The snow is falling again as Winter keeps its vise grip on the North Coast, so let's think of sunnier days, among the cacti in Goodyear and get right off on a Lazy Sunday. This week, Paul hits on the following: the Indians organizational depth at AA and AAA, Fatso Carmona coming to camp with a beer belly, the Indians statistical analysis when it comes to attendance, Joe Crede to the Twins, the battle for the #5 spot in the rotation, and the new MLBTV cable channel.

The snow is falling again as Winter keeps its vise grip on the North Coast, so let's think of sunnier days, among the cacti in Goodyear and get right off on a Lazy Lasy:

Leading off with the only print piece of note (sorry, the fluff pieces coming out of Goodyear are, while necessary because nothing's happening, simply not worth linking), Terry Pluto throws some numbers at you regarding some of the young players who are trying to make an impression in Goodyear. The players he mentions (Santana, Valbuena, LaPorta, and Brantley) all excite me individually in terms of upper-level, young talent; but, as a group of players that figures to dot the Columbus and Akron rosters, I can honestly say that I haven't been this excited to see how the position players perform in AA and AAA in a long while.

That Columbus team, in particular, is going to have AB up and down the lineup that I'm interested to see as the players attempt to slot themselves in line for a promotion to Cleveland...and that's to say nothing of the middle of the lineup in Akron that's going to boast Santana, Weglarz (who was on the show this week), Mills, and Carlos Rivero. Terry also throws a plug in for Tony Lastoria's Prospect

Book, which you may have heard about before...but is definitely worth your time, as Pluto points out.

One of the only things of note (albeit subtly) to come out of Goodyear this week was...no, not The Looch's story about an alligator (if you're looking for a link, it isn't there)...this little dig from Castro :

The more I see of Luis Valbuena, the more I like. He looks quite polished in the field, and he has a smooth swing. One line on Valbuena when the Indians acquired him this winter was that he's a bit on the stocky side, but he looks to be in pretty good shape to me.

Fausto Carmona, on the other hand, must be a regular at the Andy Marte Buffet.

Speaking of which, there was a Marte sighting at camp here today. He came here to workout, as he is, technically, still with the organization. He got out of here before reporters could shake him down for a few thoughts on the move the other day.

Did you catch it in there?

I hope for your sake that you did, I put it in bold. It's a quiet revelation that Carmona arrived to camp carrying a little extra baggage. This got pointed out in the comments section of one of Larry Jones' picture galleries with poster Caryn fabulously pointing out that Carmona looked like that guy in "Total Recall" who had Kuato coming out of his stomach (yes, the comment was regarding the picture above), but let's just hope that the words "oblique" and "strain" don't come trickling out of Goodyear regarding Carmona as it has in the past few years with Lee, then Westbrook. As important as Carmona's rebound is to the Tribe this year to couple with Lee at the top of the rotation ahead of the question marks behind them, losing Carmona or having him ineffective in the #2 hole could have disastrous ramifications for the season.

On the topic of Larry Jones of Lazy Lightning Media, he promises to continue to send more snapshots to me, much to the delight of all of you...if the e-mail's I'm getting are any indication. Larry, by the way, is at the 2:24 mark of this video fro m the PD, just in case you're interested.

Taking it around the horn, for an interesting retrospective on the Indians' new closer and his time on the North Side, here's a piece from the Chicago Sun-Time that appeared earlier in the week and answers some of the questions that were still out there about why Wood left the Cubs and what he valued most in his time in Chicago.

Here's a fascinating look at how the Indians are attempting to get creative in terms of attendance for 2009, using statistical analysis to come up with variable pricing. The idea being that "not all games are created equal" and by pricing them according to time of year, opponent, promotions, and fireworks is a way for the Indians to entice fans to games in April and May and to a Royals series by pricing them differently from a Sunday afternoon game in July against the Yankees.

The consultant who managed the statistical analysis and applied it to ticket prices, Vince Gennaro, actually wrote a piece explaining just this process and how pricing was determined based on different variables in the IA2K9 that I was honored to participate in ...which just happens to now be shipping from Maple Street Press.

Going around the Central, the Twins have inked Joe Crede to an incentive-laden deal for one year, the success of which will obviously hinge on Crede's back. Perhaps Crede took the best deal that was out there for him, but the thought that a player with persistent back problems is going to stay healthy on the parking lot that is the Metrodome field should be raising red flags everywhere in Minnesota.

