Crap.

This ballgame in Arlington had begun well enough. Roberto Alomar took Texas Rangers starter Darren Oliver deep, in the first. In the fourth, Ellis Burks, Jim Thome, Marty Cordova, Travis Fryman and Einar Diaz went walk, single, single, single, single to put the Tribe ahead, 4-0. Charles Nagy's outing was a strong one- he'd given up four hits through five innings. He got dinged in the sixth, a double play holding the damage to two runs. Danys Baez got the final out of that inning, and he set the Rangers down, 1-2-3 in the seventh. With the score still 4-2 Tribe in the eighth, the announcement came over the crowd of 43,000-plus: "Now pitching for Cleveland, number 49, John Rocker."

August 11, 2001. Our Tribe was leading the American League Central Division, with a good chunk of their roster still in place from their "Era of Champions" (as it was known later; commonly viewed as 1995 - 1999). There were Kenny, Omar and Robbie. And Thome and Fryman. They'd added Juan Gonzalez and Ellis Burks. Russell Branyan (Yeah, yeah, I know- but a young slugger who wowed the fans with the ability to hit the ball a mile. Perhaps farther than Thome, only with sparsely intermittent frequency).

This was the season which saw the number 455 retired by the Indians franchise- that was the number of consecutive home sellouts by the Tribe. Manny and Sandy were gone, but the Indians could still hit; their year-end average of 5.54 runs/game proved to be second in the league, behind only the Seattle Mariners (the Mariners won a record 116 games that year. Although one notable loss was the August 5th game against this Cleveland team, in which the Tribe found itself down 14-2 in the sixth inning. They came back to defeat the Mariners, 15-14 in 11 innings, to complete the greatest comeback in major league history). Robbie, Juan Gone, Thome and Burks all dotted the Top Ten in the major American League batting categories in

2001.

The team still had a solid bullpen, as well. Danys Baez, Ricardo Rincon, Paul Shuey and Bob Wickman each had ERAs in the twos. Wickman began the season as the closer, and had converted 15 of 16 saves up until the June trade for the new Indians closer, lefty John Rocker.

CRAP.

John Rocker's on the mound, and the crowd is alive. It seems clear that many people have showed up just to razz him. This crazy atmosphere occurs every time he enters a road game. He's all pumped up, throwing his last warmup pitches in an exaggeratedly vigorous manner. People are just scu-reeming at him. Working in the eighth inning with a two run lead, Rocker promptly walks the leadoff batter, Chad Curtis, on a 3-1 pitch.

While the bullpen had performed well, it was overworked. Manager Charlie Manuel's mantra was that the starting pitching only needed to give the team six innings- the bullpen and the bats could carry the team. Trouble was, the starters were at the bottom of the league in innings pitched. In June, General Manager John Hart had traded for Rocker, a hard-throwing lefty closer who was having a fine season for Atlanta: at the time of the trade, he'd saved 19 of 23 and boasted a 3.09 ERA. Obviously, he was available due to his being the pop-culture pariah of the moment in American society. In 1999, Rocker had inflamed the hatred of New Yorkers by publicly stating his disdain for the gays, minorities, foreigners, and unwed mothers one would be forced to deal with while walking in Times Square or riding on the subway. He was a jerk. Unconfirmed reports attributed the exaggerated nature of Rocker's personality to "roid rage". He wasn't alleged to have beaten up women (like other athletes) - or anyone. He committed the unpardonable sin of our current times: he hurt people's feelings. And his scowl and generally foul mood made him a lightning rod for taunting fans in every city in which he performed.

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