We got all kinds of positive response to Paulie C's first part of his 2008 season in review, and today, we bring you the second installment. Paul's first piece focused on the positives of the Indians recently completed 81-81 season, and in Part II, Cous talks about what went wrong this season ... specifically in April, May, and June that caused the team to get out to a 38-53 start.

Now that I'm officially forced to watch Jim Thome in the playoffs - because, you may remember, he wanted to return to the playoffs ASAP and leaving Cleveland would give him the earlier opportunity - depression may not be far off. Rather than fight it, let's embrace it and get into what went wrong with the Tribe in 2008. For sunnier thoughts, there is the previous piece on what went right - but right now, the sky in Cleveland is starting to remind us all what it's like to live inside a dirty milk carton as Fall, then Winter arrives.

Obviously, we've been down this road before in an attempt to quantify the what, who, and why of 2008 as the Indians sit at home with CC, Byrd, and Lacey Cake in the postseason. Lest you forget what was thought in mid-July (as the Tribe sat at 38-53, ironically pretty close to the low point of the season), a combination of the bullpen, the injuries to Victor and Hafner, the regressions of Garko and Gutierrez, and the inactivity of the off-season was offered as an explanation for 2008.

Now, with it all mercifully over, we're forced to watch CC take the pill for the

Brewers in Game 2 and watch Casey take hacks in Wrigley. Not that there's a big grain of salt sitting atop my TV this postseason, but yeah...it would be nice to be watching baseball I care about, or at least see the above players in the playoffs WEARING INDIANS' UNIFORMS!

As a quick aside while I watch CC implode for the Brew Crew, during last Sunday's Brewers-Cubs game I texted my brother-in-law to tell him that he was shown on the WGN feed right after the Counsell (damn you forever, Craig Counsell) walk that tied the game in the 7th. He apparently felt that the opportune time to call me back was as Ryan Braun strode to the plate with one on in the 8th. As most of us know, the ball carried over the LF wall as my brother-in-law held his phone aloft while he celebrated the fact that the Brewers were likely to be headed to the playoffs with his buddies. Sitting on the other end of the line, listening to the raucousness of Miller Park (and having attended the clincher last year at The Jake), my stomach started to hurt.

Why, oh why, do I subject myself to having these high hopes dashed?

Why do I torture myself with this?

Wasn't this supposed to be the year that the Indians cruised through the Central and battled the Angels and Red Sox for AL supremacy, before rolling over whatever the NL put forth for the Fall Classic?

Whatever...on to what went wrong, my stomach is starting to hurt again...

The 4077

The absence of Victor and Hafner in the lineup is well-documented and, frankly, sad - so I won't get into it too much about how the ineffectiveness and absence of these players, designed to be linchpins in the Indians' lineup, effectively deep-sixed the season as they attempted to play injured, then spent a shocking amount of time on the shelf.

Let's just examine the cumulative stats for the players thought to be the #3 and #4 hitter when the team broke Spring Training:

.243 BA / .331 OBP / .420 SLG / .751 OPS with 51 R, 8 HR, and 59 RBI over 464 AB

I don't want to get into where these two players go from here (mainly because both of them still figure to populate the middle of the order in 2009), but if anyone has one of those "Men In Black" sticks that erases people's recent memories, find Vic and Hafner...hell, come on over and see me if you're in the area.

Beyond Martinez and Hafner, the Indians were crippled by injuries to the pitchers thought to be their #2 and #3 starters when the season started. In Winter Haven, Jake Westbrook looked to be riding the momentum from a tremendous end to his 2007 season into 2008 as opposing managers marveled all Spring at the movement of Jake's sinker and his effectiveness. Bobby Cox went so far as to say that Westbrook had the best stuff he had seen all Spring. In Cleveland, we got to see that for all of 5 starts.

His stuff certainly was good (3.12 ERA, 1.15 WHIP in 5 starts)...but Tommy John, then Bo Jackson (get it, hip injury?) came calling and the pitcher now working off that 3-year, $33M deal contributed all of 34 2/3 innings before hitting the shelf until probably the middle of 2009. That's $317,307 per inning pitched with no guarantee that he'll be back at full capacity in 2009...but this is SUPPOSED to be the depressing part of the series, right?

