While the postseason has long since been a reality, the Indians and manager Eric Wedge had at a fresh start after the All-Star break. Instead, we've been forced to suffer through more of the same. Uninspired play, mental errors, poor situational hitting, and being unable to capitalize off wins. It's been a fresh start gone stale for the Indians this past week, and this team is just getting very hard to watch.

Visit the Papa Cass weblog at http://papacass.blogspot.com/

For every team, spring training is a time for renewal. Every team can be the Detroit Tigers, shedding the cocoon of losing and spreading new, beautiful wings that lift them to the top of the standings.

Unfortunately, most teams don't find themselves on an out-of-nowhere ride like the Tigers do this year. The Indians, most definitely, are not on a ride to remember.

For those teams, there is the all-star break. A time to take a deep breath, collect your thoughts and renew your vows to winning. A time to reassure your fans that the word "quit" isn't in your vocabulary.

It's like amnesty day at the library. Keep forgetting to turn in that copy of "The Sting" that you borrowed in 1998? Bring it back now, and there will be no questions asked.

Stunk like a pile of chicken dung in the first half? Deliver a rousing speech to the media at the all-star break, rattle off six or seven wins to start the second half, and come out smelling springtime fresh. Even if you don't make the playoffs, a strong second half can at least convince the ticket-buying public that you gave it the ol' college try and are building on something for next year.

The trouble for the Indians is that manager Eric Wedge did the first part, giving his best rah-rah to the microphones and cameras last week. But his team didn't back the words up.

Same stuff, different half. After a spark of encouragement with a half-opening win over the Twins on Thursday, the Indians reverted back to their lackluster selves with three straight losses, plagued by a typical mixture of defensive goofs, inconsistent offense and pitching that stumbled at the worst possible time.

Along with the series in Minnesota probably went the Indians' best chance to make anything meaningful out of the second half of the season. If you are backsliding as badly as this team has been, you need to strike quickly out of the second half gate and set a different tone.

Instead of a renewed sense of urgency, the Minnesota series has proven that the teamwide malaise is thickening. When August comes, it will be way too tempting for this team to begin counting off the days until the season ends. Especially for players like Ronnie Belliard and Aaron Boone, who almost certainly won't be back next year.

Of course, Boone and Belliard might have been traded off for beads and trinkets by then, so this mess won't be their problem anymore, even though they've had more than just a cameo role in creating it.

The only people we can rest assured will be left behind to deal with the mess are the thousands of tortured Indians fans who can't bring themselves not to watch. It's difficult for a team to follow a 90-win season with a 90-loss season when they haven't had widespread personnel turnover. But the Indians, it appears, will buck the odds and do just that.

And, just to give the knife in our guts a couple of good, hard twists, we can probably sit back this October and watch Jim Thome win a World Series MVP award with the White Sox, or watch the Tigers win a World Series out of nowhere.

Somebody, somewhere, is going to get a ring. And as has been the case for more than four decades, it won't be Cleveland.