The start to this season has been like a bad nightmare. When one facet of the Indians team is working, the others fail them. And the bullpen. The freaking bullpen! Looking to shake things up, the Tribe called up two of their top prospects in the offseason, Matt LaPorta and Luis Valbuena. In today's Lazy Sunday, Paulie C makes sense of the shakeup, and also notes how fascinating it is to see the disparity among the beat writers as to how the promotions of Friday night were covered.

Anyone else having a recurring nightmare?

It goes like this - the Indians try and try and try to win a game, but something always prevents them from doing so, be it a horrible start, a stagnant offense, or a gas-can wielding relief corps...

What do you mean, I'm awake when these things are happening?

Trying to convince myself that "this is all just a bad dream" let's get rolling on a Lazy Sunday in the aftermath of the promotions of Friday night:

Does anyone else find it fascinating to see the disparity among the beat writers as to how the promotions of Friday night were covered and what impact the promotions figure to have on the Indians' lineup going forward with LaPorta and Valbuena, in terms of who is going to play where and when?

Leading the charge for the "let's take the Indians' at face value for what they're saying" is the PD's Paul Hoynes who writes that:

LaPorta, at the very least, will start against left-handers. Verlander is a right-hander, but Toronto is starting lefties Brian Tallet and Brett Cecil on Monday and Tuesday at Rogers Centre. He'll play left and right field and first base. LaPorta played first base Friday night for Columbus.

That's it...there's your capsule analysis of when LaPorta will play, with the "at the very least" leaving it open for more...I guess.
This, of course, goes along with the absurd idea that LaPorta is here to be a "complement" to Dellucci as the presence of one has very little bearing on the presence of another. If you REALLY think that Dellucci and LaPorta are here to be some sort of LF/DH platoon, you haven't been paying attention to how many AB are now available and why those AB are available.

Someone a little more in-tune with the likely usage of LaPorta is (not surprisingly) Anthony Castrovince, who wrote in his initial piece after the promotion that:

Wedge said he also feels comfortable using LaPorta in the corner outfield spots, and he is, of course, a candidate to get starts at DH. With left fielder Ben Francisco off to a slow start and Hafner on the DL, LaPorta should have plenty of opportunities to prove himself early on. ***The Indians are careful to get their top position player prospects consistent playing time, and they wouldn't be calling LaPorta up if he was simply going to sit.***

"He's coming up here for a reason," Wedge said.

In full disclosure, the bold was added by me and effectively points out that Castrovince understands the significance of the LaPorta call-up and recognizes that he's not making a trip to the Big Leagues to be a "platoon" player.

Which one makes more sense to you and which one goes a little more in-depth than just taking a cursory glance at the situation?
Yeah...I know.

It doesn't stop there though, as the coverage of the topic of how often Valbuena will play is treated to the same superficial vs. in-depth coverage from the two writers:

Hoynes:

Valbuena, 23, will probably see most of his playing time at second and third base. He'll also play short. He made his big-league debut with Seattle last year, hitting .245 (12-for-49) with one RBI. He's a left-handed hitter with some speed. The Indians didn't say it, but they probably consider him an upgrade over veteran Tony Graffanino. To make room for the new arrivals, Graffanino was designated for assignment, Joe Smith was placed on the disabled list and Trevor Crowe was optioned to Columbus.

Castro:

As far as how quickly LaPorta and Valbuena will get into the mix, Wedge wouldn't reveal his plans for Sunday. But it's safe to assume LaPorta will get his fair share of at-bats and Valbuena could play more than the average utility infielder.

*Meanwhile, Jhonny Peralta's ongoing struggles might put him in more of a fight for at-bats. Wedge could start Valbuena at second base and move Asdrubal Cabrera to short. He can also use Valbuena to spell Mark DeRosa at third...**The Indians don't view Valbuena as a long-term utilityman but rather as a potential starter. So his presence, like that of LaPorta, has potential to impact the lineup going forward.***

Again, the bold was added by me...but which piece takes you a little more into the thinking of why these moves happened and what's coming?

The Indians make a major move in terms of how this Front Office has handled the promotion of their young players that fast-tracks the evolution of the Indians, putting the 2009 season squarely in the balance for the next month or so and you're thirsting for insight and analysis from the writers that travel with these teams and are paid to know more than you and I - so...which coverage strikes you as more complete?

It's been said before here, but if you're not on Castro for your everyday Indians' info and for superb pieces like this on Tony Sipp in addition to the everyday info, you're not getting all of the information and analysis that you can.

As for what impact the impending returns of Carroll and Hafner would mean to the newest Indians, wouldn't it stand to reason that the Indians can see how much Valbuena is playing (and how well) before summarily relegating him to AAA again,

particularly with Barfield's main purpose on this team to be a pinch runner and nothing more, meaning that a roster spot would still essentially be available if Valbuena proves himself to be worthy of one? Additionally, when Hafner returns, wouldn't he just take the place of Garko or Dellucci as the DH with each of them remaining on the roster as potential PH?

