadoff hitters in AL (Granderson)

H – 160

1st on Indians
17th overall in AL
4th among leadoff hitters in AL (Suzuki, Granderson, Roberts)

SB – 32

1st on Indians
6th overall in AL
3rd among leadoff hitters in AL (Roberts, Suzuki)

At a certain point in Sizemore's career, it's entirely conceivable for him to move down the order to impact his run-producing ability as he continues to mature as a hitter. Certainly, his skill set isn't being wasted at the top of the lineup where his speed and aggressiveness are constantly utilized to create run-scoring opportunities for the rest of the Tribe lineup.

But what of this power, beginning to develop in SuperSizemore?

Despite the fact that he had Trot Nixon and Josh Barfield batting in front of him for most of the season, Sizemore still put up solid RBI numbers. And, now with Lofton, Gutierrez, and Blake in front of him on a regular basis, the fruits of having a more complete lineup are apparent as Grady finds himself in more run-producing situations.

Grady, sitting on the top of the lineup, seems to be doing OK for himself in the "power" categories, in terms of his placement on the Indians and league-wide:

HR – 23

1st on Indians
14th overall in AL
1st among leadoff hitters in AL

RBI – 74

3rd on Indians (Martinez – 102, Hafner – 90)
35th overall in AL
1st among leadoff hitters in AL

To recap, Grady's in the top 3 on the Indians in ALL of the categories shown above and in the top 20 in AL in 6 of the 10 categories.

So where's the love for a wildly consistent player that just goes about his job, never asking for the spotlight while throwing his body around the OF and having his name penciled into the lineup card every day?

Perhaps it's his K totals (144 that lead the AL) that frustrate people, particularly from the leadoff spot. But, going into this year, Sizemore said that he was working on improving his hitting against LHP:

2006

.214 BA / .290 OBP / .427 SLG / .717 OPS in 220 AB

2007

.274 BA / .372 OBP / .416 SLG / .788 OPS in 190 AB

Nice little bump for something that he focused on getting better at.

All of Cleveland spends the Cavs' off-season reading about what facet of the game that LeBron has decided to improve (and if his FIBA performance and reports that he's suddenly Jimmy Chitwood from the field, I simply won't be able to contain myself), so why can't we say that Sizemore's doing the same thing – improving a different portion of his all-around game one piece at a time.

In the same vein, as fans often forget Sizemore's relative inexperience when pointing to his K total, consider that he has all of career 2,010 AB before this season is dubbed a "disappointment", in that he didn't enjoy the break-out year that some were predicting (remember that Gammons picked him as his pre-season AL MVP).

With Sizemore, it's important to remember that he JUST turned 25 and the two players that he compares most closely too in the history of baseball are Duke Snider and Carlos Beltran . Snider hit 42 HR when he was 26 as opposed to the 21 he hit while he was 25 and Beltran's breakout year happened when he turned 27 (he hit 38 HR with the Royals and the Astros during that season that he put the Astros on his back en route to the World Series) and never hit more than 29 in the years prior to it. Of course, there's no certainty that Sizemore will take the same steps as those two players, but those expecting a true "breakout" year this year may just a bit premature.

It's also important to remember that the 25-year-old is still growing into his skin as his quiet demeanor often defers to players on the with more experience than him. At this point, he's a leader on the team in that he leads by example the way that a young SS did back in the 90's in the Bronx.

Now, is Grady our Jeter?

That "Face of the Franchise" whose numbers may not sparkle like those of the sluggers, but whose contributions go deeper than just numbers in the winning attitude, the quiet confidence, the "pedal to the metal" approach to the game that sets the tone for his teammates without saying a word, and the steadiness that calms the stormy waters of the ups and downs of a baseball season?

While his consistency and steadiness may leave Sizemore taken for granted as a pillar of the Indians, it's important to remember the old adage that "slow and steady wins the race".

If that's the case, and Grady is by no means slow with no signs of slowing down, what does "fast and steady" win?
Hopefully, more than just a (simple pennant) race.