With the Indians finally stringing together some wins in a lost season (what was that "dread" that was felt about a second-half surge justifying The Atomic Wedgie's return in 2010), the most compelling story (or non-story) comes not from the field but from the world of rumor and innuendo because ... the trading deadline is fast approaching. And in today's Lazy Sunday, Paulie takes us all around the web, hitting on all the latest news and rumors with the Indians and some of the players they may look to move.

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As the rumor mill spins as fast as it always does this time of year (with Clifton Phifer Lee and El Capitan the subject of seemingly every other piece that hits these interwebs), let's take a quick moment before we get into the teeth of it all to look at what Castrovince has to say on the topic , beginning with this beautiful intro to the week that we're in store for:

Depending on what you read or believe, the Indians are either telling teams they are unlikely to move Cliff Lee before next week's Trade Deadline or are engaged in increasingly serious discussions with the likes of the Phillies, Rays, Dodgers and Brewers about the reigning Cy Young winner.

When it comes to the latter reports, those are, by and large, generated from

outside the organization, as the Indians are notoriously tight-lipped on such matters. It can certainly be frustrating for those of us on the beat when national reports surface quoting a "source" or a person "familiar with the Indians' thinking" (which could be the guy cleaning the bathroom stalls at Progressive Field), but that's just part of the job in this 24/7 news environment.

If you've not been following every inch of this, consider yourself lucky as you take a look at the stories filed by what seem to be dueling MLB "insiders" on consecutive days as everyone seems to have a new rumor every time you turn around regarding either CP Lee or Vic.

After a bit of a lull (like a few hours) early in the week, the whole thing was re-energized with this nugget from SI.com's Jon Heymann on Tuesday morning regarding the "availability" of one Clifton Phifer:

The Indians appear to be more seriously considering the possibility of trading star pitcher Cliff Lee in recent days, according to an Indians-connected person. Indians people have been very reluctant to deal Lee all along since they have a reasonable $9 million option on him for next year and no obvious, certain top-of-the-rotation replacement.

Something apparently happened in recent days to change their thinking and make them slightly more receptive to a trade, though it's unclear exactly what.

Suddenly, everything is atwitter (pun intended) as we began asking, "what changed...is this really happening?"

Then, the report on Wednesday from FoxSports.com's Jon Paul Morosi that the Rays are a new team in the mix:

The Rays and Indians have discussed a trade that would send Cleveland ace Cliff Lee to Tampa Bay, major league sources said, but the sides didn't appear close to a deal as of late Wednesday evening.

Indians general manager Mark Shapiro is asking for multiple high-end prospects in return for the left-hander. He is believed to prefer right-hander Wade Davis as the primary chip in the deal. So far, the Rays have balked at including him.

But there might be another way to get this deal done.

The Rays are trying to involve a third team in an attempt to satisfy Cleveland's prospect demands, major league sources told FOXSports.com senior baseball writer Ken Rosenthal. The third club would provide a second pitcher of the Indians' liking.

And the question of the day became - Wade Davis...who's Wade Davis ?

He's not enough. Oh, good a third team...but what third team?

Next, we have Ken Rosenthal throwing water on that fire with this from Thursday afternoon :

The Indians continue to gauge the trade markets for both left-hander Cliff Lee and catcher Victor Martinez, but doubt they will receive the value they desire for either player, major-league sources say.

Lee is a "longshot" to be traded and Martinez "more of a longshot," one source says.

Not wanting to miss out on the whole party, ESPN's Jayson Stark summarized what HE'S been hearing on CP in Thursday in his Rumblings and Grumblings piece
:

Cliff dwellers: Is Cliff Lee available or not? Well, you wouldn't find teams like the Dodgers, Angels, Rangers, Phillies, Rays and Brewers still scouting him if he were untouchable. But it would take a four-for-one, Halladay-esque package. And we're hearing there are two major differences between the Indians' approach on Lee and Toronto's stance on Halladay:

1. The Indians aren't anywhere near as motivated to trade their ace, but they'll do it if they're blown away. The Blue Jays, on the other hand, appear to be looking for ways to make the Halladay trade happen, because they know they can't re-sign him and this is as marketable as he'll ever be.

2. The Indians are looking for a slightly different type of package. Both teams are asking for future-ace-type young arms, but Cleveland isn't as dug in on the idea of

getting big league-ready players back. The Indians are willing to do an all-prospect-based trade if the prospects have enough upside. Toronto appears to be looking mostly for players who can be in the big leagues within the next year.

