Now 3-7 since the GM's declaration that the coaching staff would stay intact for the remainder of the season, designed to take any pressure off the players and coaching staff and to allow them to focus completely on baseball, let's get off on a Lazy Sunday as the Indians sink deeper and deeper into the abyss of their 2009 season. Paulie's theme to today's column? Mixed messages from the front office and manager, and how frustrating it is as fans of this baseball team.

Now 3-7 since the GM's declaration that the coaching staff would stay intact for the remainder of the season, designed to take any pressure off the players and coaching staff and to allow them to focus completely on baseball, let's get off on a Lazy Sunday as the Indians sink deeper and deeper into the abyss of their 2009 season:

Starting off where we often do, Terry Pluto has some bits about the players that currently populate the Clippers' roster, hitting on the fact that he hears that the Indians are grooming LaPorta for 1B with Garko's expendability (which was hit on at length here) being a possible by-product of the LaPorta-to-1B discussion. At this point, I'm not sure why the Indians don't allow LaPorta to ascend to the Bigs to play mainly LF, as Pluto says that, "LaPorta is actually more comfortable and effective in LF" and have him play 1B periodically when the need arises. Certainly what I don't understand is the names of Andy Marte and Jordan Brown being potential

1B, if in fact Garko is moved, with Martinez and LaPorta assumed to be on the roster. Regarding a possible Marte recall,
Indians' Assistant GM Chris Antonetti says
,
*"We need to have a better sense of what we have and what they can contribute for next year."*

Anyone else getting the sense that this talking out of the both sides of their mouth stuff coming from the Front Office regarding who needs to stay in AAA and who the organization needs to find out about at the Big League level is confusing even the Indians?

Who needs to stay in Cleveland to see what we have for 2010 against MLB competition...and who needs to stay in Columbus to "work on some things"?

The two lists seemed to get blurrier every day...

But I digress...

The other interesting nugget that Pluto throws out there regarding players in Columbus is to pass along some "good" news on what Jen Lewis and Rafael Perez have done since being demoted. Their success did not go unnoticed by Christina Kahrl at B-Pro, who wrote this about the performance of Lewis and Perez in AAA and how it relates to their manager in Cleveland
:

*It's interesting to note that Lewis has struck 15 and not seen a single runner score off of him in nine innings in Columbus since his demotion; now on his second stint in middle Ohio, Perez has 10 Ks in 11 IP, and also hasn't seen a runner of his score.*

*Now, it's easy to suggest what isn't in the International League: Eric Wedge, of course, but in his defense, there also aren't m/any major league hitters. But it's interesting to note, and for as frustrating as the performances of two relievers pegged in the pre-season to rank among Wood's chief set-up men have been in the bigs, doesn't that International League domination suggest that they share a bit of that frustration?*

As for Wedge's take on the situation as to whether Perez and Lewis will work their way back topside, there's this :

*Regarding when the Indians might recall recently-demoted relievers Rafael Perez and Jensen Lewis, Wedge said, "We need to let them pitch down there."*

This makes perfect sense in the land of mixed messages, right?

Jose Veras, Mike Gosling, and Winston Abreu have certainly forced the Indians hand in that regard with their track record and performances to date certainly keeping them on the roster. Plus, the development of Rafael Perez and Jensen Lewis against...you know, MLB hitters is secondary to seeing if "lightning in a bottle" can be found with Gosling and Abreu for next year.

Have I got that right?

Staying on the topic of the bullpen, anyone catch the two "alleged" PTBNL options from the DeRosa deal in the Futures Game and the AAA All-Star game?

In case you missed it, Francisco Samuel went 1/3 of an inning, allowing 2 ER in the process as he gave up 2 walks and a HR to Colorado's Eric Young Jr. (who has 24 career MiLB HR in 2,407 MiLB plate appearances) in the third inning.

His performance prompted Kevin Goldstein of B-Pro to weigh in on Samuel's velocity and control issues
:

*Francisco Samuel of the Cardinals and Leyson Septimo of the Diamondbacks both have high-velocity arms, with Samuel touching 97 from the right side, and Septimo equaling that velocity from the left. The thing is, neither have a clue as to where the pitch is going, nor do they with their high-octane sliders. If you can't throw strikes, it doesn't matter what the radar guns say, and if, when you throw strikes, you throw upper-90s heat over the plate with no movement, even guys like Eric Young Jr. can hit them 400 feet.*

If you still like that "upside" that Samuel offers with that 97 MPH fastball, here's his Pitch f/x from the Futures Game, courtesy Viva El Birdos , with

even the Cardinals' site proclaiming
*"given the lack of speed differential or moment on his pitches and the horrible command (7+ BB/9 in AA this year), I doubt he can be called a legitimate prospect."*

Yes, it's based on 15 pitches...but at the other end of the spectrum...

In the AAA All-Star Game (which admittedly "featured" 35-year-old Nelson Figueroa...no seriously, there was some talent on display ) Jess Todd continued to mow his way through AAA hitters, as astute reader Richard Sheir pointed out to me, notching the final two outs in the 9th for the PCL All-Stars, getting those two outs on six pitches, four of which were strikes.

