April is in the books. It was a disappointing month mostly for the Indians, yet a poor start to the month for the Tigers and a poor close to the month for the White Sox still have the Indians right in the thick of things. As we change the calendar, Paulie's got a mixed bag of tomahawks to hurl at our readers. Paul hits on Betancourt's entry music and the Indians dominant starting pitching ... and shockingly suggests the potential return of Trot Nixon and the post game rally pies.

In an AL, where no team has separated itself (whether it be in the Central or elsewhere), the Indians remain right in the thick of things, just a game and a half out of the Central lead. As the calendar turns to May ... certain players (Pronk, Garko, Brodzoski, C.C., just to name a few) more than happy to rip the "April" page off their desk calendars, while others (C.P. Lee, um...er...I guess Dellucci?) probably wish April lasted forever.

Perhaps the April showers have passed and May promises to be full of, well...let's just let ‘em fly before I get all poetic:

As good as Sandy Koufax...I mean Steve Carlton...I mean Warren Spahn...I mean Cliff Lee (there, I got it) has been and as much as his numbers are a mind blowing anomaly in comparison to his previous two seasons , here's the greatest part of his 2008 season - three of his five victories have ended three game losing streaks for the Indians. If CLIFF LEE is playing the role of "Stopper", what will that mean when C.C. finally gets fully untracked, when Jake returns, and when Fausto stops walking people - that the Indians won't have a losing streak longer than two games?

The way that the starting pitching is setting up, the Indians are one offensive hot streak (even if it's just 4 to 5 runs a game) from putting a string of victories together that could put some distance between them and the rest of the AL

Central.

Interesting to see the Mariners jettison both OF Brad Wilkerson and 1B Greg Norton after Tuesday's victory over the Tribe. Granted, Norton was playing very little and his replacement on the roster (Jeff Clement) is a highly thought-of prospect and Wilkerson had posted an OPS of .652 to that point in the season, but the Mariners hadn't even played 30 games when the move was made. Generally, we all hear that the "magical" 40-game mark is the point that organizations wait for before making significant changes on their roster.

Whether getting rid of two aging veterans who weren't really contributing and didn't have much upside represent "significant changes" is debatable, but it may serve as the first among many moves as teams around the league switch gears or move some plate appearances around. If that is the case (and I know that my harping on Carson Kressley is bordering on the irrational as his inclusion in the lineup is simply an irritation and not a HUGE problem), I happen to know of a certain blonde-locked OF taking time away from other potential players (presently in Cleveland and Buffalo) whose OPS cracked the .500 mark after ONLY 48 AB while playing in 20 of the first 28 games of the season.

I'm certainly not one to the live in the past (the suggestion that Omar Vizquel should return to Cleveland at this point in his career to "upgrade our defense" and "recapture the magic of Jacobs Field" puts my stomach in knots), but does anyone else miss seeing the Rally Pies fly in the post game interviews?

Fully realizing that the Trotter was the burr under everyone's saddle last year, the looseness of the clubhouse that seems to be notably lacking this year is one big difference between this year's team and last year's incarnation of the Tribe. It's obviously an attribute that doesn't show up anywhere on paper and is certainly is not quantifiable, but I long for the mischief and mayhem of a whipped cream concoction in a post-game interview.

On a somewhat related note, somebody's looking pretty good in AAA this year , and I don't mean the "Just For Men"-free goatee. His OPS for Tucson is 100 points higher than anyone in Buffalo.

After reading that suggestion, whose blood pressure just went up?

