With the offense stuck in neutral and the bullpen still in preliminary stages of an evolution, what's most frustrating about the last week for Indians' fans? The fact that Indians starting pitchers not named Carsten Charles have been absolutely dominant, and with nothing to show for it. In his latest, Paulie hits on that, the possibility that C.C. is hurt and pitching through it, Andy Marte, and the Dellichaels platoon.

With the offense stuck in neutral and the bullpen still in preliminary stages of an evolution, what's most frustrating about the last week for Indians' fans? How about that the Tribe starters (not including the reigning Cy Young winner's 1 start) have compiled the following numbers over the last 7 games:

49 IP (an average of 7 IP per start)
1.29 ERA
0.90 WHIP
36 K
6 BB

What is the Indians' record in those 7 starts (again, I'm not including C.C.)?

3-4...with the starters included allowing less than a baserunner per inning, posting a 6 to 1 K to BB ratio, and averaging 7 innings per start.

Their 3 best starters' respective rankings in the AL in terms of ERA thus far are #1 (Lee - 0.40), #5 (Carmona - 1.96), and #12 (Westbrook - 2.73). Additionally, Lee has the best WHIP in the AL, with Westbrook #12 among AL pitchers. From Lee,

Westbrook, Carmona, and Byrd, the Indians have received 12 Quality Starts in their 15 starts....from the #2, #3, #4, and #5 spots in the rotation.

Obviously, the offense and the bullpen are letting this team down in terms of supporting the starting pitching, as they continue to come up short in the runs department or blowing the leads (or ties) handed to them by the starters, who are certainly not struggling.

Not struggling, that is, save one.

I'm going to link this article from Beyond the Box Score again because it comes to an interesting conclusion after proving that Sabathia is not throwing his slider, but takes the next step as to trying to determine why. With the caveat that Sabathia could just have no confidence in his slider and doesn't want to throw it, **Peter Bendix comes up with this**
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As much as I hate to say it, there is one potential answer to this question. Let's say you're CC Sabathia, pitching in the last year before you are set to earn a bagillion dollars on the free agent market. Perhaps last season, perhaps in spring training, or perhaps in your first start of the season against the White Sox, you feel something strange in your arm or shoulder. Maybe it's tingling. Maybe it's pain. Maybe it's just uncomfortable. But no matter what it is, you only feel it (or it's exacerbated) when you throw an off-speed pitch. Like a slider. What do you do?

You stop throwing as many sliders. And other teams sit on your fastball. And if you can't command the fastball (which may or may not have to do with that strange feeling in your arm), you walk guys and get hit hard.

Of course, this is the extreme case of projecting an injury on somebody and, since I'm not in the practice of trying to figure out what's going on in Sabathia's substantial head, it's about as good as I've seen thus far in terms of an explanation as to why his velocity is unaffected, but opposing batters have been able to sit on his fastball, wait for it to meander over the plate, and hit it wherever they want.

If Sabathia is truly hurt (and I'm not saying he is, I'm only taking the next step from Bendix's conclusion), where do the Indians go? As much as Sheldon Ocker would like to see C.C. work out his problems in the minors or the bullpen, it's fairly

obvious that a DL stint may be what's best for everyone. If that is the case, I don't think the Indians will blink before the decision to promote Aaron Laffey is made. Laffey's posted a 3-1 record in Buffalo with a 3.13 ERA, a 1.26 WHIP, and a 3 to 1 K/BB ratio. He's struck out 18 batters in 23 innings and, in his last two starts he's posted a 1.38 ERA and a 0.77 WHIP. Moreso than Jeremy Sowers, Laffey has shown that AAA may be beneath him and that the 23-year-old (turned 23 on April 15th) is ready to, once again, contribute at the MLB level.

If Laffey if promoted, it would bring the 3rd groundball-inducing pitcher into the rotation (with Fausto and Jake) and brings up a greater question - namely, what in the name of the DiaBride is Casey Blake still doing starting every day at 3B?

