Twenty-two games into the 2009 baseball season, the Cleveland Indians' Oceanic jetliner threatens to take a big plunge into the Pacific. If the entire summer is "Lost," even Dr. Jack Shephard will not be able to resuscitate them.

Like the survivors of Oceanic Flight 815 couldn't control their fateful plummet into unknown waters five years ago, the Indians do not control at least some of the factors that have contributed to their dive this spring. The domestic economy is crumbling before our very eyes, keeping purse strings tighter than normal; the weather here has been largely dreadful, making it rougher than normal on both pitchers and hitters. Tribe talk has been minimized by the intriguing Cavaliers, who are in the NBA Playoffs with their sights on a championship; and by the Browns, whose fans are still celebrating (sort of) their new coach, new general manager, and new draft picks.

But it's still early.

The Indians' real problems are self-inflicted. The fault of no one person, they fall squarely in the laps of the management team -- owner Paul Dolan, general manager Mark Shapiro and manager Eric Wedge -- and the players.

Besides being last in the A.L. in home attendance, the team is tied for 11th of the 14 teams in ERA (5.83 at last glance) and is 12th in home runs yielded. A pitching staff that relies on control rather than power has issued more bases on balls than any other team in the league. Offensively, the Indians have the 12th-worst batting average with runners in scoring position (.256, though it seems a lot lower).

To top it all off, the last-place Yahoos (err, Wahoos) have leadership problems, according to none other than their "field general" (note quote marks), The Atomic Wedgie.

"I'm the leader of this ballclub, but I'm the manager," Wedge recently professed. "Position players are playing every day. That's where it has to come from."

After management let former clubhouse leaders CC Sabathia, Casey Blake and Paul Byrd escape (to New York, Los Angeles and who-knows-where, respectively), here is the current status of players who could be candidates to replace them:

- For all their experience and offensive talent, Grady Sizemore, Victor Martinez, Jhonny Peralta and Travis Hafner don't really have the extreme Type-A personalities that translate to clubhouse leadership.

- Mark DeRosa and Kerry Wood -- both former Cubs -- are brand new to the team.

- David Dellucci (yes, THAT David Dellucci) is in Columbus.

- Jake Westbrook is in physical rehab.

"We definitely have leadership guys here," says DeRosa. "It's just a matter of getting a feel for our identity as a team and having guys stepping up and taking that role."

So it's still early.

Leadership isn't the team's biggest self-inflicted problem. The elephant in the room is the 5.83 team ERA.

As early as January, anyone with even the most rudimentary baseball knowledge (that's gotta include Shapiro, Wedge and pitching coach Carl Willis) could see that the 2009 pitching staff would not overwhelm batters. Except for Wood, none of the pitchers can touch 98 on the Jugs gun, even if you spot them 5 mph. Returning Cy Young Award-winner Cliff Lee is the No.1 starter, but no one ever expected him to go 22-3 with a 2.54 ERA again. The rest of the starters are a patchwork quilt of major league castoffs and inexperienced youngsters. There were high hopes for the bullpen, but it has largely imploded. And Wood, the Indians' $10 million closer, has yet to make much of an impact.

But it's still early. There's plenty of time for Frank Lapidus to show up in his trusty helicopter and rescue the drowning Tribe. Lots of games remain for leaders to emerge and for the pitchers (like Lee and Fausto Carmona recently) to find their control.

Certainly, there have been bright spots, especially a 22-4 victory over the hated Yankees and their spoiled fans in their extravagant new billion-dollar stadium. That gleam that will not fade for a while yet.

With an even average pitching staff, the Tribe's record currently would be in the vicinity of .500. Overall, they are between 5th and 8th in the A.L. in virtually all meaningful offensive statistics (except the aforementioned BA/RISP). Martinez is hitting almost .400. Grady is being Grady. If tougher times strike, guys like outfielder Matt LaPorta and infielder Luis Valbuena are tearing up minor-league pitching. By the end of the season, most astute baseball fans expect the team to score more runs than the vast majority of other major league teams.

Yes, it's still early. In another six weeks or so, the Cavaliers will be NBA champions, and the new-look Browns will have yet to begin training camp. The weather will be balmy, with high, clear skies and a nice breeze blowing across the outfield grass. Grady will still be Grady. If all goes well, the lousy April will be forgotten, and summer heroics from Jack Shephard and Frank Lapidus will not be needed.

Call me an incurable optimist, but it's a long, long baseball season -- and for the Indians, it's far from "Lost."