For a team that relies heavily on attendance for revenues, the Cleveland Indians sure don't act like it. Speaking to the media last week, general manager Mark Shapiro more or less shrugged his shoulders at the team's fate and said that this may just be one of those years. And a million Indians fans shrugged with him. Gary talks about the Indians disastrous 2009 season in his latest column for us.

For a team that relies heavily on attendance for revenues, the Cleveland Indians sure don't act like it. Speaking to the media last week, general manager Mark Shapiro more or less shrugged his shoulders at the team's fate and said that this may just be one of those years. And a million Indians fans shrugged with him.

By the time Shapiro got around to admitting what most everyone else has known for months, the Indians were working their way to the worst record in the American League. As they were sending recently-acquired Mark DeRosa packing for greener grass, the Indians achieved that goal. Now it appears that the rest of the season will be a fight against the Washington Nationals for major league baseball futility. It may be close.

It was a little surprising that anyone thought to even ask whether the team's latest mail-in loss, this time to the Cincinnati Reds, was a result of the DeRosa trade. Manager Eric Wedge, looking as if he was in need of a heavy laxative, patiently

explained that the team has been through this before, most recently with CC Sabathia.

The question Wedge didn't answer, though, was the one that was really asked: how do you motivate a team when the general manager has raised the white flag before the 4th of July? For that matter, how do you motivate the fan base?

Wedge doesn't have any answers for it because there really aren't any. This is a team that already knew they were going nowhere. When Shapiro issued his eulogy, all that was left for them to do was to get in line for the deli tray and reminisce with the other mourners.

The far larger problem, though, is the fan base that owners Larry and Paul Dolan are expecting to come out anyway and fund this enterprise through the end of the year. They'd have an easier time and probably face less questions if they applied for federal stimulus money instead. Other than already being in possession of tickets you bought way back when, what would motivate anyone to head to Progressive Field these days? It isn't the product on the field. Maybe if they gave away free cars like Oprah that might yield an extra 10,000 fans or so per game.

That's the real second punch coming as the result of the major miscalculations Shapiro made this season. The lack of attendance this year and the attendant loss of revenue will linger far longer than a week old stadium hot dog in your stomach. By trading DeRosa, that Indians already have cut their payroll by $1.4 million for the rest of the season but there is more work to do.

If you were the Dolans, wouldn't you demand more payroll cuts? With a payroll upwards of $80 million and attendance slowing to a trickle, the Indians can't afford not to cut more. But where? That's the more difficult question.

In three players, the Indians are absorbing $31 million of their $81 million payroll. For those not doing the math at home, that's nearly 40% of the team's overall payroll. The problem is that two of those players are virtually untradeable-Travis Hafner and Jake Westbrook-and the third is Kerry Wood. Then there is Fausto Carmona pulling down nearly $3 million this season while playing rookie ball in Arizona. Kelly Shoppach is raking in nearly $2 million for all his lack of plate discipline and Rafael Betancort is making $3.3 million for doing what?

Of that group, there probably are teams willing to take on Carmona and Betancort and perhaps even Shoppach. But that would get the Dolans only about $3 million in salary relief for the remainder of the season. That isn't going to be enough. Hafner would get his full salary if cut and Westbrook is just starting to come back from an injury. A decision about him is probably a year away.

In other words, Shapiro can hold his annual garage sale but after so many years of similar sales, the pickings now are getting pretty slim and the bounty will be small.

What the Indians need now is to stop trying to emulate the business model of the Browns and instead adopt an actual plan and stick with it. The problem with Shapiro is that he approaches his business these

days as if he were playing a high/low poker game. As the cards are dealt he decides to concentrate on winning the high side of that pot. But somewhere around the fourth or fifth card he's dealt he realizes that going high isn't going to work so he swings to the other direction. In the end all he accomplished was feeding the pot for the more skilled players while he's left holding one or two face cards, a couple of twos and a bunch of sixes and sevens.

What Shapiro hasn't realized but perhaps the Dolans are starting to is that Shapiro keeps upping the ante at their expense, clueless to the fact that the deck is running colder than the walk down West 3rd Street in late December. We all understand the amorphous goal of building a team that can contend each and every year. At this point that means nothing. How about rightsizing the expectations and just work on building a team that can be competitive each and every year?

Will all due respect to Shapiro, this isn't just one of those years and no amount of saying so is going to change that fact. This year is the inevitable collapse after years of skirting the building codes. Shapiro may not be George Bluth but each year he tries to put new wallpaper on the plywood frame he gets ever closer to resembling the patriarch of the fictional Bluth family.

The Cleveland Fan's Jesse Lamovsky wrote a thought-provoking piece last week laying out the case for how the Browns and the Indians are like twin sons from different mothers yet only the Browns are viewed as

the train wreck. For however true that once was, the tide is surely changing on that as well. Fans are quickly understanding that this team and this management at this moment is an absolute train wreck. About the only reason they are given a relative pass is that with such a long season, it takes awhile for the incompetence to sink in. With the Browns, the relative urgency of each game highlights organizational shortcomings much more quickly.

If you want to take Lamovsky's analysis even further with regard to Shapiro what you'll see is that he really has become the baseball version of Phil Savage but with a better sense of public relations. After trading DeRosa the other night, Shapiro talked about newly-acquired relief pitcher Chris Perez as someone with "swing and miss capability." Close your eyes and it could have been Savage talking about a running back.

Even more like Savage was the almost complete lack of information in what was actually said. In truth, it was analysis by quip and had all the substance of a lettuce sandwich. They have a name for pitchers without "swing and miss capability." They're called football players. But the larger point is that it is just this kind of pabulum that Savage often fed the media about this player or that.

Shapiro is like Savage, too, in that somewhere along the line of

believing all his press clippings the point of his job seems to have shifted from assembling a team to merely collecting players. It's not just that the team lacks talent, it lacks players who mesh. There is so much sameness in the skills on this roster that it's understandable why the team performs as it does no matter which roster Wedge uses on a particular day.

But for now, where Shapiro and Savage differ is in the patience of the owners. The Dolans seem well satisfied with Shapiro if not his results. But eventually the empty seats at Progressive Field will be the loudest voice in the room and no amount of diversionary swing and miss gobbledygook is going to drown it out.