If the wheel's hadn't officially come off the Indians' season yet this year, a closer look into the post game comments after Friday night's loss to the Tigers are strong evidence that they are now. In Paulie's latest Lazy Sunday, he takes a look at those comments, which may have slipped below the radar of many Indians fans ... and says they are proof positive of a split clubhouse, and all the more reason to trade Cliff Lee, who is as good as gone after the conclusion of next season.

If the wheels hadn't officially come off of the Indians' season this year yet, allow me to relay the post-game comments after Friday's game to provide a little glimpse into what's happening in the Indians' locker room.

We all know what's happening on the field, but not unlike what's being seen between the lines, what's being seen and heard in the clubhouse...it's...um...it's not good.

It starts with Cliff Lee on whether a fly ball in the 3rd should have been caught by "RF" Ryan Garko :

Asked if he felt the ball should have been caught, Lee said, "Do you? I don't pass judgment on that. I throw the pitches. Where it goes it goes. It's not up to me to move the outfielders or infielders. All I do is pitch. It did seem like it was in the air a long time. I don't know if they had him shaded the other way or what. You'd have to ask him or Wedgie."

Yikes.

To me though, this doesn't look like a shot at Garko the OF, but rather at not-so-thinly-veiled shot (and an accurate one) at the person who decided to put Garko there in the first place, even going so far as to question where the coaching staff had Garko playing on that particular play.

Apparently, Garko didn't see it that way:

Garko said he was playing Laird straight up.

"Sometimes I think because it's me, I don't make a play, and it becomes a big deal," said Garko. "If [Shin-Soo] Choo's out there, it's a double and it doesn't become an issue. I got a good jump on the ball, went all out. I just didn't make the play."

And now two bodies are under the bus, though it is strange to me that Garko brings Choo into the conversation. Regardless, you can tell that this talk of him not being cut out for the OF is getting to him. However, the fault with Garko playing the OF doesn't fall to Garko's feet as he's simply trying to learn a new position (which he probably shouldn't be asked to play) and can only go by what he's told by the coaching staff.

From the coaching staff perspective, how's this for a comment on the situation:

Wedge had no problem with Garko.

"That's a tough play for anybody," said Wedge. "He made a great effort. You can't do any more than he did."

"A tough play for anybody"?

Maybe, but isn't it also a little tougher for a college catcher playing RF in the expanses of Comerica Park?

While this little exchange of thoughts from Indians is all well and good to pore over, what it really brings to light is that the frustration over the questionable moves that are being made by The Atomic Wedgie on a nightly basis is not only grating the most forgiving of fans - it's fraying the edges of the clubhouse.

Lee says what everyone's thinking...

Garko defends himself (even if he wasn't the target of Lee's comments) by inexplicably bringing Choo into the mix...

Wedge happily goes back to putting his head in the ground after the post-game media session...

And it's all happening in front of the notebooks and the microphones for all to see...

If the edges are fraying in front of the media, how do you think this is playing out behind closed doors?

Do you really think that CP Lee is simply going to face the collected media after his next loss and toe the company line once again?

You might, but I don't see it happening and the frustration that we've all been feeling seems to be bubbling over among the players with some very real consequences being possible. That is, we all know now that the positions that Wedge is putting these players in is not simply being questioned by the fans or the media, but also by the players...and the best player on the team to boot. Plus, that "best player" also happens to be a FA after next year with the team crumbling around him as he sinks deeper and deeper into a resentment that could have very serious ramifications if he sees his situation in Cleveland as untenable.

Realizing that Lee is the same guy who doffed his cap to the fans in 2007 prior to his being sent down to AAA (then denied ever doing it), would Clifton Phifer throw the organization under the bus as the season wears on?

Would he demand some sort of trade under the light of "this team's going nowhere and I want out"?

How does the clubhouse not look fractured in all of this?

Wouldn't now be a good time to see some leadership (whether it come from ownership or the Front Office) to acknowledge that this ship needs to be righted and that the season is not only lost, but that major changes are on the horizon?

And finally, do those major changes include one Clifton Phifer Lee?

