As the Indians season rolls on and the calendar keeps flipping, a dichotomy has emerged within Paulie C in terms of how he is viewing this evolving 2009 season. One one hand, he sees an eminently flawed team, wracked with injuries. However, in his heart, he wants to believe that this flawed team, seemingly going uphill, attempting to get back in the race against all odds can pull this off by getting healthy and by taking advantage of their second half schedule and the soft underbelly of MLB that is the AL Central.

As the Indians season rolls on and the calendar keeps flipping, a dichotomy has emerged within me in terms of how I am viewing this evolving 2009 season. On one hand (call it my head), I see an eminently flawed team, now trying to overcome injury and stick around long enough to make their suddenly-patented 2nd half run. However, in my heart, I want to believe that this flawed team, seemingly going uphill, attempting to get back in the race against all odds can pull this off by getting healthy and by taking advantage of their second half schedule and the soft underbelly of MLB that is the AL Central.

Both parts of me (head and heart) have the ability to present compelling arguments and, at the risk of sounding schizophrenic, here's a little glimpse into the battle within:

Heart: How about them Indians, baby! We're on a roll, making up some ground in the Central, winning with smoke and mirrors and Matt Herges. Look out AL Central, here we come!

Head: "Making up ground" where, exactly - this Indians team is still in last place in the AL Central and is now closing in on the 70-game mark with the 3rd worst record in the AL and the 2nd worst team ERA in the AL. I keep hearing this argument to "just wait" until the Indians make their run, but how many times does it need to be pointed out that they're at the bottom of the worst division in baseball for anyone to realize that they're...well, that they're in last place in the worst division in baseball.

Heart: But that's just it, this division is so bad, that even mediocrity may be able to get it done for the Indians because the AL Central is weak and none of these teams is going to run away with the division. Look around the division - the Tigers are winning because Edwin Jackson has an ERA more than 2 runs lower than what he put up in Tampa last year and because Rick Porcello is a wunderkind who at some point is likely to hit an innings threshold, the Twins are winning with an otherworldly combination of Mauer and Morneau and Kevin Slowey's pitching and not much else, the White Sox are a team that whose principal hitters are receiving AARP advertisements in the mail and whose pitching isn't strong enough to overcome their shortcomings offensively, while the Royals have the arms to make a run at this thing, but can't put together any semblance of a potent offense to even keep things close. If the Indians are flawed, so is every other team in the division and no

team looks to have that stretch in them where they're just going to run away with the division.

Head: You know, I keep hearing this argument, but if the AL Central is so weak and the Indians are poised to stay in this and "make this run"...well, why are they still in last place with three teams to still leapfrog ahead of to get to 2nd place even? It's one thing to be chasing down one team or two teams and winning while hoping that other team or other teams are losing, but it's quite another thing to see that the Indians have to be winning consistently AND four teams ahead of them have to be losing at a pace that allows them to get back into it.

Heart: Point taken, but take a look at how many games each team in the AL Central has played against the AL East and the AL West and their respective records in those games:

Against AL East

Tigers - 14 games (4-10)

Twins - 22 games (6-16)

White Sox - 14 games (5-9)

Royals - 17 games (7-10)

Indians - 26 games (12-14)

Against AL West

Tigers - 18 games (14-4)

Twins - 17 games (10-7)

White Sox - 16 games (7-9)

Royals - 10 games (4-6)

Indians - 3 games (0-3)

If we can agree that the AL East is the class of the AL with 4 of the 5 teams sporting records of .500 or greater, the Indians have played 12 more games against the East than the Tigers and the White Sox, both of whom have already struggled in their brief times against the East and have only played 3 games against the West, against whom both the Tigers and Twins boosted their overall records.

Since these things all come out in the wash in terms of divisions playing each other an equal amount of times (and realizing that winning games against AL Central teams is more important than anything), once this Interleague madness is over the Indians should be looking at a 2nd half schedule that they can take advantage of while their divisional rivals will be staring down the barrel of the schedule that the Indians limped through over the first 40% of the season.

Head: OK, so they're poised to make this BIG run...with Jamey Carroll leading off and Luis Valbuena and the everyday SS. Yep, sounds like everything is turning the Indians' way.

Heart: Hey, don't knock Carroll, who happens to be nestled between El Capitan and The BLC on the team in OBP, just because he doesn't look the role of an everyday player. In fact, he's done more than his part to keep the Indians close in this thing, just like DeRosa, and Cabrera (before the injury) as players who have stepped up into the void created by Sizemore's ineffectiveness and injury, Jhonny's inconsistency, and The Atomic Wedgie's predilection for playing mediocre players when better alternatives exist. Beyond the performance of those guys that have stepped up, it looks like this team finally getting healthy with Hafner back and Sizemore perhaps returning soon to everyday action.