If Lee does get traded, it doesn't figure to happen until just before the deadline, after the Halladay free-for-all has sorted itself out.

Now, back to Heymann on Friday morning in a piece hitting on all of the possible big names that could be moved with an all-encompassing quote from Shapiro on the market :

Shapiro, speaking generally about all teams' recent valuations of prospects, said, "There is an understanding of the value of young prospects in roster construction. But it's almost to the point where there's an over-evaluation of these guys. There's almost an over-correction."

Not to simply rest or let sleeping dogs lie where they may, Heymann was back for more on Friday morning with some news from that team in the Bronx :

The Yankees called the Indians about pitching star Cliff Lee, but the chances for a deal turned south when the Indians told them one of two fine young Yankees starters -- Joba Chamberlain or Phil Hughes -- would have to start the package. The Yankees are not inclined to do that for Lee.

Feeling caught up?

If you're like me, your head is spinning and you're not quite sure how to separate reality from fantasy or at least trying to wade through what Craig Calcaterra calls "guys like Heyman Tweeting whatever they overhear in the men's room just add to the glory of it all".

Throw the whole Halladay factor in (with the latest nugget from Saturday being that the Angels could include Jered Weaver or Ervin Santana in on a deal) that teams that miss out on Halladay may up their ante for CP Lee meaning that this thing is going to roll on into Friday and, if you're head wasn't already spinning...just wait.

Regardless of the teams (which looks universally to be the Dodgers, Phillies, Angels, Rays, Brewers, and Rangers on Lee and the Red Sox and the Rays, at

least, on Victor) or the players that are getting linked here, isn't the overwhelming sense of this is that it sounds about right in terms of asking these teams for their young, already-pitching-in-MLB talent as a "start" to the discussion (although the Stark piece that they're willing to receive "prospects with upside" is a new jarring wrinkle), demanding more than just one high-end arm for Lee or Victor?

Aren't they just gauging interest to see what's out there to see if there's a fit out there and if a team is willing to pony up the right mix of MLB-ready arms?

As Paul Hoynes puts forth on the whole process:

If another general manager calls and says he's interested in Lee, Shapiro listens. When he gets an idea of how that team values Lee, he and his assistants call other teams to find how they value Lee.

In Shapiro's mind, he's not shopping Lee, he's trying to find the best fit for the Indians. The information is then put in front of ownership with Shapiro giving his opinion on each option.

At this point, it feels like speculation of he-said-he-said of a game of telephone where it really looks like anyone's guess. Did anybody hear that the Rockies were in on Rocky Betancourt before that deal was consummated?

Really, the only concrete report that a deal was on the table that the Indians were rebuffed in their request is the Pete Gammons piece from earlier in the week on Vic-for-Buchholz after the Red Sox netted Adam LaRoche:

On the Adam LaRoche deal: *The Red Sox have been searching for ways to upgrade their sliding offense for weeks. This deal has been on the table for three weeks, and after losing their fourth straight game on Tuesday and declining to trade Clay Buchholz for Victor Martinez, Theo Epstein took LaRoche.*

That's the only rumor that's been out there that didn't involve the Indians turning down a deal and Gammons certainly intimates that the Tribe wanted Buchholz in a deal for Victor. Now, since the nugget is dropped so casually by Sweet Pete, it's certainly possible that the Indians said, "the price STARTS with Buchholz...and includes more", with the Red Sox declining, which makes Gammons' report technically true.

Again, we'll never know if this spinning world of rumor and innuendo.

But it gets back to something that's been bothering me in terms of Clay Buchholz being the name that keeps getting thrown out there as the "ideal" and the "type of pitcher the Indians are looking for", according to most reports.

Maybe I've been colored by the whole Jeremy Sowers 2006 to where we stand today fiasco, but is anyone really that excited about a pitcher that's turning 25 in less than a month 20 starts in MLB, compiling an ERA of 5.40 and a WHIP of 1.59 in 108 1/3 MLB IP?

Does Buccholz have promise?

No question as his 2.42 MiLB ERA and 1.00 WHIP attest, but are we really looking at a top-of-the-rotation guy ready to step into the "ace" role immediately, or are we looking at a talented starter who may make that jump but is just as likely to remain middle-to-back-end-of-the-rotation fodder?

Buchholz has put up his gaudy numbers in the minors for 5 years now and if he really was ready to ascend to the starting rotation, why are the Red Sox signing the likes of Brad Penny and John Smoltz?

They didn't put the brakes on Jon Lester, why are they doing it with Buchholz?

