The offense has been bad, worse than bad…painful to watch, excruciatingly dismal to dissect and depression-inducing to think about. The disappointment goes up and down the lineup, from the struggles of Sizemore and Cabrera to the growing dread (if it isn't already realized dread) that all of the positive talk about the health of Hafner was just that…talk, from the inability of ANY of the young players to adjust and flourish to the acknowledgement that Austin Kearns in the clean-up spot may actually be a good idea.

We laughed away at the aging and punchless White Sox lineup (which has now scored 12 more runs in 19 games than the Indians) while The BLC carried the offensive burden in the short-lived "winning streak" and now attempt to believe that this team HAS to get better, to rationalize that the talent in the lineup SHOULD be performing at a higher level. However, the facts remain the facts (even if it is in the early going of the season) as the Indians' offense has prevented the team from taking advantage of some unlikely-to-continue starting pitching and getting out to that "hot start" that was so important.

While the disappointment with some of the players is tempered by either their youth or their recent performance, one stands out as the poster boy for all that is wrong with the Indians' lineup – Jhonny Peralta.

Long gone is the idea that Peralta would thrive under the guidance of Manny Acta, out from under Eric Wedge's thumb. It seems foolish in hindsight to think that Peralta, with a full off-season under his belt to be ready to be the "3B of the Present" would somehow morph back into the player that barnstormed his way to a 24 HR season as a 23-year-old shortstop, back when his potential seemed limitless.

From Peralta bursting on the scene back in 2005, we've seen Peralta swing up and down throughout the course of the season with the end result often disappointing, but with those flashes of his former self that let the imagination think that Peralta could return to the origins of his success once more.

Now, as the calendar threatens to flip to May a full 5 years removed from Peralta's breakout 2005, no such illusion exists – Jhonny Peralta has regressed into a player undeserving of regular AB, both by his performance at the plate and in the field. Throughout the decline, Peralta has pouted about a move from SS to 3B, questioned the manner in which he was informed of said decision, and floundered even in his "hot streaks" to the point that waiting for

the conclusion of his “cold stretches” simply is no longer justifiable.

At the age of 28, Peralta has not only hit his plateau…he’s coming down the other side of the mesa. Of course, everyone who has watched Peralta since the beginning of the 2009 season knows this – as he continues to flail away at pitches low and away while watching ground balls pass under his glove, all while remaining seemingly oblivious to calls for his head (or worse) – but to truly understand how Peralta’s performance at the plate since the beginning of 2009 has completely bottomed out, let’s look for the proper context.

Since the beginning of the 2009 season, Jhonny Peralta has stepped to the plate 715 times, and in those 715 plate appearances, he has compiled this line:

.247 BA / .316 OBP / .366 SLG / .682 OPS

Horrible…putrid…embarrassing, this we know…

Just wait…of the 70 players in MLB that have accumulated 700 or more Plate Appearances since the beginning of the 2009 season (meaning that they have ostensibly remained in the lineup for a year and a month for better or worse and have not battled injury), here is where Peralta ranks in MLB:

BA - .247 – 68th of 70
OBP - .316 – 65th of 70
SLG - .366 – 70th of 70
OPS - .682 – 70th of 70

That’s right…Peralta has the lowest OPS among all hitters in MLB with 700 or more plate appearances since the beginning of 2009 as well as the lowest SLG (this for a player who slugged .520 when he was 23) – lower than that of Michael Bourn, Ryan Theriot, Rafael Furcal, and so on and so forth.

To throw more dirt on his grave, let’s lower the minimum plate appearances to 550 to see all of the names that Peralta has “outperformed” at the plate (in terms of OPS) since the beginning of 2009, among the 158 MLB players who qualify:

152. Jhonny Peralta - .682
153. Randy Winn - .660
154. David Eckstein - .656
155. Yuniesky Betancourt - .653
156. Edgar Renteria - .645
157. Jason Kendall - .644
158. Kaz Matsui - .638

If you want context as to how horrible Peralta has been since the beginning of last year, there it is…there are the 6 names (that double as answers to jokes as cocktail parties) that Peralta has exceeded at the plate. The player among those 6 with the highest number of plate appearances

is David Eckstein, who has a full 70 fewer plate appearances than Peralta.

