As the end of the 2009 baseball season can't come soon enough for Indians' fans, there certainly seems to be a different aura around this final month of baseball than years past that fell into this same "lost season" category as 2009. It certainly seems that the cumulative effect of disappointing seasons in 2008 and 2009 have run the fanbase ragged and left most fans wondering if the season is still even going on. In Paul's latest, he talks about the anger of the Indians fan base. And the apathy that has set in amongst us.

"The thrill is gone
It's gone away from me
The thrill is gone baby
The thrill is gone away from me
Although I'll still live on
But so lonely I'll be"
--- BB King

As the end of the 2009 baseball season can't come soon enough for Indians' fans, there certainly seems to be a different aura around this final month of baseball than years past that fell into this same "lost season" category as 2009. It certainly seems that the cumulative effect of disappointing seasons in 2008 and 2009 have run the fanbase ragged and left most fans wondering if the season is still even going on.

Going back a few years, September baseball remained compelling (even if the season was essentially over) for baseball diehards, who remained relatively excited as the team played out the end of 2008 or 2004 or even 2003 (my inexplicable first year as an Indians season-ticket holder) as hope for the near future, or at least steps in the right direction, seemed to portend happier days ahead. While the assembled group that we're watching finish up this season for the Tribe unquestionably has talent and merits excitement, even the most inspiring pieces and parts come with reminders of mistakes made and already

carry a feeling of "what-could-have-been" with them.

Every LaPorta extra-base hit reminds us that he wasn't in Cleveland in June, just as every fantastic play by Asdrubal at SS is a reminder that he inexplicably started the season at 2B, throwing the whole infield off kilter to start the season

Throw the new disappointments on top of the old ones and it's nearly impossible not to view each start by Jeremy Sowers as a reminder that he was never able to translate the success of his 2006 into a permanent roster spot, or to allow every pitch thrown by Fausto Carmona to serve as a jarring reminder that 2007 may be further away for him than just two calendar years.

Even when trying to simply separate the day-to-day from the big picture, the fact that Kerry Wood's BB rate has doubled from last year to this while his HR rate has tripled depresses enough. When you remember that he's still wearing a $10.5M price tag for next year, the depression deepens.

Despite all of these reminders of frustration though, it seems like we've entered a new stage of viewing the Indians in this 2009 season. Anger, blame, and disappointment have passed (now a full six weeks past CP Lee and Vic being traded) and the whole bargaining process (you know the one that hyped up Justin Masterson and Carlos Carrasco being MLB- ready right now) has been exhausted...no, apathy has set in.

The sense that we just don't care has coincided (maybe not so coincidentally) with this recent slide into the AL Central cellar and as the Browns' season starts (at least the games are on TV, though will someone please let me know when they start "playing") and the Cavaliers look to be poised for a deep run into the summer of 2010, the Indians have been pushed to the back of Northeast Ohio's collective mind - even among those who found solace in positives from the second half of last year.

Perhaps not being able to find those silver linings among the clouds of gray that we've relied upon in years past is a result of the lesson that "past performance is not an indication of future results", particularly in terms of projecting anything on the basis of August or September is our lesson learned and the wet blanket over the remainder of this season. Regardless (and maybe I'm alone...though I don't think I am), the painful home stretch that's occurring right now is doing nothing to elicit a buzz

Does this mean that all hope is lost for 2010?

Certainly not, as baseball remains a fickle muse and watching this team on a daily basis has been a reminder that the currently constructed team is a young team that (even if it does contain talent) is going to struggle to establish and maintain some level of consistency, with the idea that when that consistency is attained remains the great question.

The fact remains that the 2010 lineup is quickly coming into view, even if it's not necessarily the one that leaves Goodyear, with the notion that the offense could represent one of the better offensive outputs once 2010 progresses (with Carl Santana not far off):

C - Marson
1B - LaPorta
2B - Valbuena
SS - Cabrera
3B - Peralta
LF - Brantley
CF - Sizemore
RF - Choo
DH - Hafner

Beyond the burgeoning offense, the bullpen has shown that the pieces may FINALLY be in place to cobble together an effective combination of relievers who have the capability to miss bats. Chris Perez looks like a future closer, just as Tony Sipp looks like a dominant late-inning LHP, as other arms may be emerging to allow the organization to fill a bullpen with internal options.

But the concerns about the rotation and the myriad of directions that every pitcher that figures into the rotation next year could take prevents any great optimism from emerging. While the offense and bullpen seem to have settled (or at least show signs of stability), the rotation remains the great mystery.

Realizing the importance of starting pitching (and particularly realizing that this whole "Plan" was designed to be built upon the bedrock of starting pitching), the optimism starts to die for this team. The fact is that I want to believe and I want to care about these meaningless September tilts...I really do.

But the reality that the atmosphere around the team is stagnant (a startling revelation when you consider the roster turnover of the season) is too pervasive to truly garner any excitement about the team that's being trotted out there as the season winds down.

Is it related to the players or the disappointments associated with the past two years?

Maybe, as we've now been conditioned to bring our grain of salt with us...

Will the certain change in manager make a difference?

Probably, at least from a standpoint of perception that something is being done and that something will change. It's likely that a long winter without nightly baseball games without looking at a disappointing team would help. Because at this point, as apathy persists and expectations hover in the depths, anything would help.