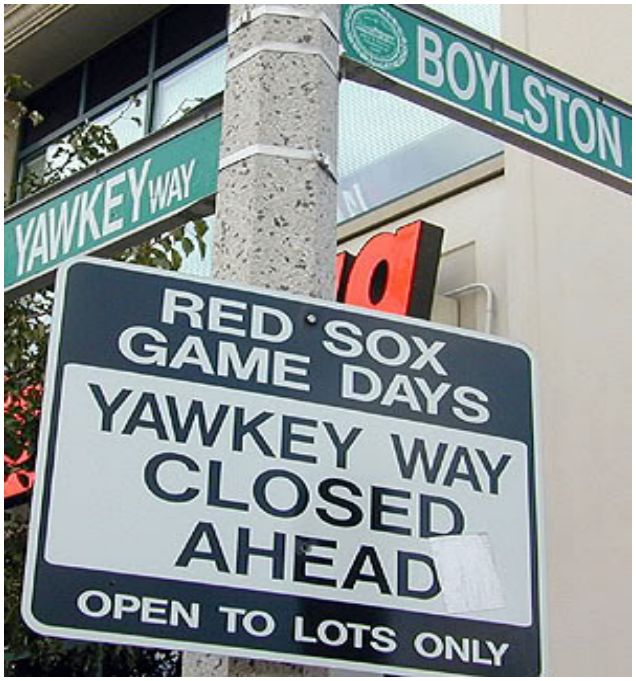
There's any number of roads one might consider going down after Thursday night's Indians loss to the Boston Red Sox. Negativity Boulevard, Indifference Alley, Naive Street, Optimism Avenue, or Realistic Road ... they all lead to the same place: The city of Boston with the Tribe up three games to two. As we get ready for this thing tonight, Gary has some fun with the different fan perspectives through a grueling playoff series.



There's any number of roads one might consider going down after Thursday night's Indians loss to the Boston Red Sox. But they all lead to the same place: The city of Boston with the Tribe up three games to two.

The first and far more traveled road in this town is Negativity Boulevard. It's hard to find it exactly on a map, but considering where the key sports venues are in this town, it has to be somewhere between East 9th and Ontario. At one time or another we've all been on it, many of us recently. Everyone by now knows this road, right?

It's the road where Manager Eric Wedge convinced all his old naysayers Thursday night that he really isn't a very good manager because he sent C.C. Sabathia out for the 7th inning Thursday night when it was clear that Sabathia was lucky to get through six after only giving up two runs. It's also the place where a different group of

naysayers are screaming for Travis Hafner to be dropped down in the lineup because he's sucking the life out of this team with one lousy at bat after another. And while we're here, how the heck did Kenny Lofton misplay what should have been a routine fly ball in the first inning Thursday? It led directly to Boston's first run.

Hanging out on Negativity Boulevard can actually be quite fun, for a limited period of time. It helps cleanse the sole of the pent up anger over the fact that the Indians didn't get it done in their own ball park, denying their fans to collectively rejoice in the exact moment that the Indians received their invitation to the 2007 World Series.

But hanging out on Negativity Boulevard is hardly recommended even if that's where many Cleveland fans like to call home. In a sense, it's hard not to empathize. Cleveland hasn't had a championship team in any major sport in over two generations by this point. There have been any number of close calls which most can recite in painstaking detail. Indeed, it may not be the nicest place to live, but it's the nicest place we know. It has a certain perverse comfort in the same way that pounding your head against the wall does-it feels so good when it's over.

And far be it from me to stop someone from visiting an old friend every now and again. But as the brokerage houses like

to tell us all the time when hawking their mutual funds: past results may not be indicative of future performance. Indeed, other than as interesting footnotes, nothing about what has taken place with prior teams in any sport in this town has any bearing on whether the Indians will advance to the World Series this year. Accept it.

And while I'm at it, accept the fact that you can change out of your so-called lucky shirt or stop aligning the remote control just so on your coffee table. If you really have that sort of dominion over the outcome of an Indians game by the shirt you wear or the chair you sit in, then there are probably even greater uses for such power, such as making that speeding ticket you got for going 85 down I-77 two weeks ago disappear.

For those who do occasionally leave Negativity Boulevard, it's a short trip over to Indifference Alley. Most folks don't like walking around in a bad mood all the time. Convinced, however, that ultimately nothing good could possibly happen in Cleveland sports, they eventually take a side trip down Indifference Alley, flipping the remote, for example, from the game to The Office even though the game is only two innings old, trying to convince themselves that they really could care less what happens in the game.

As if that ever works. Eventually they put on the

picture-in-picture, just to keep an eye on the game in case something happens. And with the very next Indians hit, they get sucked right back in. So much for Indifference Alley. It's only permanent residents are the wives and girlfriends who'd rather be shopping anyway.

A far less traveled road is Optimism Avenue, not to be confused with Naïve Street. See, on Naïve Street, a person doesn't know what he doesn't know. Even though there is no cause and effect between Earnest Byner's fumble and Edgar Renteria's base hit, you can't appreciate success without understanding its disappointing run-ups. The residents of Naïve Street just sort of believe everything will work out just fine even as the parking lot vendors are picking their pockets for nearly double the price during a playoff game.

Those on Optimism Avenue, on the other hand, have a clear understanding and healthy respect for the past. They know that in September it cost $20 to park in one of the lots on Sumner just off of E. 9th and now it is $30 but pay it anyway because it's a small price to be part of history. These folks, too, believe everything will work out just fine because, sooner or later, it's our turn, right? Right?

The final road is reserved for the remaining few who can

place events into context. These folks live on Realistic Road. The reason you find so few fans living here is because it's inconsistent with the concept of being a fan in the first place. As we get reminded from time to time (and as I'm doing for you right now), fan is short for fanatic, meaning someone whose emotions tend to run in extremes.

While you may not find many fans living down this road, it's absolutely critical that the players live there. Boston's Manny Ramirez received great criticism on Thursday for publicly extolling the credo of those who live there when he said, quite simply, that if Boston didn't win the series, it wasn't the end of the world. Dismiss that as Manny being Manny, but what he's really saying is that as professional athletes, they can't afford to be too optimistic, too pessimistic or too fatalistic. The only thing that works, that keeps them sane is to be realistic. Anything else and it is hard to perform.

In Thursday night's game, one of the lessons learned for this young Indians team, frankly, is that they need to be more like Manny, except without the ill-fitting pants, the mile-long dreadlocks and the uneven facial hair. It wasn't

so much that the Red Sox did anything different so much as it was simply that they had been in this position before and thus were able to remain realistic about what would come next. They'd either win or they wouldn't but no matter they were still going to play the game the only way they knew how. It's what they came to do.

Fortunately, it isn't necessarily a long learning curve in professional sports and won't be for the Indians. By the time most athletes have reached this level, they've been in enough pressure situations for enough years that processing a new experience is second nature.

The other thing that's important to remember, indeed what Manny and the Red Sox clearly understand, is that in reality this is a very good Indians baseball team even if it didn't appear that way Thursday night. The Red Sox are neither intimidated nor overconfident, just realistic enough to know that their future can't be predicted so no use trying. Simply stay in the moment.

This is the reality, too, that Wedge has drilled into his

group over and over this past season. It's what allowed them to overcome the harsh reality that good pitchers sometimes struggle and good hitters are still only successful slightly more than 30% of the time. Along with having hearts the size of Montana, it's also what will ultimately allow them to apply the lessons learned and prevail in a series they should win, whether in six games or seven.