While Peralta continues to be trotted out every day, with the illusory hopes that he's "turning the corner" or believing that "Jhonny's starting to go the other way…which means that he's not far away" ringing as hollow as ever, the question has to be asked – how long do the Indians keep him in their lineup?

The obvious answer is whether they think that Peralta will improve at some point to increase his trade value, which is currently non-existent. I don't think that it's a closely guarded secret that Peralta's club option for 2011 was unlikely to be exercised and that he was probably going to be traded at some point in the 2010 season, in which contention was unlikely…and that was before the first month of 2010.

Peralta's slow start however, has put the team in an interesting position in that the only way to be able to net anything from flipping Peralta (be it in May, June, or July) is to continue to give him AB in the hopes that his track record of "heating up" in May rings true. Just looking at Peralta's career numbers (and did you know that Peralta has 3,526 career plate appearances), let's remember the insane swings that Peralta's performance takes year in and year out, inexplicably by month:

OPS by month
March/April - .668
May - .848
June - .730
July - .831
August - .759
September/October - .687

Can they drive up his non-existent trade value by hoping (against reason) that Peralta can get hot in May or June and fool some desperate team to become interested in his services, even if it means simply flipping him and what remains on his salary for a low-level prospect?

At this point, that's actually the best-case-scenario as the idea that Peralta's regressed past the point of usefulness to the team (particularly at his salary in his final year) is gaining momentum. To that end, some have clamored (well…"clamored" may be a strong word…perhaps "suggested") for Andy Marte to take over at 3B and for the Indians to send Peralta out to pasture. While that seems like an idea rooted essentially in making Jhonny disappear from our existence, let's remember what Andy Marte's career numbers as a Cleveland Indian in 690 plate appearances look like:
.222 BA / .279 OBP / .365 SLG / .644 OPS

Are those totals spaced out over 5 seasons of inconsistent AB?
Absolutely and the descent of Andy Marte from top prospect to "persona non grata" in The Atomic Wedgie Era to clearing waivers at the beginning of the 2009 season comes close to matching Peralta's decline in terms of performance and frustration. But let's remember again

what Peralta has done with consistent AB since the beginning of 2009:

.247 BA / .316 OBP / .366 SLG / .681 OPS

Compared to what Marte's put forth in his MLB career, is there evidence to suggest that Marte would improve upon Peralta's offense?

Not definitively, and he could certainly be worse and just as frustrating as Peralta, simply replacing him as the whipping boy du jour in a town largely in need of one.

Ultimately, the Indians find themselves with two similarly flawed RH 3B and Marte's time to play 3B on a regular basis is going to come soon enough (assuming either Grudz or Valbuena don't inherit 3B) when Peralta is moved at some point in the next two to three months. That timeframe for which Peralta will move on is very real as Peralta's tenure with the Indians is getting shorter by the day and his performance amazingly is not going to change the fact that he's not long for a Tribe uniform as it would only affect where he ends up next.

That is, if Peralta appreciably improves in the month of May or June or (gasp) both, the Indians should look to move him to the first bidder for whatever the return may be. However, if Peralta does not improve by the middle of June or so (I know, a fun 6 to 8 weeks await if he's still struggling), the Indians should not use the "he's earned his chance to start every day" of the idea that a "long leash" is justified any more in the handling and usage of Peralta because being the worst hitter in MLB over his last 715 plate appearances being played every day constitutes a pretty long leash.

Given the precarious position that the Indians find themselves in, wishing for Peralta to improve, if only to improve his trade value and forced to play him regularly in an effort to somehow force that improvement, a breaking point still exists. If Peralta is still unable to find success even with the consistent AB being handed to him, there will be a point when the Indians simply cut ties with him or relegate him to the role of a wildly overpaid RH bat off of the bench until his contract expires.

That day may not be coming as soon as some would hope, but make no mistake…it is coming.