Your Cleveland Indians are back! When the first pitch is thrown tomorrow around 3:12 PM, the Indians will look to get the bad taste out of their mouths from last years ALCS, and have another stiff challenge ahead of them this season. Not only will the Indians be in a war with Detroit all year to win the division title, but if they make the playoffs there will be several formidable opponents like Boston, New York, Seattle, and others. We got the Roundtable back together to get our writers thoughts on how this season would turn out for the Tribe.

Your Cleveland Indians are back.

When the first pitch is thrown tomorrow around 3:12 p.m. at the newly named Progressive Field, it will finally provide fans the opportunity they have waited for all offseason to wipe that bitter taste from their mouths after the Indians meltdown in the ALCS last October. It has been a long 161 days since the end of Game Seven of the ALCS, which in baseball life is an eternity.

The Tribe embarks on a 2008 campaign that will see them face one of the stiffest regular season challenges any Indians team may have faced. With the American League loaded with several elite and some very good teams, just about every night will be a dogfight. Not only will the Indians be in a war with Detroit all year to win the division title, but if they make the playoffs there will be several formidable opponents like Boston, New York, Seattle, and others.

Last year, the Indians were a popular choice by many pundits to rebound from a rough 2006 campaign and make the playoffs. This year, even though the Indians did little this offseason, the Indians are not only a strong favorite by many to win the American League pennant, but also to win the World Series. Indians fans can only hope.

Whatever happens this season, the boys of summer have returned to the corner of Carnegie and Ontario. The name of the park may have changed, but fans will notice that the team that trots out onto the field for the home opener will be almost

exactly the same as the one that walked off the field in their final home game last year in Game Five of the ALCS. The Indians believe that continuity combined with the continued development and growth of their young players as well as rebound seasons by some of their stars who had off years last year will be the difference in putting this team over the hump.

Can the Indians repeat their success from last season? Are C.C. Sabathia and Fausto Carmona ready for an encore? Can Travis Hafner rebound? Will Borowski finally cave? Do the young players from last season take a step back in their sophomore campaign, or take a step forward and establish themselves as stars? Will we get anything out of the left field platoon? We polled the guys here at The Cleveland Fan for their thoughts on how this Indians season will go, as well as several predictions for season awards and the playoffs. Baseball is back!

Tribe Thoughts

Nick Allburn: It's tough not to like the Tribe's makeup this season considering that they're essentially the same club they were last year, when they were the second best team in baseball. Fans should be worried about Sabathia, Carmona, and Betancourt possibly having tired arms. At the same time, fans can expect increased offensive production from lineup mainstays Travis Hafner and Grady Sizemore, and should be ecstatic about having wunderkind Asdrubal Cabrera in the lineup for a full season. Mark Shapiro was very disciplined over the winter, and he didn't make a deal (via trade or free agency) that violated the Indians' conservative policy to build from within and retain their core players. Detroit's revamped lineup will be outstanding, but they traded away much of their young starting pitching depth when they parted with Andrew Brown and Jair Jurrjens, and also dealt away a can't "miss" outfield prospect in Cameron Maybin. The Tigers will definitely score some runs, but with the Tribe's offensive balance, bullpen, and depth of starting pitching, I expect them to hoist their second consecutive AL Central championship banner.

Steve Buffum: The past three seasons have essentially been the same: the rotation is good, the offense scores runs, and the bullpen controls the outcome. In 2005, the bullpen was very good, much better than expected, and we won 90. In 2006, it was dreadful, and we finished under .500. In 2007, it was outstanding and we won 90. I expect it to be good again with the addition of Kobayashi and the full-season availability of Lewis and Perez, so I expect 2008 to be another 90-win season. The offense has its plusses and minuses, but we did score runs last year

and should do so again. I'm not worried about the starters, except insofar as we've been pretty lucky with the collective health of the rotation. Obviously injuries are a huge factor for any team, but Cleveland is better-suited to absorbing them than most, including its main rivals for playoff spots.

Because it is Cleveland, I expect them to lose in the playoffs. Better to be pleasantly surprised than devastatingly disappointed.

