Attempting to hold off on any wild overreactions from the to two games played to date, it is not a stretch to say that Carmona walking the first two batters of his start put a pit in my stomach that I feared would be there until October or so. With Carmona eventually settling in (to a degree) and the offense finally scoring some runs (which is either a condemnation of the lineup or an indication that the White Sox rotation may be pretty good), let's get going on some Tommies.

Before we do, realize that this is the most difficult part of the season to actually glean anything from because everything is under the magnifying glass and while Jake Westbrook's control simply wasn't there and Jenny Lewis looked like the "Stomp" of old, we're talking about drawing conclusions on 18 innings of baseball and if this were the NFL, we'd be sitting on about 4 minutes left in the first quarter of the first game.

While that attempts to put some perspective on the marathon that the MLB season has become, let's finally let the 'Hawks loose…

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What was it that was said all Spring about the importance of a long man to this team, particularly in the early going, with The Babyfaced Bulldog eventually drawing the short straw in the rotation "battle" and heading out to the bullpen?

With the uncertainty in the starting rotation, some thought that it was kind of an important role, right?
Not that anything can really be taken from a couple of games, but Laffey proved his worth to the team as long man almost immediately, relieving an obviously out-of-whack Westbrook to stop the bleeding in Monday's opener. Given the uncertain nature (and that's putting it kindly) of the Indians' rotation, there's a very real possibility that the role that Laffey finds himself in could be the most valuable on the team in the early going if the Indians are going to have any hope of getting out to the fast start that they have deemed to be so important. He followed that up with a crucial 1 1/3 innings in a 1-run game as the LHP out of the pen, meaning that Laffey has been used both in mop-up work and with a lead.

What does all that mean in the context of the idea that Laffey could eventually move back to the rotation?

Back in the early-90s (not to go too far back on you) when the Indians had a young, burgeoning offense and a pitching staff full of question marks, guys like Rod Nichols and Tom Kramer played the role of the swing man on those teams. The swing man would appear between 30 and 40 times and start around 10 to 15 of those games, accumulating about 120 innings over the course of the season in their dual role. If that's what Laffey's role boils down to, are there many other players or roles that would be as vital to maintaining some semblance of consistency on this particular pitching staff? Even if he evolves into a dependable 6th or 7th inning reliever, are those not in short order as well for the club?

While Aaron Laffey's future should be brighter than what Nichols and Kramer turned out to be (and the fact that he doesn't wear glasses like those two (here and here) did must mean something favorable), at this point in the organizations developmental curve, the idea that the Indians should be maximizing Laffey's ability to eat innings from the bullpen is not without merit, particularly if the Indians find themselves consistently behind early in games.

Given the expectations for the current starting rotation, how many innings do you think that he would get as the long man (assuming he doesn't go into the rotation, and he will at a certain point) if he throws between 2 to 3 innings every 3 or 4 games?

All told, Laffey's going to see his share of innings this year and given that there was some thought that Laffey's eventual spot would be in the bullpen, using the 2010 season to ultimately determine where his value is the greatest to the organization while attempting to keep the Indians in some games where the starting pitcher falters early holds merit not just in April but well beyond.

Given that Laffey is arbitration-eligible after this season, it behooves the Indians to find out what his best spot is on the team (be it the rotation or the bullpen) as his salary is about to increase substantially for 2011. The argument could be made that Laffey should be put into the rotation and given a long leash (in fact, I think that I've made that argument), but Laffey's role as a swing man allows the Indians to evaluate him both as a starter and as a reliever.

Speaking of Laffey, did anyone know that Laffey remains the only player from the 2003 Draft that remains on the Indians' roster or even in the organization? That year, Laffey was a 16th round pick and this week alone has shown that even the players that now find themselves outside of the organization from that draft have underwhelmed.

With 2003 1st Round Pick (11th overall) Michael Aubrey being outrighted off of the Orioles' 40-man roster and clearing waivers and Ryan Garko (2003 3rd round pick) being outrighted out of Seattle to be a waiver claim for the Rangers, this has not been a particularly good two weeks for the 2003 Indians' draftees.

The only player, besides Laffey, from that draft who finds himself in a meaningful MLB role entering the 2010 season is Kevin Kouzmanoff (2003 6th round pick), who is now the starting 3B for the Oakland Athletics. As we all know, K2 was traded to for Josh Barfield who finds himself going into the 2010 season as the now 27-year-old 2B for the…wait for it…Portland

Beavers of the Pacific Coast League, after not making the Padres (they of the $37M payroll) out of Spring Training.

Seeing as how Aubrey and Barfield were DFA'd by the team and how no other 2003 draftee still finds themselves in the organization, the players that the Indians have to show for the 2003 draft are minor-league pitcher Scott Barnes (acquired for Garko) and one Aaron Laffey.

