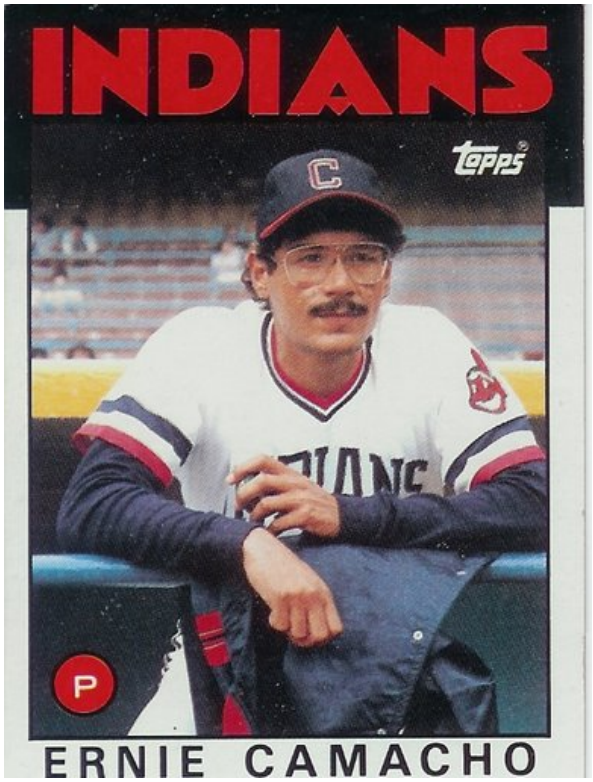

Things change so often in life these days. Any more, a woman can be called 'dude'. Dudes (guys, I mean) call each other 'bitch'- even straight ones.

(Can women call dudes, 'bitch'? Guy-dudes, I mean? It's never happened to me. A dude called me that once, but only in a sports website forum. I assume it was a guy-dude...)

Of course, back in the ooooolden days, like say when I was growing up, nothing ever changed. Ever.

For instance, take the early 1960s to the 1990s. The Cleveland Indians were known as being synonymous with losing, often finding themselves out of the pennant race before the weather warmed up. They were a long-running national joke, despite the occasional human-interest story. Gaylord Perry winning the Cy Young Award on a last place team. Frank Robinson joining the team and becoming the first black manager in major league history. There were hush-toned references to a possible move of the franchise. Places such as New Orleans and Seattle were ready for baseball. However, every so often Tribe fans would approach a season with heightened anticipation: maybe this is 'next year'!

Many readers will recall the spring of 1987, when a few national publications picked the Tribe to be the best team in the American League. Sports Illustrated (in)famously featured Cory Snyder and Joe Carter on the cover, with the headline, "INDIAN UPRISING." The team was going to hit and score runs with those 'cover boys', slugger Andre Thornton, Tony Bernazard (who was coming off of a career year), Brook Jacoby, and Julio Franco. The starting pitching was going to be solid, with veterans Joe Niekro and Steve Carlton along with young knuckler Tom Candiotti. And the bullpen was going to be anchored by the Tribe's all-time season saves leader, Ernie "Macho" Camacho.

Camacho, who is from Southern California, was drafted by Oakland in 1981. He was with the Milwaukee Brewers in 1983 when they traded him along with Gorman Thomas and Jamie Easterly to the Indians for center fielder Rick Manning and pitcher Rick Waits. It was a highly unpopular trade among Brewers fans, who loved Thomas. He'd won the AL home run title twice in six years in Milwaukee. He also looked like them- a hairy, lunchpail sort.

In 1984, Ernie Camacho set the Indians franchise record for saves with 23. Arm trouble dogged his time in the majors- but he made up for that in eccentricity. He may not actually have fully achieved Gorman-Thomas-in-Milwaukee cult status in Cleveland, but he at least flirted with it. Perhaps he was closer to a guy like one-time Cleveland Cavalier Ricky Davis: possessing of immense potential, unrealized arguably due to his flaky persona; somewhat of a fan favorite, even to this day.

From The Sporting News, October 2, 1995:

* Camacho was concerned about his locker being by the door, since he thought that it would make it easier for the team to get rid of him.