Erik Cassano: With the Indians, it will all come down to pitching. If the pitching is as good or better than last year, and the old adage that good pitching beats good hitting is true, the Indians should win the AL Central for a second straight year. I'm predicting a tortoise-and-hare scenario where the Tigers jump out to a fast lead, then the Indians slowly chip away as the Tigers live a feast-or-famine existence with great hitting and shaky pitching.

Paul Cousineau: The quality and depth of the Indians' starting pitchers will carry them past the aging and pitching-thin Tigers in the AL Central, despite Detroit's offense setting franchise records for runs scored. The flotsam of the roster will be jettisoned by mid-season as the Tribe's farm system continues to bear fruit for the parent club, allowing the Indians to overcome poor years for Lee, Dellichaels, Garko, and Borowski to win their first WS title in 60 years.

Todd Dery: The 2008 Season is upon us and there is a ton of excitement and expectation in C-Town. Rightfully so. A young team is a year matured and hopefully a year better. **The Good:** There is no way Travis Hafner will have the year he had last year. Big jumps will happen from Franklin Gutierrez and Ryan Garko. Jhonny Peralta will hit like he did in October all year. The bullpen and rotation will be rocks all year long.
The Bad:
Joe Borowski will pitch his way out of the closers role by July. The leftfield platoon of David Dellucci and Jason Michaels will be a colossal disaster. C.C. Sabathia will be good, but not great as he was last year as he struggles a bit in his free agent year.
The Prediction:
Last year, we said 90 wins and missing the playoffs. This year, we say 94 wins and the AL Central Crown. The difference: Too much Tribe pitching depth and the Tigers bullpen is really THAT bad.

Jesse Lamovsky: In 2006, the reigning AL Central champion had its title

defense undermined by a once-stellar pitching staff that crumbled down the stretch. In 2007, the reigning AL Central champion had its title defense undermined by a once-stellar pitching staff that crumbled down the stretch. The Tribe ran up last year's division flag and took down the Yankees with pitching. It will be pitching that either makes for a repeat and more- or an uncomfortable stroll in the shoes of the White Sox of ‘06 and the Tigers of ‘07.

Fortunately, Cleveland as an organization has done an outstanding job of managing the health of its pitchers, and there is young, proven talent from the front of the rotation to the back of the bullpen. The Tribe may not pitch as well as they did in 2007. But with question marks all over every other team in the division, they might not have to. "Pretty good" should be good enough.

Tony Lastoria: I don't see a lot changing this season. Sabathia will be as good as he has been the last two years, Borowski will make you pull your hair out in the 9th but do the job 85% of the time, Michaels and Dellucci will not stop sucking, Martinez will continue to put up great numbers, and so on. But, two things will change that puts the Indians over the top. First, Travis Hafner will rebound and produce in line with his 2004-2006 performance. And second, having Asdrubal Cabrera, Franklin Gutierrez, Jensen Lewis and Rafael Perez for a full year will help a lot. With the quartet of youngsters here all year and Hafner performing at a near MVP level, it will be what puts the Indians over the top. This is the year.

Brian McPeek: I'm not one to be overly optimistic. Anyone reading anything I write is aware of that. That said, this year's Indians squad returns nearly everyone in 2008 (including 19 game winners CC Sabathia and Fausto Carmona) who made a difference to last season's run to within one game of a World Series appearance. More importantly, those players return hungrier and more experienced. Blessed with strength in the rotation, in the bullpen and led by veterans like Victor Martinez, Travis Hafner and Grady Sizemore (both coming off what can only be described as 'off' years for them) the Indians are poised to break a 60 year drought in Cleveland. If not now, when?

Jarad Regano: The Cleveland Indians made a believer out of me last year. I thought they didn't do enough to improve on the dismal '06

campaign; however the '06 season proved to be the mirage (not 2005). Pitching is the key, and the Indians have it. With the rotation returning and deep, the bullpen is even better than last year with Kobayashi and Jorge Julio. I am scared about 2009, but this year's team should play in October- even with David Dellucci in left.

