While the North Coast is preoccupied with the OSU-USC game last night and the Browns' opener against St. Brett, Paulie C takes the quick opportunity to use those two gridiron tilts as bookends for a Lazy Sunday. Paul takes a look at the controversy surrounding Indians prospect Jordan Brown (calling it Wedge's Waterloo), who was not called up despite coming up on 26 years of age and winning the AAA batting title ... and also hits on several other Indians related topics as the season winds down.

While the North Coast is preoccupied with the OSU-USC game last night and the Browns' opener against St. Brett (who apparently is coming back to the NFL...do I have that right?), let's take the quick opportunity to use those two gridiron tilts as bookends for a Lazy Sunday:

On the reservation, the topic du jour certainly seems to be Jordan Brown - a soon-to-be-26-year-old - who did not receive a September call-up after an excellent season in AAA. After the initial surprise that Brown would not join his Clipper compatriots up I-71 for even a cursory call-up, Tribe Farm Director Ross Atkins explained the decision to Tony Lastoria , saying that "plate appearances is what it comes down to...with Andy Marte, Matt LaPorta and four catchers on the roster, there just weren't plate appearances for Jordan. That is the most important aspect of the decision."

With that explanation, the decision not to call-up Brown made sense as Matt LaPorta unquestionably represents a part of the team's future and Marte's status going into next season certainly means that seeing Marte as often as possible left Brown on the outside looking in. Obviously, Brown (who, unlike Marte will not have any option issues if he is rostered in the off-season) could have been called up to see some limited action at 1B, LF, or DH, but the reasoning that the Indians needed to get AB for LaPorta and Marte as well as the Catchers on the roster

(given the questions there for next year) held some water.

Of course, not everyone agreed with the logic that the Indians presented...most notably Brown himself, who told Paul Hoynes :

"They gave me plenty of reasons," said Brown from his home in Tucson, Ariz. "They said there weren't enough at-bats for me. They said there was no role for me. They said they weren't a rewarding organization. They had their reasons. They made them very clear. I politely disagree with all their reasons.

--snip--

"I respect their opinion," said Brown. "They are my employer, but I'm 25, not 22. I'm so tired of hearing two words -- defensive liability. Last year, when I had a mediocre year and I was injured, they said I didn't hit for enough power. Well, 35 doubles and 15 homers is power.

"It's their organization. I have no hatred toward them, but I completely disagree with them."

--snip--

"Believe me, they won't be surprised [when they read this]," said Brown. "They know how I feel. It makes me wonder if I have a future with them.

"I understand that Marte is out of options and has to play every day. I know LaPorta came over in a blockbuster trade and is a year younger than me. They deserve it, but so do I."

Brown's feelings are not surprising (they're probably more normal than not among MiLB players passed over in the development process, regardless of level), except if you consider that he voiced them to the beat reporter for printing in the Sunday paper surprising.

The non-call-up though, that wasn't the problem...

The lineup cards over the three games in two days soon after against the Rangers

was, as everything went crazy with this Brown situation as Chris Gimenez got the start at 1B in the second game of the twin-bill and unquestioned non-prospect Niuman Romero (called up allegedly for his ability to spell Valbuena and Cabrera in the middle IF) got the start the next afternoon as Marte sat for the second straight game.

And with that, the fur started flying with confusion and anger from frustrated fans, with even Terry Pluto weighing in on the Brown situation first with a column , then expanding on it with his "Terry's Talkin'" (among other...ahem, "topics")on one game having to do with a soon-to-be-26-year-old LF/1B/DH on a team with two of their top prospects who play LF and 1B and an ensconced DH...though not because of performance.

The Brown fiasco could be considered making a mountain out of a molehill, particularly given the fact that we're talking about two games; but the filling out of the lineup card in those two games, particularly after the comments of Atkins to Lastoria just a day earlier reeked of insubordination and the final slap at logic by a lame-duck manager known to be on his way out, thumbing his nose (or worse) at a Front Office by playing the "available options", regardless of organizational philosophy.

In a season wrought with roster mismanagement, lineup card head-scratchers (Ryan Garko...the LF, ladies and gentleman), and the growing sense that the Front Office and the Field Manager were no longer reading out of the same playbook, much less reading off the same page as they once did, the playing of Romero at 1B immediately after the Front Office went on the record to say that "there just weren't plate appearances for Jordan" may be looked back on as The Atomic Wedgie's Waterloo.

