It's time for another Lazy Sunday, Paulie C's whirlwind look around the internet and all things Cleveland Indians from the weekend. This week, Paul hits on Terry Pluto's Sunday column on the Tribe, and also talks about Pluto coming on he and Tony's radio show next week. Paul also talks a little more about Pavano and the last two spots in the Indians starting rotation, and also starts to look at who the 7th arm in the bullpen might be. Stay warm Tribe fans!

Having hopefully concocted the proper mixture of 32 parts gasoline to 1 part oil (as Toro suggests) for the snowblower for the last time on a weekend spent ostensibly indoors as the City of Cleveland plows made it to my street at...oh, about 10:30 PM last night, it's time to launch off into a Lazy Sunday, if only to break up the monotony of snow removal from various driveways and sidewalks in my neighborhood.

Nevertheless, we're off:

Starting off where we often do, Terry Pluto gets our appetites whetted for Spring Training with some news and notes on players like Ben Francisco and Anthony Reyes, noting how those two players are players whose 2009 seasons could go in a variety of directions as their respective careers (to date) have been up and down. Either could work his way into the long-term plans of the team with a strong 2009, but both could just as easily become roster fodder with a poor 2009.

Pluto also has some quotes from Shapiro on Hafner's health and how the team scored the 6th most runs in baseball without Hafner and Victor and how the return of Pronk (or even some variation of the monster that wore the #48 jersey for a few years) can propel the team to having "an elite offense".

More Shapiro comments come on Aaron Laffey and how Pluto asserts that *" Shapiro feels strongly about Aaron Laffey claiming a spot in the rotation."* It' easy to forget what Aaron Laffey did in 2008 because of the way his season

fizzled away, but in his first 14 starts for the parent club last year, Laffey posted a 3.45 ERA and a 1.26 WHIP with a .696 OPS against. He lasted 5 innings or more in all 14 starts with a stretch of 21 consecutive scoreless innings mixed in while essentially replacing Jake Westbrook in the rotation with what could be perceived as Westbrook at his very best - inducing grounder, minimizing damage, and attacking hitters.

To me, as 2009 rolls forward, the presence of Laffey and Dave Huff in the rotation may have a greater impact than any of the other candidates for the back-end of the rotation. It's conceivable that Reyes stays healthy and becomes a middle-of-the-rotation starter, and less conceivable that Pavano does (in terms of health and effectiveness), but it's easy to forget that Laffey doesn't turn 24 until mid-April and has a career 3.47 ERA in the minors with a career minor-league WHIP of 1.28. At his tender age (a full year younger than Huff, who also excites me) and with 143 career MLB innings under his belt, Laffey could become that steady middle-of-the-rotation presence that we all know Jake Westbrook to be - perhaps as early as this year.

Back to the addition to the rotation, Hot Carl Pavano, Castro has an interesting bit as to how the team settled on Pavano
as the "veteran" that they were looking for, saying that,
"the Indians plucked Pavano out of a discount bin of starters trying to revive their careers after major injuries. The Tribe also looked at Mark Mulder, Kris Benson, Freddy Garcia and Bartolo Colon before ultimately deciding Pavano had the best combination of performance upside and the sheer physical ability to take the mound early and often this season."

Whether or not that's the case remains to be seen as this Pavano signing comes with a giant grain of salt with me (as would the signing of any of those other names above) simply because of the health issues and because there's no guarantee that Pavano will somehow become anything close to the pitcher he was in 2004 (his only really great year) after so many arm troubles.

After getting a number of e-mails from people who thought I was overly hard on the Pavano signing and who thought that the Pavano deal was exactly the kind of deal the Indians should have been targeting, let me say this - I didn't mean to throw cold water on the Hot Stove with my piece on Pavano, it's just that I'm kind of indifferent to this deal as it I just don't see Pavano staying healthy, given that he hasn't been since 2004. What I was trying to project was that Pavano just looks

like another question mark to me and doesn't really make me feel any better about the state of the rotation.

Certainly it's a low-risk option and maybe he does have something to prove, I just don't see Pavano adding much more to the rotation than the hope that he'll miraculously return to his 2004 form after too many injuries to even count.

I think a lot of people see the name "Carl Pavano", know that he was (for at least a season) one of the better pitchers in baseball, know that the Yankees gave him all of that money, and get excited for Kevin Millwood redux when the two scenarios are very different. All I was trying to point out was that he simply hasn't been able to stay healthy and that one season was now a full four years ago.