The next three weeks (trading deadline is July 31st) just got a whole lot more interesting and with that in mind and on just such a topic (regarding an ace on a team going nowhere), let's start off the Lazy Sunday:

Before looking forward to those three weeks though, let's take a quick look back at last year's major move with Castro's piece on the return for the aCCe and whether (in light of what we've seen this year) the Indians should have been targeting pitchers as the return for The Hefty Lefty and, more specifically, if an offer involving pitching was ever even on the table:

The Phillies were said to be dangling right-hander Carlos Carrasco, and that might have been the offer Shapiro was referring to. But the Indians reportedly didn't have much interest. Carrasco is currently 5-7 with a 4.70 ERA in 16 starts at Triple-A this season.

It's believed the Indians talked to the Yankees about Phil Hughes, but the Yankees were not among the final contenders for Sabathia's services, either because of their hesitancy to deal Hughes or their inability to work out a sign-and-trade in which Sabathia was guaranteed to them beyond 2008.

Other than that, I'm not sure the Indians had any offers or conversations that centered on pitching. Most likely, their focus on outfield depth was as much a function of what was available in the market as it was an address of the organization's needs.
As AC asserts later in the piece, wouldn't it be nice to see that "outfield depth" in light of what we're seeing everyday with the parent club?

But I digress...what pieces and parts might be going this year?

Terry Pluto makes the case that Jhonny Peralta may be due for a change of scenery (although I think I could make an equally compelling case for Peralta's manager needing a "change of scenery" which might give Jhonny some new life), suggesting that giving Andy Marte a chance for the second half of the season could provide a solution past Peralta at 3B...

Wedge says that the post-All-Star break rotation will be Lee, Ohka, Huff, and Sowers (noted in the print edition of the PD, not online) until Pavano gets his next

start on July 22nd, by which time he's not too likely to be wearing an Indians uniform...

The Athletics acquired a 23-year-old RHP in Justin Souza from the Mariners for Utility IF Jack Hannahan, meaning that an upper-level arm (albeit not a wildly exciting one) can be had for a middling middle infielder. Jamey Carroll, it's been a pleasure...

But back to the main course of this discussion, moving a MAJOR piece like Clifton Phifer at what could represent "peak" value for pitching, here's Ken Rosenthal's piece on the Blue Jays "allegedly" shopping (or at least listening to offers on) Roy Halladay
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Why is this rumor and innuendo relevant to the Indians?

Replace the word "Halladay" with "Lee" and the similarities become striking - two AL Cy Young Award winners (currently ranked 6th and 10th in VORP among pitchers, a year after finishing 1st and 4th in VORP among pitchers) in their early-30's, whose deals expire after the 2010 season, currently pitching for teams whose chances for contention in 2010 are certainly up for debate.

One major difference between the two, in terms of contracts, is that Halladay holds a full no-trade clause which would need to be waived for him to be moved (CP Lee does not) and Halladay is owed about $23M over the next year and a half while Lee is owed about $12M through the end of 2010.

To that end, Dave Cameron at Fangraphs.com has an utterly fascinating look at Halladay's value over the next season and a half . If you're looking to equate Cameron's formula to Lee, the value of Halladay (in terms of performance) would be greater based solely on the length of Halladay's effectiveness compared to Lee as Halladay has been a truly elite pitcher for seven out of the last eight years while Lee is really only working on about a year and a half with varying degrees of success in the 2005 and 2006 seasons mixed in. Thus, if Halladay is "a +6 to +7 win pitcher, easily the best in baseball", as Cameron states, let's say that Lee is a +4 to +5 win pitcher...which is actually

probably a little low given what Lee's accomplished since the dawn of the 2008 season.

Cameron equates a "win" to about $5M on the open market for a premium Free Agent, with the lesser risk of only holding a contract on a pitcher for a year and a half (that is, the long-term risk of a shorter deal is limited) pushing the deal that Halladay is working under (which has the same timeframe as that of Lee) to about $5.5M a season. That puts Lee's value (in Cameron's language) to $22M to $27.5M per season. Again, like Cameron, if we settle on $25M as middle ground (he has Halladay's value as $35M per season), a year and a half of Lee at his current performance is worth $37M.

It should be noted here, that Cameron is not saying that these players SHOULD be paid these numbers, he's simply trying to assign value to particular players' performance to discern what an apples-to-apples comparison of a players' worth would be.

Back to the exercise, Cameron asserts about Halladay that "you can't forget about the fact that he's very likely to be a Type A free agent at the end of 2010, and the acquiring team would be able to recoup two quality draft choices if they didn't re-sign him as a free agent. Thanks to some good work by Victor Wang, we can see that the value of Halladay's Type A status is around $8 million or so."

