Headed out to LA to see his sister and a little Tribe/Dodgers at Chavez Ravine, awful thoughts started to fill Paulie's head on the plane ride west about the status and direction of the Indians 2008 season, which increasingly appears to be circling the drain. And if indeed this season is over (a depressing thought on June 21), it starts to bring some very tough questions to the surface about how Mark Shapiro should handle things the rest of the way out. Paul addresses all these tough questions in his latest piece for us.

On the cross-country flight to the Left Coast, a few rows on the plane behind Rafael Betancourt's wife (unless you can think of another smoking hot Latino woman with a diamond necklace that says "63" with a reason to be flying from Cleveland to LAX on Thursday), awful thoughts filled my head about where this 2008 season is headed for our beloved Erie Warriors. The Indians, presented with a portion of the schedule to take advantage of to make up some ground in the AL Central, have continued to scuffle and watched EVERY other team in the AL Central blow up their Interleague opponents while getting swept by the Rockies.

Losing ground when they should be gaining ground, or at least keeping pace.

Ugh.

Now sitting 8 ½ back, with three teams ahead of them in the Central, perhaps it's time to start asking some very hard questions about this team ... and none of them even getting into a certain 300+ pound lefty. Sitting now in my sister's house in Long Beach (for the record, we're out here because she just had a baby, not

because the Tribe is playing in Chavez Ravine the next few days...which doesn't hurt), let's throw some of those questions out there that need to be answered in the next week, month, and few months.

Not many answers, but the questions are plentiful:

If 2008 is an afterthought (which is looking more likely by the day) is it time to flip Paul Byrd in a Chuck Finley-esque nature to see if the Indians can fill some organizational holes that have become apparent? Do the injuries of Westbrook, Fausto, and Miller make you think twice about keeping Byrd around for another year to help fill out the rotation? If the team does decide to move him or if he is reticent to talk about re-upping for next year, it's time to put the feelers out there, even if he's not going to bring much in return, in terms of anyone close to being MLB-ready or being a shiny prospect.

Continuing on the same vein regarding veterans not under contract for next year, isn't this situation almost exactly like what happened in 2006, when the Indians were able to flip Benuardo to Seattle for Asdrubal and Choo and jettisoned Wickman and Belliard?

Is it time to look to move anything not nailed down?

If so, what other veterans, besides Byrd, could be fodder for a trade?

Blake to a team looking to strengthen their bench?

Dellucci to a team looking for a LH bat, given that Choo is filling the "Dellucci" role on the team?

Borowski to a team desperate...please note, I said DESPERATE...for bullpen help?

If we're talking about players that may be fungible, what other players on the Indians may have more value to another team and could be moved to augment the suddenly shifting "core"? That is to say, are there young players that are not seen as "core" players that are young enough (and under club control at known salaries) that they could net some talent in return from a team that may have a greater need at a certain position than the Indians?

If Victor figures to come back at a certain point, are BOTH Garko and Shoppach needed on the roster? Victor will, at some point, settle into 1B or C, meaning that one of those players figures to remain a backup (unless Pronk, as we once knew him, is gone forever and Garko becomes the DH) and wouldn't it be a good idea to deal from a relative strength to fill some other holes on the team rather than stockpiling similar players?

Given Frank the Tank's superb play in the OF (and his relative struggles at the plate), is he attractive to other teams as a defensive wizard in CF (and that role is filled in Cleveland for the foreseeable future), where he can play everyday? Is he essentially blocked by Grady, making him more valuable to teams not playing in Cleveland? Couldn't an NL team, able to sit Gutz at the bottom of the lineup and happy to benefit from his defensive prowess, be a better spot for Gutierrez?

With the organization down on Jhonny Peralta (and there's no question that they are), is it time to look into moving him to a team that needs offense more than defense at SS? Asdrubal looks to be the long-term answer at SS (anyone notice he's playing SS in Buffalo), so where does that leave Jhonny? Trying to figure out how to play 3B (with no guarantee that his defense would improve by moving to his right on the infield? Not with the way that Wedge and Shapiro have PUBLICLY said that Peralta is not where they want him to be as a player.

Are the signings of Morgan Ensberg and Sal Fasano simply for "organizational depth" or are they harbingers of things to come where a player like Blake or Shoppach could be moved?

Is Andy Marte alive? No...seriously. Isn't it time to just cut bait with a player so obviously not in this team's plans? The Indians have had chance after chance to work Marte into the lineup because of ineffectiveness or injury and haven't done so, portending that Marte simply will not see the field any time soon in Cleveland...regardless of how obvious opportunities for him may seem to some.

Again, no answers today...just food for thought. Answers are for another day.

For today, it's time to go walk to the Pacific Ocean with my new niece and take in some ocean air. They'll be plenty of time to consider the answers as I get to watch all of these Dodgers' games ending before midnight local time (although I got up at 5:00 AM "local time" this morning) and head to Dodger Stadium for Sunday's game.

If you've been to Chavez Ravine, any input is appreciated as I try to figure out a way to get Matt Kemp into my carry-on.