Obviously, some of the disappointment of that draft rests in Atom Miller's finger not cooperating…and remember when he was in SI's "Dream Rotation" back in 2007? However, in the same two-week timeframe that saw 2004 1st Round Pick (6th overall) Jeremy Sowers ALSO get outrighted off of the 40-man roster AND clear waivers, just like Aubrey did in Baltimore, it brought home another reason that the Indians find themselves where they are in 2010. As a quick aside, it is worth noting that 2005 1st Round Pick (14th overall) Trevor Crowe may not be far behind the path now taken by Aubrey and Sowers off of the 40-man and into AAA at some point in the near future as his usefulness to the organization as a 4th OF (and he certainly doesn't look to be more than that) will run out once his affordability does.

Just to leave this on rosier terms, now might be a good time to mention that Lonnie Chisenhall (2008 1st Round Draft Pick) may make it to the Majors sooner than anyone drafted in 2006 and 2007, other than Dave Huff who is the only player from either draft to make it to Cleveland from those two drafts. While Josh Judy (34th round, 2007) may improbably be the second, the 2008 draft may already have an impact by the end of the year with The Chiz hopefully on the fast track to the hot corner in Cleveland.

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Not sure if you caught this beauty from Yankees' president Randy Levine, responding to Brewers' owner Mark Attanasio complaining about Milwaukee's difficulties in signing Prince Fielder to a contract extension, so cue the insanity :
"I'm sorry that my friend Mark continues to whine about his running the Brewers," Levine told ESPNNewYork.com in a phone interview Tuesday morning. "We play by all the rules and there doesn't seem to be any complaints when teams such as the Brewers receive hundreds of millions of dollars that they get from us in revenue sharing the last few years. Take some of that money that you get from us and use that to sign your players…The question that should be asked is: Where has the hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue sharing gone?"

Just for a point of comparison, the largest contract that the Brewers have ever handed out was a $45M deal to Ryan Braun in 2008 that spanned 8 years. Prince is going to be looking for a deal comparable to what Teixiera and Mauer recently signed for (8 years, upwards of $175M) with Scott Boras as Fielder's agent.
Anyone want to venture a guess how this is going to end up?

Getting past the absurdity that there is an ESPNNewYork.com (given that it is a redundancy), I'm not sure why I'm rooting for more comments like this from the likes of the Yankees and the Red Sox, in which they lord over their serfdom. The superiority and utter disdain for facts in these arguments while asserting that they are simply playing "by all the rules" is appalling as they attempt to question why a team like the Brewers aren't able to simply go to the money tree

when they need something while they happily sign their own (did anyone else see how the Beckett extension that locks him up until he's 34 is relatively minor news) and simply wait to sign the best players (Carl Crawford's Yankee jersey may already be available in Team Shops) that they didn't develop.

The financial disparity in MLB is something that you're likely tired of hearing about here (because I'm tired of writing about it with no discernable end in sight), but I want the Yankees and their like to assert this position as often and as loudly as possible. Reason being that at a certain point, there's going to be a national writer or a person with the national stage who points out the absurdity of the Yankees' "argument" that small-to-mid-market teams should simply "sign their players" and that they demand to know where the "hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue sharing" has gone?

If an owner like Attanasio in Milwaukee, who sells out his stadium and has built through the draft, is the one who's going to be rattling his saber on this, I'm all for it because this issue HAS to come to a head at some point, does it not?

While Game 1 of last year's World Series certainly seemed to present the perfect opportunity for somebody to get up on a soapbox and rail against the unleveled playing field in MLB, the hope would be that the discussion is coming and that the league has a commissioner and a bloc of owners in place to push for real changes and not just ones that inexplicably embrace the system, as "floating realignment" would have.

If the "haves" in this argument ignore basic tenets of their built-in advantage and look down upon the "have-nots", how do the "have-nots" (of which there are more) not rebel against this system?

Maybe everyone's truly making too much money because of the current system (although in At tanasio's response to Levine's comments
he said that the Brewers "need" their piece of revenue sharing), but at a certain point, the league becomes more laughable than ever in terms of competitive balance as teams with deeper pockets get as smart (or smarter) than teams reliant on out-smarting because they cannot outspend.

If the Brewers are used as a team that is showing "how proceeds given to them by wealthier teams can be reinvested to assemble good rosters and draw fans" as they were in the article accompanying Forbes' recent franchise valuations (and have some fun with that link, even if there are unsurprising teams at the top of the list), and their owner is being taken to task by the bully on the block, the day of reckoning has to be coming…doesn't it?

If we're lucky, the battle lines are starting to be drawn between the large-market teams and likes of Milwaukee and Cleveland with the collective voice of the small-to-mid-market teams growing loud enough to force serious changes at the way that business is conducted in a game that is still intrinsically beautiful, but a sport that remains fundamentally flawed.