For an organization that stresses continuity (almost to a fault) and speaks with one voice (again, almost to a fault), the act of throwing a fellow member of the organization under the bus with an obviously calculated decision confirms that the Indians' Front Office and the Indians' manager are no longer attached at the hip - a fact that will hopefully make the decision to fire Wedge (and probably others) at the end of the season all the easier.

Because if you'll remember, ownership is on the record that Shapiro isn't going anywhere and that the coaching staff will come under review:

Paul Dolan *- It's not possible that Mark will be gone, we are not looking for a new General Manager. There's absolutely no way, in my view, that Mark is in any way in jeopardy of losing his job this season. Eric and his staff is different, you know, we will look at it, continue to look at it; they've done a lot of good things while we're here, but we've also underachieved in the last couple of years. We need to know why and we also understand that the fans are looking for something different - we have to take that into account and we have to understand what the alternatives are too.*

WTAM's Mike Trivisonno *- I don't want to put words in your mouth, but after you gave the explanation about Eric Wedge...if that was me, I wouldn't feel very secure. That's the feeling I got from your explanation there, that's all I'm saying. I don't know how accurate my feelings are.*

Paul Dolan *- I can't comment any further on that, I just will say that Eric has done a very good job here and he's a very good manager. Whether he's the right manager for the Cleveland Indians in the future is a determination that we will make in the near future.*

WTAM's Mike Trivisonno *- But it does seem like you have way more confidence in Shapiro than you do Wedge, am I safe in saying that?*

Paul Dolan *- You're certainly safe in saying that Mark is part of our organization in the future...I can't, I can't really quantify that or qualify that any further.*

With this Brown thing being the piece de resistance and a culmination of an awful year, The Atomic Wedgie may have just severed his remaining lifeline by distancing himself from the final group in Northeast Ohio that still seemed to be on his side - the Front Office.

As for the Brown situation, it was something that Tony Lastoria and I discussed (almost to the point of absurdity) on this week's "Smoke Signals", but if we're talking about Brown the player strictly from a roster standpoint, I'll stand by what I wrote back in early August:

It's also possible that the Indians could simply pass the mantle of

"placeholder" at 1B to Jordan Brown, who has placed himself back on the map with a strong 2009, though his lack of power puts him on par with what Ryan Garko put forth for the last few years in Cleveland and both look to be similarly skilled players, based on their MiLB numbers:

Jordan Brown - MiLB numbers through age 25
.306 BA / .372 OBP / .469 SLG / .841 OPS in 2,022 plate appearances

Ryan Garko - MiLB numbers through age 25
.293 BA / .379 OBP / .488 SLG / .867 OPS in 1,637 plate appearance

Certainly not bad overall numbers for either player, but it's meant to illustrate what Jordan Brown likely is in terms of MLB projection - he's not unlike Garko as he hits for average, but not a lot of power from what is traditionally a power position at 1B. Perhaps his defense is a shade better, but looking at Brown as a long-term option feels a lot more like looking at a continuation with what we had in Garko. Maybe that's not a bad thing or one that isn't an acceptable option for a bit of 2010, but as this team evolves into its next combination of players, I'm looking for a little more than just a Garko-type player to be manning 1B.

That shouldn't discount the fact that it's not unreasonable to assume that Brown can have a viable MLB career, but if you assume that that Matt LaPorta and Michael Brantley figure to serve as the LF and 1B (Brown's two defensive positions) perhaps starting sooner rather than later , with Hafner signed through eternity, and you see why the Brown non-call-up was much ado about nothing...that is until The Atomic Wedgie sealed his fate.

One of the pro-Jordan Brown arguments is his bat-to-ball ability and his avoidance of the K in an organization full of players that stack up K totals. This week, Jeff Passan of Yahoo put forth a fascinating piece
on whether or not the strikeout is as bad as it was once (or still is) thought to be, in terms of affecting the runs scored by an offense:

Yahoo! Sports analyzed the past full decade of games and found that in the greatest era of striking out baseball has seen - there were 316,274 from 1999 to 2008 - there is no connection between the number of times a team strikes out in a season and the number of runs it averages per game. The correlation coefficient between strikeouts and runs was .075, which means the relationship is so negligible there is no relationship.

Some high-scoring teams strike out a lot, and some low-scoring teams don't, and vice versa. The most productive team of the past decade, the 1999 Indians, scored 6.23 runs per game even though they struck out 1,099 times, the ninth most in baseball that year - and 92nd most of the 300 teams in the study.

Was anyone else thinking about Mr. Show Pack and his future as an Indian when you were reading that?