It's not that I HATE the deal, it's just that I don't love it the way that I do the Wood, DeRosa, Smith, and Valbuena acquisitions and don't think it does anything to settle what still looks to be a questionable back of the rotation. There's no question that the off-season has been a wild success, in terms of addressing issues, but I don't put the Pavano signing in the "plus" side of the ledger with the rest of those additions just yet.

Moving on to other potential moves, with John Smoltz heading to Boston, could the Indians and Red Sox be getting back into talks that could result in Kelly Shoppach returning to Boston to fill their need at Catcher. The logic goes that the Red Sox adding Smoltz and Penny to their rotation results in some of their young arms (notbably Clay Buchholz and Justin Masterson) potentially being trade bait to add that catcher.

If you're wondering what the thought in Boston is, look no further than Sweet Pete Gammons himself, who when asked about the Red Sox finding a starting catcher , says that *"there's a difference between wish list and realistic wish list, but right now, they seem to be focused on Miguel Montero from Arizona, with Saltamacchia in Texas a possibility. Early in the fall, they tried to make a run at Russell Martin of the Dodgers and Mike Napoli of the Angels, but without success."*

I missed the inclusion of Kelly Shoppach's name there.

Additionally, Tony Massarotti is still thinking that Jason Varitek will re-sign with the Red Sox or that Jarold Saltalamachia is still the target if they go the trade route to add their starting Catcher.

While the roster looks about set on January 11th, there's still quite a bit can happen in the next month for the Indians and for most other teams that will affect their needs going into the season. I wouldn't be surprised if the 25-man roster goes through a few changes as the season progresses as a lot of the players that figure into the 2009 mix retain options and flexibility in terms of what positions they can play. Additionally, the AAA team looks to be pretty loaded with high-ceiling players who could very easily force their way onto the big league club if an opportunity presents itself. The 25-man roster in 2009 could be a very fluid entity as players go from Cleveland to Columbus and back and positions sort themselves out in the proper way - on the field.

Elsewhere, The Zach Attack (which I'm happy to see Castro has picked up) has a 4th option to use because of some MLB roster rule that I'm not going to pretend to understand. It's a nice development as it gives the Indians more flexibility in filling out the 7th spot in the bullpen. If you're looking at the top 6 of Wood, Lewis, Perez, Betancourt, Smith, and Kobayashi, the candidates for the 7th member of the bullpen out of Spring Training would stand to be Jackson, Mujica, and Rundles.

The effect that Jackson't extra option has is that the Indians now have the option to either keep Mujica (who is out of options) to see if he can ever find some semblance of consistency and effectiveness to turn into a bona-fide bullpen option. If they don't feel that he can, Jackson can take the role of a long man out of the bullpen or Rundles can become the 2nd lefty in the pen (as Jackson doesn't count as a LOOGY like Rundles does, given that LHB have a .899 OPS against him in his time in MLB).

While it's possible that the Indians could go with one of their high-ceiling flamethrowers out of the gate, breaking camp with Atom Miller or John Meloan as the 7th reliever, I'd prefer if those guys started the season in Columbus, only to allow the Indians' bullpen to sort itself out independent of them, allowing either to get steady work in Columbus to build confidence and a routine instead of being used sporadically in the bullpen the way that the 7th man usually is by Wedge, which may hinder their development. Obviously, either is preferable to having the likes of Kobayashi or Mujica in the bullpen as the season progresses, but I'd

prefer those guys to start the season in AAA to adjust to a full season of being a reliever again (in the case of Meloan) or ever (in the case of Miller). After either (or both) forces his way into the plans of the team, the Indians can make a move - but to just put either in that Mujica/Mastny role that we know doesn't get steady work just slows down their development as back-end-of-the-bullpen options.

Around the AL Central, Joe Posnanski has a piece that should make you fall to you knees and thank whomever you thank when things like this are revealed to you regarding the track record of Royals' GM Dayton Moore when it comes to the FA market in light of the Willie Bloomquist signing.

In case you missed it, Tony and I were happy to welcome Jeff Stevens, Chris Archer, and John Gaub (who you may recognize as the 3 players dealt for Mark DeRosa) in Thursday's episode of "Smoke Signals". It was fascinating to hear from the players' perspective how this whole process works and how they leave the Indians/join the Cubs with mixed emotions.

In a GIANT bit of news, Tony and I will be happy to welcome Terry Pluto (yes, that one) for the show this week with more details to come as well as a link later in the week to serve as a reminder.

Looking outside at the mounds of snow, just keep repeating to yourself that Spring Training is coming, Spring Training is coming, Spring Training is coming...