The ugliness continued last night as the Indians lost 4-2 to the Kansas City Royals, falling to 1-6 on the young season. And the fan outcry is loud, with the Eric Wedge haters in mid-season form already here in mid-April. In Gary's latest, he says the evidence that Wedge is responsible for the team's poor start is minimal, and that the true blame should be laid at the feet of Mark Shapiro. And that an extension of this poor start could cause the Tribe GM to throw his handpicked coach under the bus ... a la Phil Savage.

There's nothing like a 5-game losing streak at the start of the season to get the blood flowing early. With the Cleveland Indians now at 1-6 and threatening to record the worst start since, I think, the New York Nine's abysmal showing against the their cross-town rivals, the New York Knickerbockers in 1846, the Eric Wedge haters have gotten an unexpected early boost to their prospects. Generally, it's not until mid-May when the Wedge haters hit their stride.

Wedge's sins to date apparently range from not shaving enough on a consistent basis to leaving Cliff Lee in longer than he deserved in the season's opening game. If someone could find a link between Wedge and Kenny Perry, I'm sure Wedge would get blamed for Perry's meltdown on the 71st and 72nd holes Sunday at the Masters. Give them time.

In trying to gauge fan animosity toward Wedge, a usual barometer is the predictable launching of Fire[Name of Coach here].com website. There is a FireEricWedge website, but it's not up and running as of yet. It's owned not by a Clevelander but by some guy sitting in Atlanta hoping to eventually capitalize on the $11.99 he pays GoDaddy.com to

register the website name each year. Good luck.

The evidence that Wedge is somehow responsible for what's taken place to this point is minimal, except in a larger sense. But let's talk about the details, first.

Lee has looked lousy in his first two starts. He's locating his pitches like he did in 2007 and getting exactly the same results as he did then. It may be a game of inches, but these are very important inches when your success relies far more on location than speed.

As for Fausto Carmona, he's got what the scouts like to say "nasty stuff." The problem is that Carmona can't yet get full command of his stuff. His ball dances like a really hard knuckler, but he's not getting ahead of enough batters just yet to make it work for him. When pitching from behind, like almost any other pitcher, he has to rely on a more pedestrian repertoire and hope that the batter isn't hitting it where the players ain't.

Scott Lewis is, I guess, injured. But far more than whatever minor soreness is ailing him at the moment, he's simply got to learn how to keep the ball in the park. Even when he's winning it's been a problem. It's a growth process, certainly, and Indians fans apparently are going to have to be satisfied living with the occasional pains that a growing process brings. The only fans smiling about Carl Pavano are those living in New York and watching Yankees games. Now I know why.

Then there's the bullpen. The Rafael brothers, Perez and Bentancort, have made a smooth transition from 2008 into this season, much to everyone's dismay. Meanwhile, there just haven't been enough opportunities for Kerry Wood to showcase the reason for the substantial offseason investment.

To paraphrase, "it's the pitching, stupid." In that sense, unless Wedge can suddenly become Professor Vernon K. Simpson in "It Happens Every Spring" and doctor the ball with a secret elixir that repels wood, it's hard to know exactly why Wedge is to blame, as least when you look at the fine print.

Indeed, if you want to blame someone, blame general manager Mark Shapiro. He's the one that constructed the starting rotation. But even blaming Shapiro at this point is awfully premature. Sure, the trends are disturbing, but there's a big difference in a 10-game trend and a 50-game trend. If it's early June and Lee and Pavano are still essentially throwing batting practice to the opposition and Carmona has twice as many walks as strike outs and still no fifth starter has emerged, then the criticism of Shapiro should start.

The details notwithstanding, however, the one thing that fans can point to is how slow Wedge teams start each season, other than 2007. To that there is some truth and there is some trend. Through Sunday's victory against the Toronto Blue Jays, the Indians are a collective 66-87 in April under Wedge. That's nearly an entire season of games.

While the 2007 stands as the lone exception, when the Indians ran out

to a 14-8 record, it's undeniable that Wedge's teams start slowly. It is an issue.

It's easy to look at each tree when you want to come to Wedge's defense. But yet if we're always pointing at every tree without realizing the forest we're in, then that's just as big a mistake in the other direction. Put another way, if it's fair to criticize former Browns head coach Romeo Crennel for his team's lack of preparation going into last season (or any season, for that matter), and it was, then why shouldn't Wedge face the same scrutiny?

Despite the apples and pineapples differences between spring training and the regular season, it hasn't gone unnoticed that the Indians are playing just as lousy now as they did then, except that Carmona is worse. In fact, only two teams in the entire major leagues had a worse spring, Arizona and San Diego. That's not necessarily a marker for anything but when it continues into the regular season, then it's time to start figuring out exactly if there is a problem to be rooted out or an aberration to ignore.

When the Browns went into the tank early and often last season, much of the blame was directly related to Crennel's country club approach to the preseason. By not pushing the players more forcefully and relying on the players to police themselves for discipline and professionalism issues, Crennel ended up with a team with only slightly more unity than one consisting of Shiites and Sunnis.

It showed in the little things. Throws usually made were missed. Balls

usually caught were dropped. Penalties of omission, like false starts, proliferated. Assignments were routinely missed. Sure, it was easy in each case to lay the blame on the players, but at some point didn't the buck stop with Crennel? Of course.

In the same sense, Wedge has to shoulder that same responsibility. Wedge, like Crennel, is a stand up guy and would always point the finger at himself first. At some point, though, it becomes an empty gesture if it doesn't eventually lead to tangible change in results.

Wedge isn't directly to blame for Lee's control problems, Shin-Soo Choo losing a ball in the sun, or Victor Martinez striking out with the bases loaded. But if he hasn't created an atmosphere in the first instance that places a premium on preparation, where every pitch and every at bat counts, then he's as much to blame as if he threw the fat pitch or missed connecting on a hanging curve himself.

The question, though, is whether Wedge's teams are unprepared. In this regard, baseball is far more subtle than football, making those conclusions harder to draw. Far more often than not, football's preseason is a series of practices with an occasional game thrown in for good measure. Baseball is mostly about games with an occasional off day. Practice confined mostly to the first 10 days. Players end up mostly being judged on their performance in these games and less on what they may be doing behind the scenes. In football, it's the exact opposite.

But the measure of success or failure is the same for both sports, the

regular season. In this instance, the Indians have played about 4 percent of their schedule. That isn't going to tell you much. In football terms, 4 percent of the season gets you to early third quarter of the first game, which seems like an apt comparison for how little can possibly be known thus far. But before I get a spate of emails about this, I do realize that the Browns had done enough bad by the third quarter of their 2008 season opener against the Dallas Cowboys to make some conclusions, but that's only in hindsight. There's a lot of baseball between now and then before a similar claim can be made with respect to the Indians.

But if what fans are seeing now continues for any real length of time, then Shapiro is going to start questioning Wedge's stewardship of the team he built. And in the same way Phil Savage eventually threw his handpicked head coach under the bus, Shapiro will end up doing the same. And since the book on Wedge, both good and bad, is fairly well established at this point, just like Crennel, no one is going to criticize Shapiro too much for that, either.