Ahead of Jake in the rotation, we had our Focused Fausto - unaffected by midges or by anything less than a floating strike zone and JD Drew - locked in with club options through 2014. A late 1990's Kevin Brown in his mid-20's...surely he would come to the rescue, right?

No, the injury bug (not sure if it was a nesting midge) bit him too.

Prior to the start that put him on the DL, Carmona was sitting on a 4-1 record with a 2.25 ERA after 9 starts. While his 1.50 WHIP seemed to lend credence to the idea that the league had adjusted to the movement on his pitches, he seemed to be battling through the adjustment as he induced GIDP and limited HR (1 in his 1st 56 IP). Even with the bottom-line success, something seemed different, as hitters simply sat on Carmona's sinker until he threw it for a strike, resulting in high pitch counts and too many walks that exacerbated the mechanical problems he seemed to be having.

But his 2008 season all came crashing down with his injury, as his post-injury numbers (7.61 ERA, 1.66 WHIP over 12 starts) looked like they should belong to

the likes of Matt Ginter and not the RHP that reminded Torii Hunter of a morning after too many Singapore Slings (because that's what I've heard he drinks, when he's not drinking various Cosmopolitans).

Can Carmona follow the "Cliff Lee Path to Redemption" by staying healthy next year and keeping his mechanics in check to allow his pitch count and BB to remain at a low level? One certainly hopes, as the Indians with C.P. Lee (even a couple of ticks down from his 2008) and Carmona (closer to his 2007 form) solidify the top of a rotation in need of solidification (the InterWebs tell me that's a word).

If he cannot and Westbrook's injury lingers, look out below.

You Mess with the Bull...You Get the Horns

U-G-L-Y, you ain't got no alibi...

OK, enough with the sophomoric whining - just get to the ugliness. How about a bullpen that posted a 5.11 ERA (2nd worst in AL) in 445 1/3 IP (3rd fewest in AL) while having hitters post a .785 OPS against them (2nd worst in AL) and giving up nearly 1 ½ walks or hits per inning? Bad enough for you? How about that they tied for giving up the most HR (60) in the AL...in 55 FEWER innings than the other team (Minnesota) whose bullpen hit the 60 HR mark! The stats go on and on...

They netted only 31 Saves, least in the AL, and that INCLUDES Jenny Lew racking up 13 in a row after August 8th. In fact, if you take out Lewis' 13 saves in 13 opportunities to close out the year, the Indians had blown 20 of their 38 save opportunities to the point in the season when Stomp assumed the closer role. 20 of 38 THEY BLEW! It's almost impossible to comprehend that the bullpen could pull that off over the course of the 113 games prior to Lewis finding himself at the back-end of the bullpen.

And truly, the staggering number of Blown Saves doesn't do justice to the ineptitude of the bullpen throughout the year as their struggles certainly weren't confined to the 9th inning. The 5.11 ERA speaks for itself, but what about the inherited runners that the bullpen allowed to score over the course of the year? That is, if a reliever entered the game with runners on, how effective was he to strand those runners and how many did each allow to score?

I know that I just did this recently, but here they are:

Jackson - allowed 0 of 2 inherited runners to score (0% of IR scored)
Slocum - allowed 0 of 3 inherited runners to score (0% of IR scored)
Breslow - allowed 1 of 5 inherited runners to score (20% of IR scored)
Perez - allowed 14 of 44 inherited runners to score (32% of IR scored)
Mujica - allowed 6 of 18 inherited runners to score (33% of IR scored)
Lewis - allowed 12 of 34 inherited runners to score (35% of IR scored)
Betancourt - allowed 12 of 33 inherited runners to score (36% of IR scored)
Elarton - allowed 2 of 5 inherited runners to score (40% of IR scored)
Kobayashi - allowed 7 of 16 inherited runners to score (44% of IR scored)
Mastny - allowed 3 of 6 inherited runners to score (50% of IR scored)
Rundles - allowed 2 of 4 inherited runners to score (50% of IR scored)
Julio - allowed 6 of 11 inherited runners to score (55% of IR scored)
Rincon - allowed 8 of 11 inherited runners to score (73% of IR scored)

All of that adds up to 73 of 171 inherited runners scoring on the year or 43% of inherited runners scoring on Tribe relievers. How does that compare to other teams? No idea...as finding THIS data is not exactly easily categorized or easy to find - but collectively allowing nearly ½ of the runners on base when a reliever enters the game...that, um...that's not good.