That $8M number would be no different for Lee, so if Cameron's math can be applied to Lee, it would go something like this:
$37 million for Lee's performance + $8 million for the draft picks = $45 million in total value. He will be paid $12 million over that time frame, so 45-12 = $33 million over the next year and a half.

Halladay's "value" came in at $38M, with Cameron asserting thusly :

To acquire the Jays ace, teams should be expected to surrender something like $40 million in value.

What does $40 million in value look like? Something like three terrific prospects who are not that far from the majors. No one's giving up players from the Matt Wieters/David Price mold, but it's going to take several players from that second prospect tier, the top 25-50 type guys.

Phillies fans - that's Dominic Brown, Kyle Drabek, and Carlos Carrasco.

Mets fans? Fernando Martinez, Wilmer Flores, and Jenrry Mejia.

To put those names in terms of what stage of development those players are in, Cameron's Phillies "offer" would be (in order of significance) Drabek (a 21-year-old RHP in AA with a 2.70 ERA and a 1.24 WHIP), Carrasco (a 22-year-old RHP in AAA with a 5.06 ERA and a 1.40 WHIP), and Brown (a 21-year-old OF in High-A with an OPS of .919). His Mets "offer" would be Martinez (a 20-year-old OF in AAA with an OPS of .877), Mejia (a 19-year-old RHP in AA with a 3.74 ERA and a 1.48 WHIP) and Flores (a 17-year-old SS in Low-A with an OPS of .684).

It's a lot of math and analysis, I know, but it's also an awfully comprehensive look at how the value of a Halladay stacks up with the value of a Lee with higher expectations for Halladay and a lower price tag for Lee.

As for what the Blue Jays are concretely asking for, SI.com's Jon Heymann reports that Toronto is looking for
"two big-time prospects who'll be major-league ready by next year, including a prime hitter, and two very good prospects who are further away from the bigs"
within a piece about whether the fan backlash to a trade of Halladay would preclude the Blue Jays from making such a move.

Back to the North Coast and CP Lee, an interesting wild card (other than Halladay also possibly being available, obviously) in the possibility of trading Lee would be whether the Indians employ the strategy they used in the Casey Blake deal last year and pick up the remaining salary for Lee in 2009 if he was moved. If that were to happen, a year and a half of Lee would "cost" only $9M, which could increase the return for the Indians if they were so inclined and if the acquiring team was looking to limit adding payroll this year like the Dodgers did last year.

The Dodgers, eh?

Have I ever mentioned my irrational hope for a CP Lee deal around Chad Billingsley from the Dodgers, regardless of how little sense it makes for the Dodgers?

What's that? James McDonald and Blake DeWitt...sure, we'll take him off your hands too for Clifton Phifer.

Yes, I'm kidding.

With a hat tip to serial poster Alex, speaking of netting a higher return by paying off Casey Blake's 2008 salary, anyone notice that Carlos Santana is rated the #7 prospect in baseball at the mid-season point, as per Baseball America ?

Matt LaPorta, who should be in his 6th week of being an Indian, is #22 and Lonnie Chisenhall and Nick Weglarz are in the top 50 (the prospects aren't ranked after 25) for the Tribe.

On the topic of prospects, this week's edition of "Smoke Signals" consisted of two parts - a first half about the wildly disappointing parent club and a second half updating Tony Lastoria's pre-season Top Prospect rankings and checking in on what players have seen their stock rise and what players have seen their stock fall in the first half.

Guess which half of the show was more enjoyable to discuss...

Back to the fine folks at Fangraphs.com and pertaining to two players who did not appear on the BA mid-season Top 50 (though are certainly hit on at length by Tony in "Smoke Signals"), here's a little piece on RHP's Hector Rondon and Jeanmar Gomez and a bit on Rondon from Vince Grzegorek at "'64 and Counting" regarding Rondon's importance to the future of this team, written after Rondon's brilliant debut in AAA.

Ah, prospects... certainly something to dream on (and now would be a good time to mention the All-Star Futures Game with Nick "The Stick" Weglarz and Carl Santana repping the Tribe is on at 2 PM on ESPN2, particularly notable if an Ohka v. Verlander match-up goes awry quickly), which is basically where we're at as the Indians continue to scuffle along through the darkness with the same pieces and parts that have been scuffling all season long, with the edges fraying, and with no end in sight.