I understand the MiLB track record, but Jeremy Sowers has a 2.53 ERA and a 1.17 WHIP over 5 MiLB seasons to showcase too...and we've all seen how that has ended up. I'm not saying that Buchholz=Sowers, but here's an eye-opening comparison:

Dave Huff MiLB career prior to his first start in 2009 (253 IP)

2.95 ERA, 1.11 WHIP, 7.6 H/9, 2.4 BB/9, 8.1 K/9, 3.4 K/BB

Clay Buchholz MiLB career prior to his first start in 2008 (285 2/3 IP)

2.45 ERA, 1.00 WHIP, 6.6 H/9, 2.4 BB/9, 11.21 K/9, 4.6 K/BB

Now about those starts in their first extended look at MLB:

Huff's first 13 MLB starts - 2009

6.39 ERA, 1.58 WHIP, 11.6 H/9, 2.6 BB/9, 5.1 K/9, 1.95 K/BB

Buchholz's first 15 MLB starts - 2008

6.75 ERA, 1.76 WHIP, 11.0 H/9, 4.9 BB/9, 8.5 K/9, 1.76 K/BB

Yes, there was an age difference there (Buchholz was 23 in 2008 and Huff is 24 now) and Buchholz's K rates are consistently better on the farm; but even factoring in the 4-game stretch that Buchholz put forth in 2007 (which included the no-hitter), his first 20 games in MLB put up this line:

5.56 ERA, 1.60 WHIP, 9.8 H/9, 4.7 BB/9, 8.6 K/9, 1.86 K/BB

Other than that earned line, he's pitched all of 9 2/3 innings in MLB since the end of 2008.

Now factor in that Dave Huff is actually younger than Buchholz...yes, by 8 days...and the luster either starts to come off of Buchholz or starts to shine on Huff. Maybe Huff doesn't have the publicity of a Buchholz, but both have proven themselves to be bona fide prospects with their MiLB track record and, now at the same age, will have a chance to show if they're MLB-ready.

Are either top-of-the-rotation options or are both middle-of-the-rotation innings eaters?

Do you want to move Victor for the answer with both players wearing Tribe uniforms?

To that end, speaking of the maturation of young arms, here's a little perspective on the Indians' young starter assumed to be a part of 2010 and beyond - there are 30 pitchers in MLB that are 24 or younger that have logged 45 or more innings to date this year with 50% of the games they've appeared in coming as a starter , two of them are Dave Huff and Aaron Laffey.

17 of those 30 have performed at a level of league average (as determined by ERA+) or better. Aaron Laffey has...Dave Huff has not.

Unquestionably, more ballyhooed arms that are younger than both Huff and Laffey are out there and may project as top-of-the-rotation starters, which Huff and Laffey never may. But, going off an idea initiated in Steve Buffum's latest B-List , if Huff and Laffey are #4 and #5 starters right now at the age of 24, doesn't that give them some room to mature as pitchers maybe into the middle of a good rotation?

Many people want Dave Huff to enter MLB as a #3 starter today, not to simply mature to that point against MLB hitters over the course of the next year or two. Same with Laffey, whose MiLB track record and groundball tendencies bear a close resemblance to Westbrook eating innings in the middle of the rotation, a key to the Indians' 2nd half and playoff run in 2007, inducing groundballs and performing at or around league average.

The maturation of these young arms is something that people rarely have patience for, forgetting that Cliff Lee's first full season in MLB at the age of 25 resulted in a 5.43 ERA, a 1.50 WHIP, and a 80 ERA+ or that Jake Westbrook wasn't a full-time starter until he was 26 after bouncing up and down in the organization and back and forth from the bullpen to the rotation.

Rarest is the player that steps into an MLB rotation and immediately finds preternatural success, like CC famously did in the early 2000's and that, to me, is the yin to the yang of this idea of stocking up young arms for Lee or Martinez that are a step or two away from MLB.

Yes, the arms are certainly needed in the organization as the only prospect who could be MLB ready for next year is 21-year-old Hector Rondon who may eventually have top-of-the-rotation stuff, but who realistically slots him into the top of the rotation from Day 1?

If these arms do, in fact, come into the fray for either Lee or Vic, how confident is anyone that they'll be ready to contribute (and not experience the growing pains that most pitchers do transitioning to MLB, if they're making that transition) significantly for 2010 or even 2011?

There are lots of questions, lots of rumors to muddle through, and unfortunately still lots of time to hear about them and talk about them as it's only Sunday and the Trading Deadline is still a long work week away.