I don't agree with what Terry Pluto says that he's hearing from the team in that he says that the organizations' current plan is that LaPorta "probably will got back to the minors when Hafner is healthy, but if he hits ... that can change" because I'm not sure how one affects the other if LaPorta's going to be playing LF and 1B and not, as Terry is hearing from the Tribe on their plans for LaPorta :

The right-handed batter is hitting .353 vs. lefties, .328 vs. righties and .333 with runners in scoring position. For his career, he is at .314 vs. righties, .237 vs. lefties. This season, all five of his homers are against righties. He looks like a strong, all-around hitter and has done a very respectable job in the outfield. Look for him to platoon with Dave Dellucci at DH, and see some time in left. He probably will got back to the minors when Hafner is healthy, but if he hits ... that can change.

Actually, when you look a little closer at what Pluto writes here as to what he's hearing (and, remember, Pluto's Sunday "notes" are often what the team is saying, not his opinion unless stated as such), the "platoon" at DH with The Looch makes less sense as LaPorta has a career average of .314 this year against RHP with all 5 of his HR coming against RHP this year. Conversely, he's hitting .237 against LHP...the same ones that Dellucci can't hit. He also includes the fact that LaPorta is hitting .353 vs. LHP this year and .328 vs. RHP this year...so where does this "platoon" idea make sense at all if LaPorta has experienced success against both LHP and RHP in Columbus?

Doesn't it make more sense to platoon Dellucci with a guy like Shoppach in the lineup as Shoppach has struggled against the same RHP that Dellucci thrives against?

True, they don't play the same position, but isn't this relatively easy to figure out?

Against LHP

Sizemore - CF
Cabrera - 2B
Martinez - 1B
Choo - RF
Garko - DH
Peralta - SS
Shoppach - C
LaPorta - LF
DeRosa - 3B

Against RHP

Sizemore - CF
Cabrera - 2B
Martinez - C
Choo - RF
Garko - 1B
Peralta - SS
Dellucci - DH
LaPorta - LF
DeRosa - 3B

Would the lineups look EXACTLY like that?

No, but the idea of "platooning" Dellucci and Shoppach isn't that hard to figure out and it likely becomes part of the idea that it's time to start moving this bottom 2/3 of the lineup around to find the right mix, taking advantage of the versatility of DeRosa in the process. Beyond the guys listed above, Valbuena moves into the lineup when Peralta or DeRosa take a day off or are playing elsewhere, playing either 3B or 2B, which moves Cabrera over to SS. Francisco becomes the late-inning RH pinch-hitting option and Barfield becomes the designated pinch runner.

Certainly, it's not a perfect lineup, but you can see now with the different positions that these guys can play that the pieces to the puzzle can finally be moved around with the insertion of LaPorta into the everyday lineup and with the upgrade in depth with Valbuena, who can essentially fill in for whoever is struggling or needs a day off with the hopes that he asserts himself as a viable everyday contributor.

With these moves, I think what you're going to see is an experimentation process with the lineup in terms of a lot of pieces suddenly being flexible in terms of which position they play to maximize effectiveness and to, quite frankly, try to finally find that right mix of players to put enough runs on the board to overcome the bullpen.

Moving on from the moves that were made and rolling on with what has suddenly become quite a convoluted Lazy Sunday, here's an interesting piece from the new blog SABR Tribe on how the defense of the Indians is as much of a problem as everything else that is so visible to the blind eye. If you've not yet checked out SABR Tribe, David over there does a very good job of going into the numbers on the Indians and, while it can be heady at times, it offers a unique perspective not previously available as a singular concept.

In terms of his whole "Grady is the problem" issue that cropped up earlier this week, Craig Calcaterra of NBC Sports (but more notably of The Hardball Times) points out the absurdity of the "debate" pretty succinctly in terms of where Grady falls in the list of things going wrong with the Indians this year.

Elsewhere in the blogosphere, Indians' RHP Vinnie Pestano, who is the closer at Akron, started a blog post over at Tony Lastoria's website , submitting his first entry. Pestano is a name you may or may not have heard of, but he's a name certainly worth watching (and one that serial poster Tyler has already pinned his hopes on to perhaps save the bullpen) in terms of what relievers on the farm may legitimately have a chance to help the Indians' atrocious bullpen in the near future.

If you're not familiar with him, he's posted a 2.70 ERA with a 1.30 WHIP as the Aeros' closer, limiting opposing hitters to a .592 OPS while piling up 9 saves in the young season.

Is that reaching for answers to the bullpen?

You bet...but anyone else have any ideas to save a bullpen that has two pitchers who inspire any kind of consistent confidence?

Finally, to end on the lighter side of things, Vince Grzegorek's tremendous '64 and Counting takes a stab at the absurdity of the Plain Dealer actually running an

interview with the owner of XO Prime Steaks and why that restaurant is so popular with Cleveland athletes
by...naturally going to the gloriousness that is the Harbor Inn and
asking the owner of the Harbor Inn why his place SHOULD be so popular with Cleveland athletes
. It's a great piece of video and make sure that you look at the comments under the PD "interview" to see how this whole "let's find something for Branson Wright to do at the PD" thing is going.

The "interview" was posted to the PD website at 2:25 PM on Monday afternoon and the comments were closed about 30 minutes after it was posted because...well, because the comments pretty much lay the piece to waste in those 30 minutes. Yeah, that seems to be working out real well and thanks to Vince for brilliantly skewering the absurdity of it...and, of course, for taking us all into the Harbor Inn to meet Wally.

Anyone else opposed to see if Wally from the Harbor Inn can make it up to Detroit by...oh, the 6th or 7th inning and see if he can solve the bullpen problems?

At this point, does that sound like THAT bad of an idea?