Head: Stop, stop, stop...I've heard this one before - once the team gets healthy, they're just going to bulldoze their way through the second half. But who's saying that Hafner can play everyday or that Sizemore is legitimately healthy? Aren't these the same guys, who didn't have surgery this year to correct any problems, that were on the roster when Spring Training broke and "contributed" to the Tribe's awful April?

Heart: Fine, I'll give you that...nobody knows what Hafner's shoulder can take or what Grady's going to look like; but with Laffey coming back soon and Westbrook (bump in the road in his rehab considered) maybe coming back to contribute, the rotation could get right again soon which would certainly help things out.

Head: Wait, let me get this straight - now you're counting on the season being saved two pitchers coming off of injury, one of them having a Tommy

John surgery done only a year ago and with news that his rehab hit a "bump in the road"? These are the saviors for the season...a guy who hasn't pitched in a year and a young LHP coming off of the dreaded oblique strain injury? What's next, the assertion that a healthy Scotty Lewis will go all Francisco Liriano, circa 2006, to lead the Indians to the playoffs? A little optimistic about these guys aren't we?

Heart: Maybe, but with the continued maturation of Dave Huff and Jeremy Sowers looking like he's finally putting together some quality starts, as long as Pavano goes back to forgetting that he's Carl Pavano and CP Lee keeps throwing like he is, all the Indians need to do is get some reinforcement to stabilize the rotation. Whether that come from Laffey or Lewis or Westbrook, as long as one of them can step up and stabilize the middle-to-back-end of the rotation, the Indians will finally boast a respectable staff.

Head: Fine, I'm not going to continue to argue with you on the hopes and dreams that you have for the rotation and just give it to you. But, haven't we seen this before though this season - suddenly the rotation will get right and something else will break down, like the clock striking midnight on Herges, Vizcaino, and Aquino, who all suddenly turn back into pumpkins, which is exactly what we may have seen on Monday night?

Heart: If you're willing to concede my optimism on the rotation, I'll give you your pessimism on the bullpen. I have no idea how this batch of relievers finally became effective and, with Betancourt out with what looks to be a major groin injury, Perez an absolute mess, and Jenny Lewis only showing up on the side of a milk carton, those bullpen problems could become just that again very quickly.

Head: I suppose this is the part when you tell me that the Indians can always trade DeRosa for a

bullpen arm to stabilize the bullpen a little bit as he's a man without a position and that he has more value to a team not named the Indians because of his versatility.

Heart: Sure, we can do that now. The fact is, as well as DeRosa is playing, once Sizemore and Cabrera return to play CF and SS, the Indians will move Francisco back to LF, keep Choo in RF on an everyday basis, and since they've shown no interest in DeRosa playing 2B and seem to have committed to Jhonny playing 3B, where is DeRosa going to play everyday...and don't say 1B.

Head: So, let's take the player with the most HR on the team, the 2nd most RBI on the team, and 3rd highest OPS on the team for players with 200 AB or more and flip him because he "has more value to a team not named the Indians"...sign me up for that one!

Heart: No, you're oversimplifying it. The fact is that if Cabrera and Sizemore come back, DeRosa's a man without an everyday position (though the argument that he should be the everyday LF can be made) and if a starter comes back to stabilize the rotation, the only real ongoing concern may be the bullpen. Even there, if the relievers that have thrived there for a month now can somehow keep this up, the Indians could move DeRosa to net an arm and still not affect their team that greatly.

Head: Go back and look at that above - "IF Cabrera and Sizemore...", "IF a starter comes back to stabilize the rotation...", "IF the relievers that have thrived..." and so on. I hate to do this to you, but "If ifs and buts where candy and nuts, we'd all have a Merry Christmas." You're living in this world of hopes and dreams that are all predicated on

these things MAYBE happening or everything breaking just right for the Indians in a season that everything has broken horribly for them. Am I to believe that suddenly everything is going to turn around and this team is just magically turn into a contender after looking like a pretender all year?

Heart: No, that's too much of a stretch, but you're looking for the 1995 Indians team to rise from the ashes here when that's not what is needed to win this AL Central this year. The Indians only need to stick around in the division and make up some games every week on the teams ahead of them by taking advantage of a favorable 2nd-half schedule and what should be improved health. I'm not looking for a miracle or a "Merry Christmas" here, just a steady climb up the AL Central to make August and September a little more interesting in terms of enjoying a pennant race

or at least a run at this thing.

Head: Fine, you just go on living that pipe dream as you watch this flawed team tread water for the next two months, I'm going to miss you in reality.

Heart: Just know that I'm still saving your seat in the bandwagon that you're going to be asking me about in a month or so when the Indians have pushed their way back into your mind and into the divisional race. Hey, hey, hey...Let's Go Tribe!