I'll get into the offensive struggles of Lacey Cake and his counterparts later, but for a moment consider **Blake's standing in MLB for "Zone Rating",** which is a defensive statistic that measures the percentage of balls fielded by a player in his typical defensive "zone". Blake is getting to only 2/3 of the balls hit into his zone, BEHIND Fat Miguel Cabrera, whose range has become somewhat of a joke league-wide.

Meanwhile, Andy Marte, who has been voted the best defensive 3B in his league during his stint in the minors a few times (though he's never shown much consistency in Cleveland) continues to languish, unused, on the bench. Perhaps Marte wouldn't represent much of an upgrade over Blake overall, but isn't his defensive upside enough to merit a chance against LHP, whom he's had better success against throughout his career?

2007 - Buffalo (AAA)

.827 OPS vs. LH
.748 OPS vs. RH

2006 - Buffalo (AAA)

.894 OPS vs. LH
.730 OPS vs. RH

2005 - Richmond (AAA)

.936 OPS vs. LH
.848 OPS vs. RH

It doesn't seem so, as Marte has yet to face a LHP this year while Casey LOBlake has posted a .143 BA / .200 OBP / .143 SLG / .343 OPS in the (admittedly small sample size alert) 15 plate appearances that Blake has had against LHP thus far this year. But really, amending the Marte-Blake situation (as obvious of a decision as this seems unless the Indians have ZERO interest in seeing what they have in Marte this year) is just the tip of the iceberg as the guy who's batted #8 or #9 in the order (as Blake has) is not going to make or break your offense.

No, there's plenty of blame to go around here when you take a moment to consider how each position (an easy way to compile Dellichaels' stats) compare against the rest of the AL. I'll use OPS as the barometer of production and how each position stacks up against the AL:

C - .807 OPS (4th of 14)
1B - .876 OPS (4th of 14)
2B - .558 OPS (11th of 14)
SS - .742 OPS (4th of 14)
3B - .527 OPS (13th of 14)
LF - .629 OPS (12th of 14)
CF -.740 OPS (7th of 14)
RF - .530 OPS (13th of 14)
DH - .713 OPS (7th of 14)

What does all of this tell us?

Well, what we already knew, in that the holes are at 2B, 3B, LF, and RF - all ranking in the bottom four. Of those vacuums, we know that the defense and youth of Frank the Tank and Asdrubal give them a bit of a longer leash, leaving us with the shocking conclusion that...wait for it...Blake and Michaels are playing terribly no matter how you look at the numbers.

Guess what though? While those two are painful to watch, they're not the real problem as a closer look at those numbers shows that the WHOLE lineup is struggling. Even Victor and Garko, the two players having the best offensive seasons thus far (even if Vic's SLG is just .400!) aren't outpacing their counterparts in the AL by any great measure. Grady and Pronk have

middle-of-the-pack production from the #1 and #3 holes in the lineup and THEIR struggles are hurting the team much more than the fact that it feels like hitters #7, #8, and #9 often look like a free inning to opposing pitchers.

When your main cogs are not producing at any level of consistency offensively, the rest of the lineup (which is really complementary on most MLB teams) becomes exposed and draws the ire of the fans (see my above rant on Casey Blake's inclusion in the lineup and my piece on Jason Michaels called "One Man's Trash" for proof of that), merited or not. In reality, when Sizemore (whose OPS over his last 7 games is .540, nearly .240 points lower than Casey Blake's OPS over the same timeframe) and Hafner (whose .593 OPS over the last 7 games is all of .013 points higher than Asdrubal) are struggling as they are, the whole offense is going to remain in neutral...or worse.

What can fix the offense?

You'd like to say patience, but that runs low when you see that Peralta's posted an improbable .376 OPS over the last 7 games while sitting in the #5 hole, stranding runner after runner or when you consider that 35 of the 79 runs they've scored have come in 4 games, leaving them with an average of scoring 2.93 runs a game in the other 15 games they've played.

Improbably, despite those stats, the team stands at 7-12...and not worse.

Thanks to a starting staff (save one big part of the rotation) that has carried the team to this point, the Indians figure to remain in games until the right combination of players can be found to generate some offense.

Until then, however, get used to 2-1 losses in 10 innings.