Ever since we saw the big man donning a Yankees cap at a Cavaliers game a couple seasons back, Clevelanders have feared that C.C. Sabathia would be wearing Yankee pinstripes in 2009 after his current contract expires with the Tribe. Now, as we get set to head into that potentially final season as an Indian, the whispers have turned into cries. And after C.C's recent spring start against The Evil Empire, the questions started to come. In this superb piece from Gary, he offers up his thoughts on the C.C. situation.

One of the more interesting byproducts of Cleveland Indians pitcher C.C. Sabathia's shutting down of negotiations for his next contract until after the upcoming season is how it plays so perfectly into the massive inferiority complex of the Cleveland populace. Call it the law of unintended consequences.

When Sabathia pitched in a meaningless pre-season game against the Yankees on Sunday, a game in which Sabathia was about as effective as he was in the playoffs last season, it sent both the Cleveland and the New York media into a minor frenzy. No matter how posed, the essence of the questions was the same: will Sabathia find himself in New York after this season?

It's a question that Indians fans have basically been asking since Sabathia signed his last contract. In fact it's a question that Cleveland fans ask every time any decent player on any Cleveland team gets within sniffing distance of free agency, if the fascination Cavaliers fans have with the speculation about LeBron James' next employer in two years is any indication, and it is.

If the deciding factor for Sabathia is money and length of the contract, then the answer as to whether or not he'll be in New York next season is probably. The

Yankees, along with a handful of other teams, don't ascribe to the same sort of business metrics to which most of the rest of the league pay attention. They stake no claim to adhering to a budget, at least in the common definition of that term, and thus embrace the freedom that comes with the removal of such pedestrian and self-imposed restraints. No one anywhere doubts that if it takes coming up with the most money and the longest term contract to land Sabathia, the Yankees will find a way to make that happen. They always do.

But if securing that last dollar available isn't as much of a priority as quality of life, then fans of the Yankees probably won't see Sabathia leading their young rotation next year. This isn't a slam on life as lived in the big city, either. It has much more to do with not grabbing the last buck as the tradeoff for enduring the unflinching and often unfair scrutiny of the New York media market.

According to Paul Hoynes' summary in Monday's Plain Dealer , after his outing Sabathia encountered the usual three or four Cleveland-based reporters. He undoubtedly encountered the usual softball questions as well which would have been followed by the inevitable puff piece profile in the local paper which seeks to neither enlighten nor inform. But when Sabathia looked surprise that the locker room wasn't overrun with the drones from Sector G in the form of the New York media horde, it was a look that lasted but an extra second or two as several reporters from New York, as Hoynes describes, streamed into the locker room.

Though Sabathia seemed somewhat ready for the obvious questions coming his way this time, it would be best for him to take note that it won't always be that way. In Cleveland, a bad outing elicits nothing more than a shrug from the local media, or perhaps just a mild tsk tsk. Throw a bad pitch in New York and Sabathia's liable to find a reporter from the Post sifting through his garbage cans looking for reasons.

Sabathia, of course, isn't talking much in the way of specifics about his contract status. He merely repeats the same tired lines he's been coached to say in order to deflect the inquiries his self-imposed status created. But it was that one answer

to that one question that undoubtedly that will most feed the inferiority complex beast that hovers over Cleveland in general and its sports team in particular. As reported by Hoynes:

"Q. In a perfect world, is your preference be to stay in Cleveland? [sic]

A. In a perfect world, of course, I've been here since I was 17. We'll just have to see what happens."

Locally, that is as much of an admission that Sabathia is going to New York as anything else fans are likely to hear all season. Cleveland is not now nor will it ever be considered "a perfect world." But beyond the lack of trappings of a city in a perpetual struggle with respectability, it won't be a "perfect world" because what Cleveland lacks in cache it also lacks in cash. New York is flush with both.

When fans see the fact that Sabathia shut down off-season negotiations without even giving the Indians the courtesy of a response to its four year deal at approximately $17.5 million a season plus a healthy raise on this year's salary, they naturally draw two conclusions: Sabathia is after the last dollar and there is no chance that the Indians will pay it. It's hard to argue either point. The fact, though, that Indians fans next assume that Sabathia's destination has to be the Yankees is fed less on fact and more on envy.

No matter how great a city New York might be in general, it might as well be Gomorrah on steroids to Clevelanders who see the Yankees as an embodiment of the arrogance and swagger that offend the Midwest sensibilities of a once proud industrial town. They may not be alone in that view, but Clevelanders also see a healthy dose of the Yankees success over the last three or so decades being fed

in some measure by various Cleveland connections, not the least of which is owner George Steinbrenner.

All this may be true, but it no more places Sabathia in New York than it did Manny Ramirez, Jim Thome or Albert Belle. The odds of Sabathia staying in Cleveland may be slim, but it won't be because he necessarily desires the last dollar on the table or that he has a misguided notion that success in New York is necessary to legitimize his career.

The truth is that there may be only a handful of teams capable of paying Sabathia the kind of contract his accomplishments dictate, but as long as it's a handful, the Yankees have probably less of a chance at landing him than some of the others. Leaving one team for another always involves a variety of tradeoffs, but there is enough available cash floating around a variety of major league cities to convince Sabathia that he can land at one of them and the tradeoffs from the sanguine existence he's enjoyed in Cleveland will be minimal.

As for Indians fans, the inevitable loss of Sabathia will add to a more than healthy inferiority complex to be sure, but it shouldn't. The loss of Sabathia will no more deal a blow to Cleveland's status as a major league city than did the losses of Ramirez, Thome or Belle, or even the year after year failures to win the World Series. That little dose of reality may be little solace to those still pining for that one title in their lifetimes, but it is the truth.

The other truth, the one that might elicit some comfort, will have to be in the form of the Yankees likely coming out on the short end in the Sabathia sweepstakes, just as they did with Johan Santana. The guess is that Sabathia won't chase the last dollar, even if he chases most of them. Striking that modest compromise will keep him out of the clutches of the Yankees, bring him some semblance of peace of mind, and give Yankees fans reasons other than the recent Red Sox domination to feel just a tad inferior themselves. And for the poor soles in Cleveland, who last experienced a World Series title 60 years ago, to this they can say "welcome to the club."