As Cleveland Indians' general manager Eric Wedge continues to twist in the wind, seemingly indefinitely, many fans have turned their attention now to general manager Mark Shapiro. As Clark Griswold would say, "now you're talking, Eddie." In this week's Lingering Items, Gary talks about Shapiro's reign as GM, David Dellucci's recent comments firing back at the "bloggers" that had their way with him while he was here, and Kellen Winslow II's recent comments about his time as a Brown.

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The sins of a general manager can sometimes be harder to pin down than those of the manager. And when it comes to Shapiro he can be the most difficult of all to pin down. Through careful calculation, he's created an aura of being an accessible, regular guy on the cutting edge of the modern method for running a franchise. Yet he never really says much and, when he does, it's more to confirm something that's already happened than it is to tell you what might come next. As for all the technological whiz-bang analysis that Shapiro and his cadre of front office MBAs have undertaken, it still hasn't yielded a consistent winner. But he is an earnest guy, making it easy to give him a pass most of the time.

But as it is with general managers, they are the top day-to-day executives of any franchise (except the Cleveland Browns, apparently) and control most everything that takes place on the field and behind the scenes. Thus they rightly deserve to be the focal point when fan unhappiness shifts from individual losses to

institutional bungling.

Shapiro's track record is whatever you want it to be. You can pick out any discreet period of time over his tenure to prove your point, whatever it might be. The larger picture, though, and the one for which Shapiro must be held most accountable is that the Indians are slipping back ever so gently into their "sleeping giant" status of the early 1980s. It's a potentially devastating malady where fan interest remains high but attendance does not.

Larry and Paul Dolan know that they own a valuable asset, even if they overpaid to get it. What they are now wrestling with is how to actually keep it from being a financial millstone around their collective necks. They simply cannot countenance owning a mere sleeping giant. Yet the crossroads they face is one in which they stay the course with Shapiro or go in another direction and hope for the best.

It's not an easy choice, especially when they just know that fans see past and current performance as indicative of the future and thus aren't likely to embrace a stay the course approach.

That has to scare the bejeezus out of the Dolans. When 2009 rolls into 2010, they will see that their goose of a franchise isn't going to be laying any golden eggs for a good long time; that is unless something relatively dramatic happens.

That's where Shapiro re-enters the picture. The question for the fans as proxy for the Dolans is whether or not Shapiro can work some of the black magic that has allowed him to retain his job into a reason why they would even bother to buy tickets for next season and beyond. For too many, Shapiro seems to be out of tricks. The trade of CC Sabathia last season still hasn't yielded anything tangible and causes many to wonder how Shapiro can make something tangible happen out of the inevitable trade of Cliff Lee, either later this season or next.

If the Dolans are thinking bigger than certainly one thing that can dramatically alter the landscape is to take the risk on the alluring but mystical alternate path. A change of direction is always good for a temporary bump in fan interest and spending. It also takes the immediate heat off the team. Whether it ends up in the same destination is hard to say but it very well could.

There are certain core facts about this franchise that aren't going to change no matter who is in charge. The economy in this region is deeply troubled and won't recover any time soon. Even in boom times, Cleveland is a mid-market town with mid-market upside. Whoever sits in the general manager seat next is still going to have to rely on undervalued and underpriced talent, be it young players or flawed veterans, to make it work. To be more successful than Shapiro, they'll just need to do a better job executing those fundamentals.

This is hardly to suggest that Shapiro should hold on to his job simply because it's hard to predict whether the next guy will do any better. He is the devil we know and, frankly, the devil we don't can hardly drag the franchise any further down the hole.

The reality though is that the path of this franchise isn't going to change. The only thing that can make the journey better is someone more adept at navigation. Shapiro hasn't been a complete disaster, certainly, but he's sure finding far more pot holes these days than smooth road and it may very well be time for the Dolans to trust a new driver.

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Both Sheldon Ocker at the Beacon Journal and Paul Hoynes at the Plain Dealer carried the item on Wednesday that former Indians outfielder David Dellucci is miffed that he was the subject of so much abuse at the hands of Indians fans. Hoynes added, somewhat gratuitously and somewhat pejoratively, that "bloggers" also made sport of Dellucci. Well, at least Hoynes is

reading.

Dellucci's point is that he tried his best and, gosh gee, can't a guy get a break? He has a point, but only slightly. All a player can do is give it his best effort and if it isn't good enough then so be it. But Dellucci wasn't pilloried because of a lack of effort. In fact, it wasn't even personal.

Dellucci served as a symbol of the Shapiro/Wedge regime, a limping, light hitting, average fielding, good in the clubhouse veteran presence keep your head down and don't make waves symbol of why this team's stock is dropping faster than General Motors. It wasn't even so much that Dellucci was a bad acquisition on a purely statistical level. It's just that Shapiro threw stupid money at him that ultimately greatly influenced how fans viewed him.

That's not to blame Dellucci for Shapiro's irrational exuberance. But on a mid-market team with a mid-market budget, a player making what Dellucci made is going to be saddled with higher expectations. He's also going to have to play every day, his mediocre performance notwithstanding. At the same time, players further down on the development curve but with potentially higher upsides have to be content with less playing time. Can you say, Franklin Gutierrez?

The fact that Dellucci is miffed with Cleveland fans is typical of the view players get from the dugout. The view from the cheap seats, though, is a whole other matter. Indians fans in particular are tired of dealing with a frustrating boom and bust cycle in which players like Dellucci come in and out of their lives with maddening regularity. They are sold to fans as missing pieces but they turn out to be cheap and ill-fitting copies. The fact is that Dellucci was way overpaid and consequently way oversold to the fans. All he really was and will ever be is a higher priced Jamey Carroll.

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It may be an age thing, but I'll probably never get used to how comfortable this generation is with revealing the most intimate details about themselves so publicly. In an article that appeared in ESPN the Magazine this week, Kellen Winslow had no qualms talking about how doctors were draining fluid and all manner of bad goo from his junk sack.

It was well entrenched in the category of way too much information.

Actually, what was interesting about the story is how indifferent Winslow's teammates were toward him. Winslow was and still is a loud-mouth braggart whose wants still far exceed his accomplishments. He felt, and apparently still feels, that he's the best tight end in the league and wanted the respect and glory that goes along with that status. That's probably a generational thing, too.

But the story Winslow related about how he spoke up at a team meeting concerning the problems with staph and none of the players jumped to his defense speaks volumes as does that part of the story where his teammates apparently felt uncomfortable around him because of, among other things, his overly active interest in porn.

He doesn't see his inability to fit in as anything other than a problem for others but not himself. Introspection is not one of his strong suits. This is where, for once, Braylon Edwards could have been a help. Edwards, as complex a personality as the team has ever had, at least has a modicum of introspection about him. The problem is that, like Winslow, he has an overly active ego relative to his record.

All this is too bad, by the way. Winslow, for all his personality flaws, is everything that players typically like in other players. He works hard. He plays hurt. He has skills. But he's probably doomed in Tampa. Too many injuries, too much baggage, and just plain too weird.

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Watching a few of the Indians' games this week always yields the inevitable dugout view of Wedge and his ever changing battle with facial hair. It also leads to this week's question to ponder: Why is Carl Willis always sitting so uncomfortably close to Eric Wedge in the dugout?