Tony Lastoria is back here at TCF in his regular Thursday slot, but with Postseason Happenings instead of Minor Happenings for us this week. Tony gladly eats some crow on his stance from last week that the Indians should have skipped Paul Byrd in game four and thrown C.C. on short rest. Tony also looks back on the Yankees series, and looks ahead to the Chowderheads. It all gets started back up tomorrow Tribe fans ...

Some random thoughts looking back on the Yankees series, and ahead to the Red Sox series...

Giving Me The Byrd

Wow, what a great performance from Paul Byrd in Game Four of the Indians-Yankees series. For Indians fans, that was about the best case scenario you could hope for from him facing that team in that ballpark, and he delivered.

Byrd made a lot of people look like fools - me included - who pined for the Indians to skip his start and instead go with C.C. Sabathia on short rest.

That said, this doesn't vindicate the decision by Wedge to start him over Sabathia, as going with the ace on short rest was still the safer play going into the game. But, in the end, it worked so you can't complain. Do note, we will be in this same situation in Game Four of the ALCS, and it will be interesting to see if Wedge goes with Byrd or goes with Sabathia on short rest to possibly get a third start out of Sabathia in a potential Game Seven on normal rest.

More on this below.

Props To Wedge

While I am here doling out the accolades, I have to give manager Eric Wedge his props. There is always a lot of second guessing in baseball, and aside from really one mistake where he brought in Aaron Fultz into the sixth inning of Game Three in a two run game, he did a very good job managing this series.

He lifted Sabathia after five stressful innings in Game One and immediately went to Rafael Perez to close the door on any potential Yankee rallies in the middle innings. He rode Fausto Carmona for nine innings in Game Two and did not take him out of the game after eight innings like he normally would have, and he also played small ball by constantly moving runners in the game with bunts (which I typically dislike as I am not a fan of bunting).

He also went away from using Joe Borowski in a tie game in the ninth inning or later like he had all year and instead went with Rafael Perez in Game Two once Carmona was out of the game.

In Game Three he started Trot Nixon, and Nixon delivered (the error is overblown as two of the three runs scored anyway on the hit).

Finally, Wedge stuck with his players and went with Paul Byrd in Game Four resisting the temptation to start Sabathia on three days rest.

A solid series for Wedge, and considering that going into the series that the Yankees had a big advantage at manager with the experienced Joe Torre, Wedge was par for the course and eliminated that disadvantage. Also, even if you were not impressed with what he did in the Yankees series, he clearly still was not the liability that many thought he would be.

A good start to his postseason managing career.

Torre Gets A Raw Deal

I am puzzled why Yankee Manager Joe Torre is getting so much blame for the Yankees loss in the series. I did not see any decision he made that altered the series, and I thought he did a pretty good job of managing that abomination of a pitching staff. No, if I am Yankee fan my blame falls at the feet of owner George Steinbrenner and General Manager Brian Cashman. Obviously, Steinbrenner will not fire himself, but even though Cashman is merely a puppet for Steinbrenner, this is the man who is in charge of having a near $200 payroll and having all those holes in the pitching staff.

The Yankees essentially had two starters and two relievers. That's it, as the rest of the staff was a bunch of junk.

With that payroll, that is laughable.

If I am Yankee fan, I am PISSED if Torre is not brought back. Torre won four World Series rings in his first five years in New York, and went to six World Series' in his 12 years as Yankee manager. But, the reason they have not won a World Series in seven years, or been to one in four years, is not because Torre all of a sudden became a bad manager ... it once again falls on the owner and general manager. Cashman's AWFUL acquisitions and his inability to give Torre much of a pitching staff is a big reason the Yankees have struggled a lot in the postseason in recent years.

Killing A Dynasty

Speaking of the Yankees, boy, not only was it exciting to knock them off to advance to the ALCS, but this series loss to the Indians quite possibly is the end of the Yankees as we know them. It looks like it will be an offseason of change for the Yankees as they have several question marks regarding the return of manager Joe Torre along with All-Stars Jorge Posada, Mariano Rivera, Roger Clemens, and Alex Rodriguez. There is even talk they may try to get rid of Johnny Damon and Jason Giambi, but good luck with finding a team to take on those contracts.

