Baseball is bad when it's not about baseball. And for most of the 2009 season, the Indians certainly have not been about baseball. They've been about the talking heads of Mark Shapiro, Eric Wedge and other club higher-ups trying to explain the business of baseball. Since talking heads are the only way through which we can really follow the Indians right now, let's do exactly that. Let's talk Talking Heads about the Tribe.

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Most fans don't want their TV screens fogged up with hot air speeches about market constraints, opportunistic trades and maximizing value. All we care about is the fact that the Indians are not a winning team. We really don't care why. We really don't care how they're going to get back to respectability. We just want Shapiro and Co. to *do* it, and earn their gosh-darn inflated salaries.

Friday's deadline trade of Victor Martinez was the final insult. Not to speak ill of the trio of pitchers the Indians received -- Justin Masterson, Nick Hagadone and Bryan Price -- but if Wednesday's trade of Cliff Lee removed the head of the beast, the loss of Martinez ripped out the heart, the closest thing the Indians had to a soul.

The Indians are truly a shell right now. They are a collection of players with no uniform identity, no cause for which to fight, except roster spots for next season. During Friday's game, Shapiro appeared on SportsTime Ohio's telecast, explaining the Martinez trade and reviewing the state of the organization.

Right now, that's all we have if we're on the outside looking in. We have talking heads drawing verbal diagrams and defending moves instead of players playing ball. It's like the offseason, except there is no snow on the ground.

Since talking heads are the only way through which we can really follow the Indians right now, let's do exactly that. Let's talk Talking Heads about the Tribe. David Byrne, the lead singer of the 1970s-'80s art rock band, probably never envisioned himself as a baseball sage. Well, step to the plate, David. You're up.

This is Indians baseball that Shapiro and Wedge can understand -- Talking Heads style.

Once In A Lifetime

A single off Talking Heads' influential 1980 album "Remain in Light." Also Shapiro's justification for dealing Lee when he did.

By stepping through the open door before the Phillies and Blue Jays could come to an agreement over Roy Halladay, Shapiro reasoned that he could get the best deal for the Indians. Shapiro said he was under no pressure from the Dolans to dump salary. He said this was the best move at the best time, and if he had waited, this type of deal might not have come along again.

Of course, Carlos Carrasco is the only widely-recognize marquee prospect the Indians received, and most pundits seem to project him as a middle-rotation big league starter at best. A-ball fireballer Jason Knapp might become a big league stud someday. Or he might become Adam Miller. We have time to find that out. Time is about all the Indians have right now.

Burning Down the House

A single from the Heads' 1983 album "Speaking in Tongues." After sitting through a roster purge that included Mark DeRosa, Rafael Betancourt, Ryan Garko, Ben Francisco, Lee and Martinez, the application to the Tribe's situation is kind of self-explanatory.

The trade purges of 2006 and '08 look like garage sales compared to the flame thrower Shapiro has taken to the roster in the past month. This is most definitely not a retool with an eye toward 2010. This a rebuild for 2011 and after. Grady

Sizemore is the only real core player left after this detonation, and even he might be gone before the Indians return to competitive ball.

This Must Be the Place (Naive Melody)

Another single from "Speaking in Tongues." But also a suitable commentary for the people who are aghast that, once again, the Indians are dealing off their best players.

You know the script: "Why does this always happen to Cleveland? Why do we always get screwed? We are fate's bastard children."

It is true that if Shapiro had done a better job at piecing together a roster this year, the Indians would have been winning with Lee and Martinez this year instead of trading them. But their departure from the Indians was inevitable.

Ultimately, it's a baseball problem, and it won't be solved until the sport adopts a salary cap, which may never happen, thanks to contentious labor relations between players and owners going back more than a century.

Don't be naive. Don't allow yourselves to be emotionally snookered by a tearful Martinez lamenting his departure on Friday. Certainly, his emotions were raw and real. The Indians represented 13 years of his life. It was the only organization he knew. But as soon as the Red Sox slide a fat contract extension under his nose, those tears will dry right up. It's still a business. As fans, you'd be best-served in not getting emotionally attached to players, especially when you are rooting for a midmarket baseball team with lagging gate receipts.

They'll leave sooner or later. That's the rub. A team like the Indians needs to develop players they someday won't be able to keep. That's the only way they can win.

Life During Wartime

A single from the 1979 album "Fear of Music," and probably a good working title for how Tribe fans feel right now.

If you shouldn't treat the events of the past week like the Apocalypse, no one is asking you to accept it with a smile either.

If there is a winter of discontent fit for midsummer, this is it. A bad season gone worse, as all the supports have been kicked out from under the local baseball team by a GM in full teardown mode.

How do you deal with it? Dig an emotional foxhole. Alcohol is good for relaxing on a given evening, but not so good as a coping mechanism. Tend to the garden, go for a run, clean out the gutters like you've been meaning to do since spring. If baseball doesn't bring you enjoyment, shove it onto the back burner. It will be there later, once they Indians figure out a new direction.

Take Me to the River

A cover of an Al Green song that appeared on the Heads' 1978 album, "More Songs About Buildings and Food."
Probably also what most fans would like to do with Larry and Paul Dolan, with Shapiro and Wedge not far behind.

The reasons for why the Indians are in this mess are many. Some of them, such as a lack of a salary cap in baseball, aren't their fault. But some are. The Dolans don't have the up-front cash to invest in the team, meaning that they're heavily reliant on the team's revenue streams to make roster improvements. When that revenue dries up, there is nothing to really jump start the process, short of going into rebuild mode and trying to build a winner with a new group of younger players, which can take years.

As Cavs owner Dan Gilbert is fond of saying, money follows, it doesn't lead. In other words, you have to invest money to make money. The Dolans have invested money into the Indians organization, but they can't make the acquisitions and capital improvements that can really spark fan interest, get the turnstiles clicking and the cash registers ringing, thereby jump starting revenue streams and paving the way for more income that can be pumped back into the team.

Unfortunately for the Dolans, the net result is a fan base that is highly skeptical of their competency as owners. Skeptical fans don't spend money freely.

Girlfriend Is Better

Yet another song from "Speaking in Tongues." Also a caution to Lee and Martinez, now that they're playing in the East Coast media crucible. In a

nutshell, don't wake up one morning to find out that you have a girlfriend you didn't know you had.

The unrelenting eye of the camera can turn you into a god. But it can also tear you down and pry deeply into your personal lives. I have no doubt that both you guys are upstanding family guys, but you're still professional athletes entering into contact with larger fan bases than our little Midwestern outpost. Women want you. Men want to be you. Privacy is thin. Rumors can start from a blog post.

You could let your guard down at least a little bit in Cleveland. Not so in Boston or Philadelphia. Watch your back and watch your reputation. That's all I'm going to say.

Psycho Killer

A song from the Heads' 1977 debut, "Talking Heads: 77," and probably how a lot of fans would describe Mark Shapiro at the moment. His work as GM over the past nine years does have a hatchet-job element to it. The Indians have not drafted well on his watch. They haven't had a good track record with free agents.

The only time Shapiro has had any real success is when he needs to flush a season and trade veterans for prospects. That's a definite positive quality to have in a GM, but when season after season needs to be flushed, the body of work doesn't really stand the test of time.

It's really time for Shapiro to learn from his mistakes. He's quickly approaching 10 years on the job, and his regime needs to hit for a higher average with drafts, trades and signings. If his handpicked support staff isn't getting the job done, it's time to make changes. And, Mark, please, look outside the organization. Bring in experienced baseball people and give them real authority to challenge you.

If you do that, you might take an ego hit in the short term, but your reputation will flourish in the long run.