Whither C.C.? What the heck was that? Enter ... The Voice of Reason, Paulie Cousineau, who hammered out this excellent piece for us on a chilly April Saturday morning in CTown. In it, Paul takes a very close look at the poor start of C.C., making a very astute observation about The Hefty Lefty after taking a closer look at the numbers. Also, Paul reminds us - aside from C.C. and Byrd, the rest of this pitching staff has been very good so far on the young season.

As frustrating as it is to watch the reigning Cy Young Award winner's WHIP creep closer to his weight (his current 2.32 WHIP, I believe, is still a little short of his tonnage), let's take a quick step back and analyze how the Indians' pitching staff, as a whole, is performing in the young season and what's happening to our beloved aCCe.

At the risk of channeling my inner Kevin Bacon in "Animal House", I'm really not all that panicked by the way the Tribe pitching staff has been going. Have there been some clunkers? Sure...JoeBo's implosion in Anaheim certainly falls under that category. But, for the most part, the poor outings for the Indians have come from two sources - C.C. Sabathia and Paul Byrd.

Consider the numbers:

Sabathia and Byrd

0-4, 11.39 ERA, 2.34 WHIP in 21 1/3 IP

The Rest of the Indians' Pitching Staff

4-2, 2.40 ERA, 1.09 WHIP in 50 IP

Those numbers for the rest of the Tribe staff INCLUDE a shaky start by the Fist of Steel (Betancourt), who has given up 3 ER after giving up 13 ALL of last year, and Brodzoski (The Close) sitting on an ERA of 19.29.

So, what does this tell us?

Well, that the Indians pitching staff has performed pretty well in the young season, save a few terrible starts and one terrible finish ... and I know that's like saying that Memphis had a great NCAA championship game except for a few lousy trips to the charity stripe. But, assuming that C.C. turns this thing around (don't worry, I'm getting to that) and Wedge can settle on an effective ladder of relievers (whether or not that includes Borowski at the top step), the pitching remains the strength of the team in terms of quality and depth.

Now, back to our Un-Dynamic Duo and whether we can expect this mediocrity to continue throughout the year. In the case of Byrd, he's openly admitted that he's throwing batting practice as his 85 MPH pitches aren't moving and aren't being located. As much as I'd like to say that I could hit him (I can't), MLB hitters are going to tee off on him as they have thus far in the early going.

For some reason, whenever I see someone visit the mound with Byrd, I'm half-expecting **that scene from "The Naked Gun"** and thinking that someone's going to pull a Vaseline jar out from underneath his hat. Actually, maybe that's what he's been missing as he's waited for MLB to rule on his HGH flap (he was given "amnesty" as MLB shows, once again, how weak their bite really is) - maybe he hasn't been rubbing jalapeño on the inside of his nose for fear of upsetting Bud and the Boys as they considered whether or not to suspend him for ridiculously getting an HGH prescription at the dentist.

Perhaps now that the threat of a suspension is no longer looming, he'll go back to putting sandpaper in his glove or putting snot on the ball...or doing whatever he does to remain effective. Because, if these struggles continue and he keeps setting the ball up on the tee, track record be damned, he's not going to find himself in the rotation for too long.

Now a couple of notches up the rotation, we see our Hefty Lefty struggling with his command (9 BB in 14 IP this year after giving up 37 BB in 241 IP in all of 2007) and giving up base hits at an alarming rate, having given up 24 in those 14 innings. But, watching C.C. doesn't show that he's lost velocity or that he's

laboring as he has to start the season in years past. His pitch selection seems suspect as he's mainly throwing fastballs and change-ups and not relying on his slider at all, so it could just be a matter of him harnessing his entire repertoire. Until he starts to keep the hitters off-balance, they'll be more than happy to sit up there and sit on his fastball and stroke it to all fields.

Anyone remember the game a few years back, against these same A's, when C.C. was getting absolutely crushed as **Oakland tallied 8 hits in 2 1/3 IP off of him**, eventually leading to a revelation that "the book" on C.C. was that a hitter could just sit "dead red" and wait for the fastball that Curt Schilling had (allegedly) so lovingly told him before **this game** to throw exclusively a few months earlier? Unfortunately, the version of Sabathia in 2008 so far looks closer to that "thrower" as opposed to the "pitcher" that he became in the latter half of 2006 and throughout the 2007 season.

The other variable in the short season to consider is opponents Batting Average against Sabathia for Balls put into Play or **BABIP**. It's a statistic that measures how players do when they make contact with a ball...well, putting it into play. It takes into account groundouts, flyouts, etc. To give you proper context, Fausto Carmona (whose sinker puts a lot of balls into play on the ground that result in a lot of outs) has had batters hit .216 off of him thus far in 2008 for balls that they have put in play. That is an obscenely low number as it usually falls somewhere around .300 overall.

You get the idea, right?

Well, here are C.C.'s BABIP (Batting Average on Balls In Play) for the past five years, including the early returns in 2008:

2008 - .438 BABIP
2007 - .314 BABIP
2006 - .298 BABIP
2005 - .292 BABIP
2004 - .286 BABIP

Opposing hitters are getting on base more than 40% of the time they're putting the ball into play against the Crooked Cap, which could mean a couple of things.

Either he's not keeping the hitters off-balance (as noted above), allowing them to simply sit on a 92 MPH fastball and hit it where they want, or the times that hitters are making contact with Sabathia's offerings, the balls are simply dropping or finding holes a shockingly high number of times.

At this point, I would venture to say it's a combination of both - that hitters are making solid contact off of Sabathia AND when they're making contact, they're "hitting them where they ain't", if you will. While I think (no, I know) that the .438 BABIP simply won't continue to be that high, I think that C.C. needs to perhaps work on his pitch variety to keep hitters guessing a little more to prevent the solid contact that opponents are having against him.

Is it between his ear or is it related somehow to his pending Free Agency?

I'm not going to pretend to know as I haven't found **the portal in the wall to spend some time in C.C.'s head**
; but, at this point, I'm not overly worried about him returning back to form as the shockingly high BABIP that opponents are posting against him will decrease and as long as he remembers that his "fastball-only" mentality resulted in some of the worst starts of his career.

As always, the caveat remains out there that the season is still very young, but the pitching staff, as a whole, has performed well save 40% of their rotation.

Half of that 40%, I'm not too worried about.

The other half? Well, I just sent a 5-gallon container of Crisco to Progressive Field, postmarked to the attention of one Paul Byrd...how's that for an answer?