Rich Swerbinsky: The Indians win the Central behind the best pitching staff in all of baseball, edging out the 90 win Tigers by three games. The Tribe once again beats the Yankees in the ALDS, but also once again falls to the Red Sox in 7 in the ALCS.

Cris Sykes: You think blowing a 3-1 series lead in the ALCS was bad? Try blowing a 3-0 series lead in the World Series...to the Cubs! The good things on the way to the hearbreak? Jhonny Peralta becomes an elite American League shortstop, and gets his name in the MVP talk with his .290, 30HR, 100 RBI season. Pronk and Grady return to the forefront of AL sluggers. CC and Fausto remain the best 1-2 punch in baseball.

Predictions

N

S

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T

Indians Record

94-68

94-68

92-70

95-67

93-69

AL East

Red Sox

Red Sox

Red Sox

Red Sox

Red Sox

AL Central

Indians

Indians

Indians

Indians

Indians

AL West

Angels

Angels

Angels

Mariners

Angels

AL Wildcard

Tigers

Tigers

Tigers

Blue Jays

Tigers

AL MVP

G. Sizemore

Manny Ramirez

Manny Ramirez

Miguel Cabrera

Alex Rodriguez

AL Cy Young

Josh Beckett

Josh Beckett

J. Verlander

Erik Bedard

J. Verlander

AL ROY

Clay Buchholz

Phil Hughes

Evan Longoria

Evan Longoria

Jacoby Ellsbury

NL East

Mets

Mets

Mets

Phillies

Mets

NL Central

Cubs

Brewers

Cubs

Cubs

Cubs

NL West

Dodgers

Diamondbacks

Diamondbacks

Diamondbacks

Diamondbacks

NL Wildcard

Rockiers

Braves

Dodgers

Brewers

Phillies

NL MVP

David Wright

David Wright

Albery Pujols

Ryan Howard

Chase Utley

NL CY Young

Jake Peavy

Johan Santana

Johan Santana

Brandon Webb

Johan Santana

NL ROY

Geovany Soto

K. Fukodome

K. Fukodome

K. Fukodome

Jay Bruce

World Series

Red Sox over Mets

Diamondbacks over Red Sox

Red Sox over Mets

Indians over Diamondbacks

Red Sox over Phillies

J

T

B

J

F

C

Indians Record

91-71

95-67

94-68

91-71

93-69

93-69

AL East

Red Sox

Yankees

Red Sox

Red Sox

Red Sox

Red Sox

AL Central

Indians

Indians

Indians

Indians

Indians

Tigers

AL West

Mariners

Mariners

Mariners

Mariners

Mariners

Mariners

AL Wildcard

Yankees

Red Sox

Tigers

Angels

Yankees

Indians

AL MVP

Manny Ramirez

Alex Rodriguez

Miguel Cabrera

Alex Rodriguez

Ichiro Suzuki

Ichiro Suzuki

AL Cy Young

Josh Beckett

C.C. Sabathia

Roy Halladay

Roy Halladay

Josh Beckett

Erik Bedard

AL ROY

Jacoby Ellsbury

Evan Longoria

Jacoby Ellsbury

Jacoby Ellsbury

Evan Longoria

Jacoby Ellsbury

NL East

Mets

Braves

Mets

Mets

Braves

Mets

NL Central

Reds

Brewers

Brewers

Brewers

Brewers

Reds

NL West

Diamondbacks

Dodgers

Diamondbacks

Diamondbacks

Dodgers

Diamondbacks

NL Wildcard

Dodgers

Mets

Phillies

Cubs

Mets

Cubs

NL MVP

Matt Holliday

Prince Fielder

Ryan Howard

Carlos Beltran

David Wright

David Wright

NL CY Young

Dan Haren

Johan Santana

Brandon Webb

Jake Peavy

Brad Penny

Johan Santana

NL ROY

K. Fukodome

Jay Bruce

K. Fukodome

Chase Headley

Hiroki Kuroda

Johnny Cueto

World Series

Indians over Dodgers

Indians over Braves

Indians over Mets

Red Sox over Mets

Red Sox over Braves

Cubs over Indians