Despite the fact that CC and CP Lee look to be on a collision course for the Fall Classic, in the interest of everyone keeping down their Sunday breakfast, Paulie C decides to continue to put the focus this morning on the managerial search. Today, he hits on Torey Lovullo attempting to position himself as somebody not named Eric Wedge, introduces us to Ron Roenicke, attempts to gauge Bobby Valentine's level of interest, furthers the notion that Don Mattingly is using the Indians as leverage to assure himself of the job in Los Angeles, and puts forth the reason why Manny Acta may be the best man for the job. It's Sunday, you're feeling Lazy...it's a Lazy Sunday.

Realizing that CC and Clifton Phifer are looking like they're heading towards each other at ramming speed for the World Series and the articles have started on how painful that is for Indians' fans ; but seeing as how I prefer not feeling nauseous on Sunday mornings and promising that I'll have some thoughts on that later in the week, let's keep focused on what's happening at the corner of Carnegie and Ontario and worry about what could have been (or is it what should have been) for later in the week when we all have our heads in the garbage cans watching CC face CP Lee in the Fall Classic.

With that horrific scenario pushed back into the recesses (get back there!), let's get loose on a Lazy One we return to the managerial candidate race in this election season (well, kind of) with Torey Lovullo sitting down in front of the assembled press corps on Friday.

In case you missed Lovullo in front of the cameras and microphones, the current Clippers' manager wasted no time in attempting to put to rest the notion that he's just an organizational soldier , waiting for his chance as another former Tribe AAA manager did in 2002.

To wit:
Some players sent down told Lovullo they had lost confidence after being yanked in and out of the lineup or moved from position to position.
"I like to get a lineup and try not to change it," Lovullo said. "I'm big on team chemistry. I want players to know I have their back, that they can play relaxed and comfortable. ... But I expect an effort every day. This team can look different, act different and play different."
--snip--
"The biggest challenge to an AL manager is knowing how to run a bullpen," Lovullo

said. "You try and put guys in a role in which they are comfortable."
Lovullo thinks he can get the team to start better than the 11-21 record it had by mid-May. "The last few days of spring training, you have to change the mindset and prepare as if it is already opening day," Lovullo said. "I'd like to take the team on a three-day trip, like we were going on the road."

Boy, other than REALLY trying to establish himself as a different person than Wedge (hey Eric, did you catch the license plate of that bus you just got thrown under with the "yanked in and out of the lineup or moved from position to position" line, among others), Lovullo certainly came in and hit all the high points:
Stability and development...check.
Improving the performance of the bullpen...check.
Better starts to the season...check.

Obviously, these are all just words and Lovullo attempting to say the right things, but it would certainly seem that Lovullo came into the situation with a pretty good handle on what the Indians were (and weren't) looking for and was attempting to distance himself (at least publicly) from Wedge. There had to be a part of Lovullo that knew that he was seen by some (perhaps even some whose last name is "Dolan") as Wedge Part II or simply an internal option and that differentiating himself from the former manager was the astute way to play his situation, particularly in front of the cameras and the microphones.

Maybe everything rolls Lovullo's way (in terms of Acta, Valentine, and Mattingly all opting to go elsewhere or stay put), but I still believe that Lovullo finds himself in the Indians' dugout in 2010...just not as the manager.

Of course, outside of those four candidates there seems to be a new wrinkle with the inclusion of Ron Roenicke in the mix. However, anyone else catch this snippet from Paul Hoynes in an article covering Lovullo's interview
?
The interview process...started with at least 10 candidates - including Angels bench coach Ron Roenicke ***who didn't make it past the first round - and is now down to the final four****.*

Admittedly, I emphasized the part in bold, but that was written AFTER the report in the LA Times was picked up by multiple media outlets and is even mentioned in the AP story on ESPN that, "Dodgers hitting coach Don Mattingly and Angels bench coach Ron Roenicke are expected to be brought in next week for interviews". Despite that, Hoynes seems to assert that the finalists are still four and that Roenicke WAS a candidate who did not make the cut. So...is he another finalist or isn't he?