Juan Rincon, by the by, allowed all 7 of the runners he inherited as a Twin to score earlier in the season, meaning that he allowed 15 of the 18 runners he inherited to score in 2008.

All told, what was the best part of the 2008 season for the bullpen?

The last game - because it meant that 2008 was over for them.

The aCCE?

With all of the warm and fuzzies going CC's way this time of year (and deservedly so from what he's done), a lot of people forget how CC started the season. Through his first 6 starts, CC had an ERA of 7.88 as hitters posted a .911 OPS against him. He sat at 1-4 with 17 BB and 33 K through 32 IP as people guffawed at the notion that CC was pitching for the richest contract that a starting pitcher had ever seen. He, of course, turned it around after that, posting a 2.14 ERA over his last 11 starts as an Indian, but the damage was done as the slow start from

too many contributors had started to sabotage the 2008 season and the chirpings of CC being traded overwhelmed the team.

Not to nitpick CC's 2008, but would the 2008 season have been different if CC had gotten out of the gate in Cleveland the way he did in the Cream City? Not sure, but CC gave up more ER in his first 4 starts this year in Cleveland (27) than he did all year in a Brewers' uniform (24) over all 17 of his starts for Milwaukee.

It's hard to fault CC for anything that went wrong this year for the Indians, but his inauspicious start, combined with all of the other factors in play, didn't get the Tribe off on the right foot in their defense of the AL Central.

Wrong-Way Runaway Train

While the 2008 season was full of losing streaks and prolonged stretches of losing, one particular period stands out above the rest because of the teams that it came against and the irreparable damage that it did on the season, effectively burying the Indians in the Central and greasing the wheels on the CC deal.

The stretch started on Saturday, June 14th with the Indians' record at 32-36, as the Indians sat 6 games out of 1st in the still-winnable AL Central. They had just won against the San Diego Padres and were headed into a Saturday game with Cliff Lee on the hill. Lee went his 6+ innings, allowing only 2 runs before giving way to the bullpen. Rafael Perez gave up a game-tying HR to Jody Gerut in the 8th and the game was lost in the 10th as Edward Mujica walked Tony Clark with the bases loaded, and then gave up a GS to Kevin Kouzmanoff. The 8-3 loss hurt for sure, but few knew that it began a stretch of games that would effectively end any chance of the Indians making the playoffs.

Sitting at 32-37 then, the Indians still had the opportunity to make up some ground as they had the weak NL West teams on their docket as well as some games within the division. Rather than making up ground, the team went 6-16, against teams that were thought to be less-than-formidable opponents, to end the stretch sitting at 38-53, 14 ½ games back of the lead in the Central on July 10th, sitting in last place in the division. In a 22-game stretch, the top of the AL Central went from within reach to a pipe dream. Of course, as the losing wore on, the Indians made the decision (on July 6th, to be exact) to move CC to the Brewers, putting to rest any thought that the season was salvageable...in case the team being 13 ½ games out of 1st wasn't a good enough indication.

Why was this such a back-breaking stretch of games?

Beyond the ground lost in the divisional race, they performed horribly against some teams that should have given them the opportunity to make up ground.

Their opponents in the 22-game stretch, with their end-of-the-season records:

SD - 63-99
COL - 74-88
LAD - 84-78
SF - 72-90
CIN - 74-88
CWS - 89-74
MIN - 88-75
DET - 74-88

So, against one team that would finish with a record above .500 in the NL (and the Dodgers only had 3 more wins than the Tribe when it was all said and done) and against the two teams that would finish above them in the AL Central, as well as the team that would end up in the AL Central cellar, the Indians' season slipped away.

The gray clouds moved in over the Indians season as early as Opening Day, as Victor Martinez hurt his leg in the 2nd inning of the first game, and hovered over the team all season long. From the atrociousness of the bullpen to the team enduring injuries to key players, the season took a swan dive in the middle of the season. Though they tried to climb their way back into the AL Central race, too many factors worked against them to get them feasibly back into contention.

The fact that they were able to make their way back to .500 is an accomplishment - just not the kind of accomplishment we were hoping for when the season began.