In case you haven't noticed, since the Bronx Bombers have left town on Monday night, their transaction log has been rather full:

Placed Jorge Posada on the 15-day DL (Right Shoulder)
Placed A-Quad on the 15-day DL (Strained Quadriceps)
Placed Phil Hughes on the 15-day DL (Broken Rib)

Regardless of how effective "surefire HOFer" Phil Hughes has been, he's gone until July with Pavano (surprise) hurt and the Yankees forced to possibly dip all the way to AA to call the cavalry for their rotation. Furthermore, I can't imagine that a throwing shoulder injury to a catcher is something that is easily ironed out (made worse that the Yankees' DH queue is already full with Damon and HGHiambi), so this is not good news in the Bronx. Throw in the fact that Brian Bruney, one of their only reliable relievers not named Joba or Mo, just learned that his foot injury will keep him out until August at the earliest and you see that the depth that the Indians have, and the Yankees lack, could make a big difference down the stretch in the AL...unless you think that Jose Molina, Morgan Ensberg, Alberto Gonzalez, and the likes of Billy Traber, Kei Igawa (yes...seriously), and Ross Ohlendorf (who sounds like a goon from "Slap Shot") are going to carry the flag for the Yanks as their roster ages before our eyes.

With all of that said (that is, about the Indians' depth and how it relates to the rest of the AL), an interesting batch of players to watch on the farm for the next few weeks is going to be the arms that constitute the Indians' starting pitching depth. With Laffey figuring to stay on the parent club while Jake rehabs, the Indians' #7 through #9 starters look to be Sowers, Atom Miller, and Smoke ‘Em Brian Slocum. Further down the ladder, former 1st round pick David Huff seems to have turned a

corner in Akron and could figure into the depth going forward.

Why will this be interesting to watch shake out? Let's say that Laffey performs well in his stint in Cleveland, that Atom Miller (whose starts since returning have been playing to glowing reviews) shows that his talent is real and that he is healthy, that Slocum fills the role of a #7 to #8 depth starter by eating innings in Buffalo, and that Huff continues his progression as a prospect into Buffalo. Would the Indians entertain trading Sowers, who they see (trust me) as no more than a #5 starter and could have some trade value with his 2005 season, his start against the Yankees, and continued success in Buffalo?

I know that the Indians figure to have two spots to fill in the rotation for 2009 and the trade of Sean Smith thinned out their depth already, but if the Indians count on Laffey and Miller and possibly add an arm in FA, as well has having a comfort level with the development of players like Huff or even a Ryan Edell, there's a good possibility that they can sell high on Sowers to fill another organizational hole. Would he bring a huge return? No, not by himself...but he could be a piece that the Tribe dangles in front of other teams as a young, cheap, talented arm that may be more valuable to an organization that doesn't play their home games at the corner of Carnegie and Ontario.

Maybe I'm late to the game on this, but I recently learned that Rocky Betancourt's entrance music is not some absurd Venezuelan death metal, as I had previously thought. It's actually the White Stripes song "Conquest", whose linked video has me walking around all day whistling the horn intro that accompanies the Fist of Steel to the mound. Regardless of his terrifying HR rate this year (he's given up 3 HR in 12 1/3 IP after giving up 4 HR throughout all of his 79 1/3 IP in 2007), I know that he will come to "make a...conquest".

Cue the horns and the mesmerizing singular drum beat.

After the recent foibles of the Tribe bats, you may be in the dumper on this team and it's all-or-nothing offense, but Cheer Up, Charlie - the Indians are 14-15 with Pronk's OPS sitting at .679, with Brodzoski (The Close) blowing 2 games before the revelation that his right arm may have been held together with chicken wire

and bubble gum which have now disintegrated into a gooey mess, and their reigning Cy Young winner's first 4 starts of the season netting a ERA of 11.57.

How are they not hopelessly out of the race already with those factors?

Very simply, consistent and consistently excellent pitching.

If the formula really is pitching, pitching and more pitching, you have to remain optimistic about this team, regardless of how difficult that may seem on certain nights, giving away at-bats and squandering opportunities with ill-timed strikeouts. The starting pitching will keep this team in most games and, assuming that the progression of relievers is further solidified, the bullpen will keep opposing offenses at bay - allowing the offense to find its footing and some semblance of consistency and traction.

And when (not if) it does, watch out.