Regardless if he is or not, if you want a bit of background on Roenicke, he did a Q & A with Baseball Prospectus
a while back and gets into what the duties of a bench coach actually entail (something that a lot of people probably don't know for as much talk as there is to "just go get a bench coach of a successful team") as well as articulating some of his baseball philosophies. He hits on

his thoughts on aggressiveness on the basepaths (an Angels' hallmark, which he thinks doesn't fall into the category of "overaggressive"), his thoughts on platooning young players, and how his shortcomings as an MLB player have allowed him to have a greater appreciation of the "little things".

Roenicke is an interesting option (again, if he is an option) as he would certainly represent an outside opinion and a different way of thinking than the one that the Indians have subscribed to under the Mark Shapiro-Eric Wedge regime. Roenicke could offer that breath of fresh air to implement strategies and assert ideas that may be foreign to the straight-line thinking currently in place to the benefit of the team.

Speaking of foreign, is anyone else still baffled by this Valentine press conference?
If you'll remember, he said "I can tell you I don't know about the American League, I don't know about the (AL) Central, and I don't know about the Indians, but I sure as hell am willing to learn and spend about 28 hours a day, if necessary, to know everything I could possibly know."

Isn't this the same guy that is covering and analyzing the MLB playoffs for the Worldwide Leader and has been since the end of September?

Are you telling me that Valentine claimed to the Cleveland media that he knew nothing about the American League or that he had watched a generation of baseball players on TV...and ESPN simply handed him the analysts' chair on their set, figuring he could put in some of his "28 hour days" to catch up two weeks earlier or that he would be able to just watch these games and impart his limitless baseball knowledge onto the baseball population despite not knowing about the American League?

Valentine sits in Bristol and talks about baseball with the likes of Peter Gammons, Tim Kurkjian, and Buster Olney as a paying job and he took THAT angle when addressing the media, not even attempting to show that he's done any research on the Indians to...you know...see if it might be a situation, player-wise, that he would want to walk into as a manager?

Maybe that's it...that's it not a situation he wants to walk into, but wants to get his name out there as a candidate for when the Mets or some other high-profile team needs a manager, so they know that Bobby V's back on the menu. Maybe it's an act, maybe he just doesn't care, or maybe he doesn't feel that he needs to justify his candidacy to a group of writers whose opinion he could care less about.

For all we know, he nailed the interview with the Indians' brass and simply wasn't in the mood to make himself look good in front of people who aren't making the decision whether or not to hire him. Terry Pluto's comment that Valentine "had a knack for remembering names and getting a sense of what the Indians are about, despite his public claims not to know much of the Tribe or the Central" would certainly support that idea.

What makes Bobby Valentine tick has remained an enigma, wrapped in a riddle, shrouded by mystery since his time in Texas and Cleveland may have just received their first taste as his

true interest in the job remains up for debate, if only for the tangled web that he cast in his brief time on the North Coast.

In terms of true interest, the speculation is growing that Don Mattingly may be using the Indians' interest to make sure that a power transfer in Los Angeles goes a little smoother than it did in New York, in terms of Torre handing him the reins:
The interest in Mattingly on the part of Washington as well as Cleveland might solidify Mattingly's status with the Dodgers. The current plan appears to be for him to take over for iconic manager Joe Torre after the 2010 season. It would seem to be a long shot to think he'd give up the Dodgers -- a storied franchise where his middle son is a minor league player -- to jump to a rebuilding situation in Cleveland or Washington.

This isn't rocket science when you think about the fact that Mattingly was burned in NY, where he was assumed to be the heir apparent before Joe Girardi got the job and is simply leveraging his "interest" in the Cleveland and Washington job to show the Dodgers that he'll leave unless he's given a clearer picture (particularly clearer than the one that happened in NY) as to what happens when Torre retires.

As to the question of Mattingly's readiness to be an MLB manager, Rob Neyer has some thoughts prompted by a piece from Matthew Pouliot (one that goes a little outside the lines in terms of evaluating Mattingly in the context of his family issues), with
Neyer asserting
that:
The more substantive point is that Mattingly has never managed a baseball team; the closest he's come is one season as Joe Torre's bench coach. ***The New York Yankees knew Mattingly better than anyone, and after his one season in that role, he was passed over in favor of Joe Girardi as Torre's replacement.***
Since then, he has served as Torre's (and the Dodgers') hitting coach.