In addition to Crede, the Twins are allegedly talking about adding RHP Juan Cruz to their bullpen, which would be a phenomenal addition to the Minnesota pen as he would add an experienced arm to bridge their starters to Joe Nathan, a glaring hole particularly with Pat Neshek still battling his way back. Cruz, one of the relievers that was rumored to be considered by the Tribe to augment the back end of their bullpen (whether that was ever true or not, we'll never know), but Cruz remains available because he is a Type-A Free Agent, which means that the team that signs him would have to give up a 1st Round Pick in next year's draft (unless that pick is in the top 16) and not many teams are that anxious to add a set-up guy at the price of a top draft pick. But it looks like the Twins are being creative with this, initiating talks with the D-Backs on a

sign-and-trade which would avoid the draft pick from changing hands and would likely only cost the Twins a middling prospect to make it happen. It's an interesting solution to the Type-A quandary and, if the Twins can pull it off, it's a move that may settle their 7th and 8th innings the same way that Scott Linebrink and Octavio Dotel did last year on the South Side.

With Crede and (perhaps) Cruz heading the Twin Cities, Minnesota could turn their previously quiet off-season around in the course of a few days as they look to have waited out the market and could be adding two players who have the potential of shoring up two of the major holes they entered the off-season facing.

Keeping it with the Central topic, SI has their AL Central preview, which actually looks pretty spot-on for each team and contains some kernels of interest regarding the Tribe (the position battle to watch is...DH) and offers up some thoughts from a scout about the Indians
:

The bullpen behind [Wood] is not the best I've ever seen. Their rotation is real good up top, but it goes 1-2-5-5-5. There aren't any middle guys in there. ... Carmona definitely has the ability, but whether he's mentally ready, who knows? ... They're constructed like a playoff team rather than a full-season team, pitching-wise. They have a legitimate ace candidate and a legitimate closer candidate. ... A real important pickup for them is going to be Mark DeRosa. He's a very good, clutch player. I was very surprised the Cubs gave up on him as quickly as they did. He's a good clubhouse leader. ... If Hafner's healthy, he's one of the most dangerous hitters in major league baseball. His career path is very similar to David Ortiz: had a lot of holes, every year he closed up a couple of them, then the next year he closed a couple more.

Interesting takes on the rotation and DeRosa, which I happen to agree with, though his thoughts on the bullpen being questionable behind Wood and the optimism for Hafner are new to these parts.

Regarding that middle-to-back-end of the rotation that the above scout refers to as the "5-5-5" portion of the rotation, APV over at LGT has an in-depth look at Pavano, Reyes, and Laffey
,
with some tremendous data to pore over, particularly for Laffey's repertoire.

Going past Pavano, Reyes, and Laffey, the pitcher that I think may emerge to

become that "non-5" among all of the middle-to-back-end-of-the-rotation fodder, Dave Huff, is featured in this piece from Yahoo with all of the pertinent obligatory stats that you've seen here before. New to me is the fact that Sweet Pete Gammons thinks that Huff will win 12 games for the Tribe this year, which isn't interesting because of the number of wins (as wins are a fairly arbitrary gauge of a pitcher's effectiveness), but rather the number of games that a pitcher generally has to start to even approach 12 wins. Knowing what we do about Gammons' relationship with the Tribe Front Office, don't think that this is just Gammons throwing something out there...his "information" or "predictions" are generally based on the opinions of people that he trusts and respects. Thus, that "information", may be coming directly from Shapiro or Antonetti.

From the "Mark Your Calendar" department, the MLB Network has started their "30 Clubs in 30 Days" series, which covers each MLB team in a one-hour preview show. It started on Friday night with the Red Sox (which was very nicely done, if you were able to get past the overuse of the word "confident" by Hazel Mae), continued with the Twinkies last night, and will feature YOUR Cleveland Indians on March 16th.

Speaking of the MLB Network, Joe LeMire of SI.com has a nice piece on how MLBN has quickly established itself as capable of producing high-quality original entertainment with a couple of tremendous shows that doesn't come off as a mouthpiece for MLB in any sense. For those searching for an alternative to the 4-letter word that broadcasts from Bristol, CT to get your sports fix (unless the "Mt. Rushmore of Sports" series is in your wheelhouse), add MLBN to you "Favorites" button on your remote...and thank me later.

Photo courtesy of Larry Jones of Lazy Lightning Media