I don't think Steinbrenner can buy his way out this one. Their roster is old, and needs a complete makeover. In a lot of ways, they are at the same crossroads the Indians were in 2001 when the team was in its twilight and had several players littered up and down the roster who either were bound for free agency or whose careers were all but done.
Of course, the Yankee cash flow will help finance any short-term rebuild or put yet more bandaids on their problems like it has in recent years.
It will be a very interesting offseason for the Yankees, and I am sure ESPN will document every minute of it (oh joy).

Red Sox Antipathy

I never, ever root for the Red Sox. Even when they play the Yankees. A lot of people can't stand the Yankees and their fans because of their arrogance, scoreboard with 26 World Championships, and knowing their team has the resources to get anyone they want.

Of course, if your team was the king of the sport like the Yankees are, I guess I can't blame them for being a bunch of cockamamie bastards.

But, when it comes to Red Sox fan, they are the worst. These fans are a combination of two evils where they 1.) think they have accomplished as much as the Yankees have and 2.) feel a sense of entitlement because of it. Add to it that they are the biggest bunch of whiners and crybabies in all of sports, and you have the definitive example of what the most annoying and intolerable fanbase is in all of sports.

We all heard about The Curse. 1918. Blah, Blah, Blah, Blah. Thank God they finally won in 2004 as I don't know what I would have done had I had to endure Ben Affleck crying on TV about another postseason near miss.

These fans really have a lot of nerve.

While their Red Sox went almost 90 years between championships, during that time period they got to live through a Celtics Dynasty that won 16 NBA Titles, a Boston Bruins hockey franchise that won five Stanley Cups, and a New England Patriots team who recently won three Super Bowls and went to two others.

Since 1964, the last time Cleveland won a sports championship, Boston fan has "suffered" through 15 championships in their four professional sports.

Whiners.

An Exciting ALCS Looms

Looking at the Indians-Red Sox matchup in the ALCS, boy are fans around all of baseball in for a treat this series. The Indians and Red Sox closely resemble one another, and it is no surprise that both teams finished tied for the best record in baseball. Both teams have good offenses, but are led by outstanding starting rotations that are backed up by several good relievers at the backend of their bullpens.

This could be one of those series where a mistake could prove costly, as runs should be at a premium. For the Indians to win, Sabathia and Carmona will need to be on their A-game and the offense will need to do just enough to give them a lead to work with. In Game One, you have an awesome pitching matchup of Sabathia against Josh Beckett, arguably the top two vote getters in this coming CY Young election.

Then, in Game Two, you have Fausto Carmona going up against the egomaniac Curt Schilling.

Man, are these first two games of the ALCS going to be tight.

When the series shifts to the Jake for Games Three through Five, you'll have even more outstanding matchups with Jake Westbrook going up against Daisuke Matsusaka in Game Three, and then a potential intriguing matchup of soft-tossers in Paul Byrd going up against Tim Wakefield in Game Four. The Indians want to win them all, but splitting the first two games in Boston should make them happy. Coming home tied 1-1 in the series for three games at a raucous Jacobs Field could be just what this team needs to gain an advantage to close the door on the Red Sox in five or six games.

Another Game Four Debate

A smart play for the Indians this series may be to go with a three man rotation of Sabathia, Carmona and Westbrook (I'd consider Byrd instead of Westbrook, but Westbrook is already announced as the Game Three starter). With so many off days this series, the Indians can pitch this three man rotation on regular rest for every game except Game Four, and by doing this you potentially pitch Sabathia and Carmona in five of the seven games in the series.

A lot was said about Sabathia needing to start Game Four against the Yankees instead of Paul Byrd, and for different reasons the same thing rings true here. One of the huge benefits of starting Sabathia on short rest in Game Four against Boston is by pitching Game Four on Tuesday, he could come back and pitch Game Seven the following Sunday and be on normal rest. So, by using Sabathia in Game Four you get a potential third start in the series out of your Cy Young candidate instead of just two, and would mean Sabathia and Carmona start five of the seven games.

I like that.