Moving on, did anyone catch Joe Posnanski's live blog of Friday's game "pitting" the Royals against the Erie Warriors?
If you missed it, he uncorked some beauties on the topic of a particular Third Base Coach:

You are probably not watching this Royals game - and there's really no reason you should be watching - but tie score, ninth inning, the Indians just had runners on first and second, one out, and Jhonny Peralta lined a single to left. I am not exaggerating if I say that David DeJesus had the ball BEFORE Cleveland's Asdrubal Cabrera reached third base. I thought "There's no way there's sending him."

Cleveland third base coach Joel Skinner sent him. Well, that's just great - in the seventh game of the American League Championship Series, Skinner held up Kenny Lofton when the Red Sox would have almost certainly conceded the run (and would have had no chance to get him at the plate anyway). But this time, Skinner sent a guy to a certain out - and sure enough, DeJesus made a reasonable throw home and Cabrera was out by 15 feet. It was actually kind of funny - because of the way Miguel Olivo blocked the plate, Cabrera never got within five feet of the plate. And ... we're going to extra innings.
There really is a perverse joy in watching two bad teams play baseball.

--snip--

Wow, bottom of the 11th inning in Cleveland ... and almost precisely the same thing happened that happened in the ninth inning. Cleveland had a runner on second, Jhonnny Peralta hit a hard single to left, DeJesus got the ball just as the runner was getting to third, coach Joel Skinner sent the runner home. It was a little bit different this time because there were two outs and the runner was faster. But the results were the same - this time DeJesus made an excellent throw home,

Olivo blocked the plate, and the runner never even touched home plate. We're going to the 12th inning! At what point do fans get combat pay?

Anyone else get nauseous at any mention of the last couple of games in the 2007 ALCS, after which Fausto was never really the same and, according to Rob Neyer, may never be ?

Elsewhere, with the minor-league seasons over or with the playoffs winding down (with Akron continuing to just roll up opponents), the next big thing to look forward to, in terms of prospects, is the Arizona Fall League, with Fangraphs doing a little write-up on some of the players that will fill out the Peoria Saguaros, the team that will contain the prospects the Indians are sending.

If you're looking at the whole lineup , it certainly looks to be pretty stacked with interesting names - RHP Connor Graham (who came over in the Betancourt deal), RHP Josh Judy (a late-inning reliever for Akron this year), RHP Zach Putnam (the 2008 Draft Pick transitioned to the bullpen this year, fast-tracking him), RHP Carlton Smith, 2B Josh Rodriguez (attempting to re-establish himself in the potential Utility Role mix), SS Carlos Rivero (still young for his level in Akron and looking to build on a strong second half in which he posted a .797 OPS after the All-Star Break in AA at the age of 21), OF Nick Weglarz (looking to recover from some nagging injuries to get himself ready for AAA next year at the age of 22 after a 16-HR pre-All-Star Break tear in Akron this year) and C/1B Matt McBride, who was specifically addressed in the FanGraphs piece:

Matt McBride | C | Cleveland

The Indians organization is not 100% sure what it has with McBride, who missed most of 2008 with an injury. He creamed high-A pitching but was old for the league. Upon a promotion to double-A, his batting average and on-base percentage plummeted but he still showed good power potential and struck out just 11.8% of the time. His BABIP can be partially blamed for his average.

Speaking of prospects, Rob Neyer has an interesting look at how the Rookie of the Year balloting in the AL does not exactly contain the most compelling choices in recent memory , with Louie the Fifth getting a cursory mention. What's interesting is that Neyer mentions that only 5 AL rookies have 300 plate appearances or more, something that in this new age of managed service time and avoidance of arbitration could become more commonplace as

the meaningless Rookie of the Year award (quick...name the last 5 AL ROY) could carry even less weight in the near future.

Finally, some attention has been paid to the fact that Dave Huff became the Indians' first 10-game winner last night, avoiding the first year without a double-digit winner since the illustrious troika of Scott Bailes, Phil Neikro, and Tom Candiotti all had...wait for it...7 wins on the infamous 1987 squad.

But how about this?

Grady Sizemore leads the club with 18 HR and as he's obviously not going to be tallying anymore, the next closest active Indians are Hafner and Choo with 15 (Choo being the leader if we're talking about people playing every day), meaning that the Indians could have their first year without a player to hit at least 20 HR since 1983 when Andre Thornton and Gorman Thomas each had 17.

Even the inimitable Jody Gerut had 22 in 2003...but hey, welcome to the 2009 season.

As for now, it's time to attempt to ready myself for the Browns game while attempting to vilify Brett Favre in The DiaBride's Wisconsin eyes...something that will certainly prove to be an exercise in futility.