For an updated line on Jess Todd in his 1st year as a reliever in AAA, he's posted a 2.22 ERA, a 1.01 WHIP, struck out 54 to 10 walks in 44 2/3 IP and saved 21 games. He is 8 months older (both are 23) than the same Samuel that has posted a 4.63 ERA and a 1.63 WHIP while notching 21 saves in AA.

As I understand, there is one more name on this "PTBNL list" and the Indians have to make a decision on or before September 1st. Not knowing who that 3rd name is, wouldn't it make sense to the Indians to make the announcement that Todd is the guy as the "addition" of Winston Abreu certainly showed that they're looking for arms for the bullpen this year?

The argument can be made that the Indians can afford to wait it out on Todd (or that the 3rd name could be the one preventing such a move), but wouldn't it make sense to get Todd innings in the AL this year so the team is not going into next year with the bullpen full of question marks again?

If we're going to go with the chicanery of an 8-man bullpen, can we stack the bullpen to look like this and see who legitimately figures into the 2010 bullpen?

Wood - Age 32
Betancourt - Age 34
R. Perez - Age 27
Lewis - Age 25
C. Perez - Age 23
Sipp - Age 25

Smith - Age 25
Todd - Age 23

It's time to throw our YOUNG guys against the wall to see what sticks...if that means Sowers comes up to be the long man, great. But let's dispense with the idea that 2009 is about anything but planning for 2010 and, if the bullpen needs to be sorted out to get ready for next year (and to avoid a repeat of this year and last year among relievers) starting right away would make sense.

Wait, remind me which side of the ledger young relievers fall under in the "needs more work" or "let's see what we have for 2010 against MLB competions" list?
Yeah...I can't remember either.

Moving on, if you'll remember last week, there was a little exercise to determine Cliff Lee's "value" based on Dave Cameron's piece on what a year and a half of Roy Halladay would be worth
. As a quick follow-up, Sky Kalkman over at Beyond the Box Score has created a "Trade Value Calculator"
spreadsheet for your amusement.

While it may not quite be ESPN's Trade Machine for the NBA, you can certainly lose some time plugging in names and numbers...and if you're wondering, my initial foray into it did show that the difference between Halladay and Lee is not that great given the disparity in performance expectation that favors Halladay but the lower price tag of Lee.

As for the obligatory check on the Halladay/Lee noise, SI.com's Jon Heymann has an extensive piece on Halladay
, then hits on
Lee as a possible target for the Dodgers
, eventually concluding, in terms of potential Indian activity:

*One person familiar with the Indians' thinking said they are even more reluctant to trade Lee than beloved slugger Victor Martinez. Both players have 2010 options at club-friendly prices ($9 million for Lee, $7 million for Martinez), and while Martinez is a wonderful clubhouse presence, Lee is viewed as perhaps even more valuable to them because they don't have pitching reinforcements who could*

*replace Lee. If the Indians were to deal either star, they'd insist on young pitching in return.*

Tom Verducci furthers the idea of Lee being one of the only possible targets for the Dodgers, relaying what the Dodgers are looking for, which would be *" a starting pitcher who would be certain to start one of the first three games of a playoff series. So, no, that does not mean Jarrod Washburn. It's either Halladay, Cliff Lee or nothing"* as well as the (unsurprising) news that *"they have made left-hander Clayton Kershaw untouchable".*

To give you an idea of why Clayton Kershaw is untouchable, let's go back to Dave Cameron at Fangraphs, who has been compiling a list of the players with the most Trade Value in MLB.

If we're continuing the notion of Dodgers and what they might have to offer for Clifton Phifer, here's a couple of names from the list that stand out:

**Clayton Kershaw - #29**

*Kershaw's stuff is so good that even with well below average command at age 21, he's still a good major league pitcher. He's certainly still a work in progress, but there's enough present value, combined with his enormous potential, to place him here during his pre-arb years.*

**Chad Billingsley - #28**

*Here, we start to get into the list of guys who just aren't going to get traded. The Dodgers aren't giving up their ace - he's 24, he's a frontline starter who they have under club control through 2012, and even with his arbitration reward coming, he'll be vastly underpaid the next few years. Like Kershaw, he could stand to throw a few more strikes, but that's just nit-picking.*

Wait, so #28 is where we "get into the list of guys who just aren't going to be traded"...and Kershaw is #29?

I say that in jest, but if you're looking for the ideal return on Lee (a young,

under-club-control pitcher already succeeding at the MLB level), Kershaw's pretty close to ideal. Not that the Dodgers would pull it off, but Clifton Phifer Lee in the NL West in a pitcher's park would be awfully dominant for the next year and a half.

You may recognize #12 as well...you know him simply as Grady:

*He's kind of the posterboy for the new school kind of player. He walks, hits for power, plays quality defense at a premium position, and uses his speed to steal bases at a high rate of success. The low batting average, mostly due to high strikeout totals, doesn't limit his perceived value as much as it would have 30 years ago. He's also locked up through 2012 at rates low enough to be considered thievery.*

Grady locked up through 2012, eh?

Let's hope that the years between now and then don't become the exercises in muddled decision-making and questionable roster management that this season has quickly devolved into as we sit and try to remember who needs more work at AAA and who needs to be competing in MLB.