This season we've seen a lack of progression from our young players, a healthy amount of regression from our veterans, and in many cases, a robotic lack of overall effort and enthusiasm from the team. In Gary's latest, he tries to figure out why this is happening, and feels the buck stops with Mark Shapiro and Eric Wedge. Regardless of how the rest of this season plays out, both will be brought back by the Dolans. But is it the right move?

When Cleveland Indians closer Joe Borowski walked to the mound in the 10th inning of Tuesday's game against the Chicago White Sox, he carried with him an air of inevitability. Unfortunately, it wasn't the right kind. Despite getting two rather routine outs, the fog didn't lift. And when, in almost a lighting flash, the game was over three batters later, a nice little summary of all that has gone wrong for the Indians had been completed.

Borowski's blown save was his fourth against just six saves. An early season injury of sorts and a team that affords him precious few save opportunities are mostly to blame for Borowski's rather tepid performance. In context, though, his ineffectiveness is not all that alarming in a season that is carrying less and less surprise as the calendar turns to July.

Tuesday's loss was a reminder of what manager Eric Wedge is fond of telling the great unwashed from time to time: baseball is a truly hard game to play at the major league level. And so it may be, but what is more disturbing than the daily failures is the overall lack of progression

from so many players. This is something the Plain Dealer's Terry Pluto touched on Tuesday morning
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Pluto couched it in terms of the lack of progression by players like Jeremy Sowers and how this impacts the pitching rotation of seasons to come. But he also highlights the major steps backward by players like Ryan Garko and Franklin Gutierrez as well. To this he might have added Jhonny Peralta's wildly uneven development, the inability of Asdrubal Cabrera to adjust in his second season and the strange case of Rafael Bentancort.

If Tuesday night's loss didn't do it for you, then consider the previous three games. Far more troubling than the losses was the effort. Wedge, in full protection mode, made it seem as if these were hard-fought games that could have gone either way and hey, it's just been that kind of season. Wedge even told the media after Monday's loss that at least the team didn't shut down after being down 8-1.

If that's true, it's only because the team didn't look as though it ever turned on in the first place. What actually was far more apparent was that in losing each game, much of this was a team essentially going through the motions-in June. There have been notable exceptions, particularly in the form of pitchers Cliff Lee and C.C. Sabathia. Lee has been spot on with location and command since the first pitch of the season through Tuesday's no-decision. Sabathia started poorly but has recovered nicely, lending comfort to the teams in pursuit of his services that there is indeed nothing wrong with his arm, or his bat.

With a lack of progression, a healthy amount of regression, and an absence of effort, the question turns to why? You could blame the players, of course, but the failures seem far more institutionalized. Wedge may not be an awful manager and Shapiro may not be an awful general manager, but their performance is deserving of at least as much scrutiny, if not more, than Casey Blake's, for example.

This lack of enthusiasm, this lethargy on the field is most certainly a poor reflection on Wedge in the first instance and on Shapiro from an overall standpoint. Either those two are in the same sort of slump that has overtaken their players or all of their shortcomings are coming home for an extended visit at precisely the wrong time. It's probably some of both.

That's why it is a bit scary to think of how Sabathia's situation will play out. Signing Sabathia seems off the table. Indeed, even if it wasn't from the Indians' standpoint, Sabathia, far closer to the situation than any fan, can look at the landscape and see a flawed lineup overly reliant on reclamation projects and utility players. He wouldn't be the first superstar to discern that his current mid-market team doesn't have the wherewithal to sign him *and* make the moves necessary to really improve the team.

But even with the Sabathia situation begging for obvious resolution via a trade, the far more pertinent questions revolve around whether anyone right now really feels comfortable that Shapiro is the right person to try his hand at fixing it and Wedge is the right person to implement it. I don't.

Shapiro's ledger at the moment is out of balance. The current roster is the result of a number of iffy decisions already made and a fair amount of uncertainty to come. It's the exact wrong backdrop in which Shapiro should be making another "signature" trade that will once again redefine the franchise in much the same way as the Bartolo Colon trade did. It's also the exact wrong backdrop to trust to Wedge right now given his inability to fully reach the current crop of players.

Granted, keeping Sabathia around until the season ends isn't much of an option either. After all, if Sabathia stays it likely will be Shapiro and his staff that has to make something out of the two extra draft picks the team would get as compensation. Different problem for a another day.

Right now, about the only thing certain is that Shapiro's first stab at a grand plan didn't quite work. Maybe the next one will, maybe not. But a mid-season, desperately conceived quick-fix trade is not the way to find out.

Instead, owners Larry and Paul Dolan need to impose a blackout period on Shapiro until they have first undertaken a fresh look at whether or not Shapiro really has the requisite skill to get the job done. Given his increasingly spotty record, the answer shouldn't be easily or quickly reached. But once they have that answer, they next need to turn the spotlight on Wedge and his staff, since they are the ones most directly responsible for the on-field progress. Those questions may be easier, particularly in the case of hitting coach Derek Shelton, but are far better deferred until the season's end as well. Conclusions could be made now, but a full season's record is far more damning.

The easy and convenient thing to do is to simply give Shapiro the free reign he's had until now to perform another extreme makeover on the fly. That may make everyone temporarily feel better because, if nothing else, it delivers a certain level of hope. But if the plunging attendance is any indication, fans seem to have had their fill with unrealized hope. The more difficult but truly necessary task is to throttle back Shapiro's inclinations now and instead let Sabathia leave at year end and use the time in the interim, along with a healthy does of the offseason, to reevaluate the entire operation. Certainly someone, somewhere in the Indians organization will eventually see the problems inherent in a team on the cusp one year being laughed at by the fans in Kansas City the next.