

"Major League" Uprising

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Sometimes you don't realize what you have until it's gone. And I think Tony Lastoria speaks for us all in his latest column when he says he took the playoffs for granted back in the nineties, and is really taking the time out to step back and appreciate it more this time around. Tony also uses the column to draw some parallels between this years Indians team and the one depicted in the popular film from 1989. 6:37 tomorrow night! CC - Wang from the Jake!!!



Just about every Tribe fan has the ending memorized, and knows when and where they first saw "Major League." A misfit Cleveland Indians team goes on a hot streak the last few months of the season, then beat the Yankees in the finale and pandemonium ensues.

Of course, lost in the joy of watching this fictional tale is that the victory was only in a one game playoff to determine the division winner and the right to go to the playoffs. That is something that is overlooked by many when watching the movie, that the tears some of us shed or the chills that went down our spines when we beat the Yankees in that movie was not because they won a World Series championship, but that they finally were winners and a playoff team.

That's what it was like back when the Indians first made the playoffs in 1995, ending a 41-year drought. It was a thrill-ride of a season that year, and several generations were experiencing their first season of winning Cleveland Indians baseball where we dominated the regular season ... winning 100 out of 144

games and making it to the World Series. The spoils of regular season success had not yet set in like it did from 1996-2001 when fans may have taken regular playoff appearances for granted.

Sometimes you do not realize what you have until it is gone. From this corner, missing the excitement of October for the past five years has made me appreciate what the Indians were able to accomplish back in the nineties. Yes, the division was much weaker then and the Indians steamrolled their way to a division title every year, but still, making the playoffs in Major League Baseball is quite an accomplishment. One that we took for granted and mistakenly thought was an easy task.

The Indians are now back in the playoffs and embark on a quest to bring a World Series title to this town for the first time in 59 years. If the Indians fall short of that goal and do not win the World Series this year, or heck, do not even make it out of the first round against the Yankees, all is not lost. While the disappointment of yet another playoff failure may resonate among Indians fans for awhile, hopefully after a few weeks the fans can look back and appreciate the steps the team has taken to get to where it is today. This team is setup quite nicely to be a World Series contender for the next several years.

Playoff appearances in baseball should be cherished. This is not the National Hockey League (NHL) or the National Basketball Association (NBA) where more than half the league makes the playoffs. Making the playoffs in the NHL and NBA is good but hardly a crowning achievement, at least not like it is in MLB where you play a marathon of 162 games and only four teams in your league and only eight teams total out of 30 make the playoffs. When teams qualify for the playoffs in baseball, this is why you see so many teams celebrate popping champagne and giving teammates beer baths in the locker room. You see grown men hugging each other in joy, smiling ear to ear, and managers almost breaking down because of the wave of emotions which overcome them from the moment.

To put things in perspective, liken the MLB playoff format to the NBA. The NBA has 16 teams that make the playoffs, compared to the eight in MLB. Imagine if only eight teams made the NBA playoffs where only four teams from each conference made it. If this was the case, then the Cleveland Cavaliers would have made the playoffs this past season on the last day of the season. They had needed the Chicago Bulls to lose and they needed to win on the last day to secure the #2 seed, but under the MLB playoff format the Cavaliers and Bulls

would have been fighting for the wildcard where the Cavaliers would have needed to win and have the Bulls lose on the last day of the season to get in the playoffs.

Think about that. The Cavaliers exciting playoff run to the NBA Finals would have been in serious jeopardy going into the last day of the season under MLB playoff rules. The Cavaliers were clearly one of the best teams in their conference, yet may have missed the playoffs. This is why fans should embrace the accomplishment of making the playoffs in baseball, as it really is hard to get there.

Now, by no means does this mean fans need to be satisfied with just getting there. Our goal as fans should always be for our team to win it all, especially for Cleveland fans who have been without a title in this town for over four decades. This year, the Indians appear to have as good a shot as they ever have to finally bring a title to this town for the first time in 43 years. The Indians postseason quest for a title is just hours away from starting against a Yankees team considered to be the kings of the sport because of their 26 World Series rings.

The Indians surge since 2004 has been Major League-esque in that they went from a bunch of no name players, to a group of players that is rapidly being adored by fans more and more each day. Just like the construction worker in "Major League" who was perusing the roster with some buddies at the bar and saying "Who are these guys?", this was exactly what most of the Indians fans were saying (or at least thinking) going just a year or so ago.

Over the course of this season, this team has proven itself to be a young team that is hungry to win and has fun playing the game of baseball. Along the way, they found themselves in the thick of a pennant race and were able to exorcise some of the demons from The Collapse of 2005. At times, it appears this season is playing to the tune of a perfect Hollywood feel-good sports movie script.

We know in later sequels of the "Major League" franchise that after the Yankee win, the Indians go on to lose to the Chicago White Sox in the American League Championship Series (ALCS), then they later get retribution and beat the White Sox in the ALCS to go to the World Series. No sequel was ever made that had these Indians going on to win it all, but that all may change for real this year.

The final chapter in that movie was never written, seemingly waiting for real-life to come into play and fill in what Hollywood did not script. We almost saw the final

chapter written in 1995 and 1997 when the Indians made the World Series, but bowed out in some excruciating series ending losses, 1-0 to Atlanta in Game Six in 1995 and 3-2 to Florida in extra innings in Game Seven in 1997.

As the Indians-Yankees series gets ready to start, there will be no sacrificing of live chickens, or an offering of rum to Jobu. No Crisco or Bardol to give a little extra break on a curve ball, or American Express card commercials for these Indians. This team is for real, and an unknown fate in October has yet to be realized.

"We're a contender now." Such were the famous words from fictional Cleveland Indians manager Lou Brown in the movie. The Indians may or may not win the World Series this year, and win or lose the fans should soak in and enjoy every minute of the postseason because as we have learned there is no telling when you may be back.

That said, it is time to get ready for postseason baseball and cheer on the Indians to victory.

In the immortal words of Jake Taylor: "Let's win the whole <expletive> thing!"