* He always thought that he was on the edge of calamity. After having bone chips removed from his elbow, he kept them in a jar in his locker to remind himself how lucky he was to survive the procedure.

* When he and several other players had each signed 100 photos for charity, he said his arm was sore from signing them all at once. He said, "The other guys were smarter than me. They signed their pictures a few at a time. I did mine in one day. That was a big mistake."

* He said that he got headaches when pitching because he never blinked while in a game.

Many stories about Ernie Camacho link him to Indians manager Pat Corrales. Corrales had been a catcher, at one time backing up Johnny Bench in Cincinnati during his playing days. He eventually had become the only first-place manager ever to be fired in midseason when the Phillies canned him in 1983. As it wasn't unusual for the Indians to be in the hunt for a new manager, they hired him days later. What Pat Corrales is perhaps known best for is thinking it was a good idea one day to storm the mound and throw a karate kick at intimidating A's pitcher Dave Stewart. Stewart dropped Corrales to his hands and knees with a right to the jaw.

Camacho threw a 'plus' 95mph fastball which he had no confidence in. So he threw sliders and forkballs, which seldom found the strike zone. Corrales would stomp to the mound and glare at Camacho. He'd poke or pound him in the chest, and sternly yell for the heater. Camacho was apparently warmed by this sentiment, as he said, "I think it's great when Pat does that because I know he cares about me." Corrales said, "Ernie needs to do one thing- let me do the thinking for him. Here is a guy who throws harder than Al Holland and all he wants to do is throw forkballs. Thinking is the reason he has been with six organizations." (A Baseball Winter, Terry Pluto/Jeff Neuman, 1986)

Once, while pitching against the Yankees, a line drive clipped the right-handed Camacho on his glove. He called Corrales out to the mound and apparently asked to come out of the game. Corrales ordered him to continue to pitch. The catcher was told to throw to the first or third baseman, who was to hand the ball to Camacho.

In 1985, Peter Bavasi of the Indians' front office had hired business management guru Peter Drucker to provide counsel in helping the Tribe to maximize their abilities. Drucker was regarded as an expert who would offer valuable input about certain hard-to-manage players. It was, to a large extent, an eyebrow-raiser since the perennially cash-strapped Tribe was paying him $5,000 per day. They discussed Ernie Camacho, who would follow a nice season with a terrible one. Pat Corrales was intrigued that Drucker would be able to "reveal the answer" in getting inside the head of Camacho. Corrales asked how they could get Camacho to be more consistent.Drucker thoughtfully considered the issue and said, in a businesslike tone, "The way I see it, there's only one thing you can do. You should consider trading this man as soon as you can."

So naturally, Ernie Camacho wound up as one of the lynchpins of the hopeful 1987 squad. He lasted 2 months with the Tribe before being sent to AAA Buffalo because he was pitching only slightly better than I would have. He'd gotten to the point where he was getting booed at home while warming up in the bullpen.

His signature outing of the season was on April 20, at home against the Toronto Blue Jays. The Indians led 6-2 in the ninth. Three Cleveland pitchers had loaded the bases. Camacho was brought in and promptly served up a pitch which resulted in a passed ball. After allowing a bases-clearing double to Lloyd Moseby, Camacho threw a wild pitch. When the inning was over, he walked to the dugout with an animated Julio Franco in his face. I believe Julio said to Ernie: *" Ernie! You are forcing the team to begin relying on the likes of relievers Scott Bailes, Mike Armstrong, Ed Vande Berg, Rich Yett and Mark Huismann!"*
(Franco may not have said that. He may have simply said, "DUDE!!") Toronto won in 10 innings. When approached by reporters after the game, Camacho raved about his curveball- saying it had to be in the 96-97mph range. He said nobody could stop it "when it hit the ground".

So, the Cleveland Indians didn't contend in 1987. Nothing changed. It was the olden days. The offense had its struggles but the team eventually did hit. The pitching was horrible. No Indians pitcher had a decent year, and that was an understatement for Ernie Camacho.

Times moved on. The Tribe would one day return to relevance- even prominence. The next decade, their offense would be the envy of Baseball. Alas, the pitching would be suspect. I guess even in my post-youth years, some things still resist change.