Mattingly might be a great manager right now, if given the chance. But these stories -- big name with little or no managerial experience gets the big job -- rarely have happy endings, and often the sad ending comes quickly. If Mattingly really wants to manage, he should volunteer to return to the minor leagues and learn how to run a 25-man roster. But considering the pay cut he'd have to take, I wouldn't hold my breath on that one.

Neyer's second sentence (the one that I bolded) is the one that I can't get past, in that the Yankees had EVERY good reason to give Mattingly the job (a Yankee legend on Torre's staff as his bench coach who was universally well-respected) and didn't. Obviously, the availability and track record of Joe Girardi in Florida played a role, but anointing the beloved Don Mattingly as the new manager of the Bronx Bombers seemed at once to be a foregone conclusion when Torre left. Seeing as how he was a finalist for the job, why is he not managing the Yankees today?
Is it really just the lack of managerial experience?

Back to that managerial experience idea, Manny Acta remains the one candidate who possesses some time as an MLB skipper (albeit inauspicious) and who came across as

impressive to the media (not that they're making the decision), something he likely did in front of the Indians' brass as well. However, as always, there's a "but"...as Acta (as expected) has officially been named one of the four finalists for the job in Houston - the job he referred to as his "dream job".

If you're looking for a leader in the clubhouse (at least to me), I'm thinking that Acta looks like the most logical fit. While a total outsider like Valentine makes sense on many levels, there remains the idea that Mark Shapiro has created this new "window of opportunity" with the trades of this summer and that the dismissal of Wedge put him in the crosshairs of being the next on the firing line if things continue to go awry. With that in mind, what would the introduction of a complete wild card like Valentine mean? Couldn't it result in Shapiro and a guy like Valentine not meshing with the end game being Valentine's dismissal and Shapiro's claim that Valentine never fit in, without the Indians getting a proper read on where the shortcomings in the organization lie?

The simple fact is that this managerial selection will have as much bearing on the future of Mark Shapiro as GM of the Indians as it will the longevity of any of these candidates' future with the Indians, so if Acta comes with the credentials, the image, and the backing of baseball people that assert that he was in an untenable situation in Washington - enough to satisfy Shapiro that he's the pick to win in Cleveland (with Acta putting forth the idea that he would look at internal candidates like Lovullo, Columbus hitting coach Jon Nunnally, and Columbus pitching coach Scott Radinsky to build his coaching staff), then Acta should be the guy.

However, that selection should be made with the understanding that the Indians' Front Office is hiring the guy that they feel fits in best with what they have in place and any continued failures by the product on the field will no longer be able to be chalked up to deficiencies in the dugout, but up to the offices at the corner of Carnegie and Ontario as well.

As for the players that figure to be led by any of these guys, Adam Van Arsdale at LGT has a nice write-up on some of the young players that may play a role in the 2010 season, notably Mike Brantley and Carlos Santana, putting forth the idea that those two prospects are quite certainly the real deal.

On the topic of offensive upgrades emerging from within, the aforementioned Santana was also the topic of discussion recently at The Hardball Times, as was Matt LaPorta.

Carlos Santana

The 23-year old switch-hitter has emerged as an elite catching prospect with a major league ready bat. He spent the entire 2009 season with the Akron Aeros of the Eastern League (Double-A) putting together an an eye-popping line of .290/.413/.530. His plate discipline is also advanced beyond his age.

--snip--

Santana will likely hit for a solid average and decent power numbers, in the range of 20-25 home runs. His real value will be in his ability to draw walks and reach base. I think we can

expect a batting line in the range of .280/.375/.450 in the future.

Matt LaPorta
Matt LaPorta is one of the game's top power-hitting prospects, despite his somewhat disappointing 2009. LaPorta's prime is coming on fast, and his strong plate coverage and natural home run swing are too much to ignore. He still has the ability to turn into a superior middle-of-the-order hitter, and he is one of my very top fantasy breakout players for 2010.

Some answers should start to emerge this week as to who will be given the chance to develop these players pertaining to Acta in Houston, the actual level of interest for Valentine and Mattingly, and whether other candidates (like Roenicke or even Clint Hurdle) have in fact entered the mix. For now, answers are scarce and opinions and questions remain prevalent as this four-ring circus of a managerial search rolls on.