And after what Paul Byrd did to the Yankees, I do not want to hear about the statistics of how pitchers struggle in the postseason when pitching on three days rest. Obviously, as we saw with the Paul Byrd stats and trends going into Game Four against the Yankees, you can throw the stats out the window.

Plus, Jaret Wright came back on three days rest in Game Seven of the 1997 World Series and pitched his ass off, and so did Josh Beckett in Game Six of the 2003 World Series.

If the Indians are up 3-0 in the series going into Game Four, Byrd should get the npd, but any other scenario I think we have to go with Sabathia for Game Four and ride him and Carmona for three of the final four games of the series.

So Cleveland, Did You Miss Me?

Having not been in the playoffs for six years, I forgot how intense and nerve-wracking these games can be. I'm a big fan of the NFL, and love the NBA playoffs, but I am sorry, there is absolutely no comparison to postseason baseball. From the first pitch to the last, it is an odyssey through the full gamut of emotions that leaves us all physically and emotionally spent by the time the game ends.

Then, it all starts right back up again the next night.

In the NFL, it is a week long build up to the big game, and in the NBA the playoffs are a marathon where they last over two months and some series can take over two weeks to be completed. But in baseball, the games are moreorless played every night and the entire postseason is completed in about four weeks. Man, it is great to have postseason baseball back in Cleveland. There really is nothing like it, especially as the Indians go deeper and deeper into the playoffs.

From TBS to FOX

Hallelujah!

I never thought there would be a day I would look to the heavens and be thankful that Indians games would be broadcast nationally on the YES....errrr....FOX Network. That's how bad TBS was in the Indians-Yankees series.

Personally, I didn't take much offense to the commentary like a lot of Indians fans did, but I still acknowledge how ridiculously one-sided they were in the booth and just how awful they were in general.

Right now, Joe Buck and 90's Indians TV villian Tim McCarver are my heroes (does McCarver still do the games on FOX?).

Well, at least until the first inning of Game One of the ALCS when they start gushing over the Red Sox (ugh).

A Network Nightmare

Something tells me that the powers that be at TBS and FOX are weeping profusely these days.

You see, in each one of the four playoff series' the smaller market team prevailed.

In a recent
market size study
, the smaller Colorado (25th) knocked off Philadelphia (6th), Arizona (23rd) knocked off Chicago (9th),
Boston (4th) beat Los Angeles (3rd),
and Cleveland (18th) beat New York (1st).

You better believe executives at both networks were hoping for a New York-Boston and Chicago-Philadelphia matchup in the Championship Series rounds.

Instead, the final four cities are Cleveland, Boston, Denver and Phoenix, which makes them HUGE fans of Boston right now.

A Final Parting Shot on LeBron

Now that the Yankees are out of the playoffs, hopefully it means the end of his little gloating about the love of "his" Yankees. His actions in Game One of the series in Cleveland set off a firestorm in Cleveland, and I wrote about how
disrespectful he was
to the city and fans.

I have never received so many e-mail replies to an article like I have to that one, as the replies quadrupled anything I had ever received on anything written in the past. The overwhelming majority of the e-mail replies were in agreement that he did disrespect the city and fans, although some took it a little too far requesting him to be traded.

Some e-mail replies thought it was being blown out of proportion over "a Yankee hat" and disagreed with my assessment, but I think the point was lost that it is not about the Yankee hat. I could care less if LeBron wore a Yankee hat at a Cowboys-Colts game, or went to Yankee Stadium during the regular season and wore it (provided the Indians were not playing in that game). Just don't do it in Cleveland, and more importantly do not openly root for your fans to lose. Period.

Like it or not, his little display he put on in Game One of the Indians-Yankees series is going to cost him some fan support. Cleveland fans are not ones who get over things very easy, even if some fans feel the whole LeBron-Yankees thing has been taken to an extreme.

Especially when you have a fanbase with the Cavaliers that is so casual where things like this can be a turnoff.

Last But Not Least

If you have not heard this song and seen this video yet, make sure you check it out. Outstanding video with Don MacLaine's "American Pie" sung as "Bye, Bye N-Y":

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QZRKOzAFEB4

Go Tribe!