While listening to the call of the grounder going right through the wickets formerly known as Louie V (call him Louie Wickets) and the subsequent HR by Adam Lind, I could only shake my head and say to myself, "ah…2010 Indians' baseball." Losing them this way, losing them that way – it's going to be coming at us from all directions this year, so we might as well grab a drink and do something that is always a good idea when drinking – throw some tomahawks…

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Back in 2007, when The Fist of Iron and the Fist of Steel resided the Indians' bullpen (don't ever call them Raffy Left, etc. unless you're devoid of an ounce of originality), another nickname for the left-handed portion of the Fists once made the rounds. Rafael Perez was known (perhaps only to me) as The Scarecrow, with some hack even writing that "with his tall, slender build, long arms and legs always akimbo, and his hat pulled down low, it always remind me of a Scarecrow on the mound when Perez goes into his wind-up as Perez guards a Tribe lead like any good Scarecrow guards a field."

While I'm not sure how the Wicked Witch of the West appeared on the North Coast, it would seem that The Scarecrow has been exposed to fire and, with his propensity to carry a gasoline can in from the bullpen with him these days, the straw is dwindling before our very eyes.

You know the ugliness (7.36 ERA, 2.87 WHIP, 1.146 OPS against in 2010) and you know that the situation hasn't improved from his nightmarish 2009 season (7.31 ERA, 1.90 WHIP, .899 OPS against) , to the point that his earned run total since the beginning of the 2009 season exceeds his strikeout total.

Think about that – Perez has allowed more earned runs (45) in his last 64 games than he has struck people out (37)…yes, more ER than K from the beginning of 2009 to today. Long gone is the dominant reliever who, from 2006 to 2008 posted a 2.89 ERA with a 1.08 WHIP, striking out more than a hitter per inning pitched. Despite the positive reports from the Winter (why is this a theme?) and the intimation that he was pitching so well in Winter League ball that they might consider making him a starter again at some point, the train has gone off of the tracks and (given the nature of relief pitchers) is unlikely to find itself back on them.

What is to be done with Rafael Perez, one of the poster children for how things can fall so far, so quickly for Indians' players over the past 3 years?

Unless the Indians REALLY think that he's still a reclamation project (he isn't) and because he's out of options, the only choice that the Indians have is to outright him off of the 25-man roster, expose him to the waiver wire, and hope that he clears so he can be sent down to the Minors. Whether a trip to the Minors will benefit him at this point is anyone's guess (as is the notion that some team will look past the last year and a half of his performance and claim him), but the Indians have zero confidence in Perez (and rightfully so) and should start moving some pieces and parts around in the bullpen to see if they can find, ironically enough, what they did in Perez in 2006 – a modest pitching prospect who can effectively contribute for a couple of years in the bullpen.

Is that guy Josh Tomlin or Yohan Pino?

Who knows, but the carousel is about to start in the bullpen, with Saul Rivera having an out clause in his contract if he isn't on the MLB roster by May 15th and with Kerry Wood's rehab assignments continuing in earnest.

Given that we have already seen Hector Ambriz come up to replace Joe Smith, and he has looked decent in his brief time with the team, you're about to see that I-71 Shuffle begin amongst the middle relief pitchers to see who can throw up some scoreless innings. Most of the current relievers can lay claim to some success (except The Scarecrow) as Jamey Wright's stranded all 12 stranded runners that he's inherited and Lewis and Laffey have shown promise, if not consistency. Short of anyone not named C.F. Perez (who has given up earned runs in 1 of his 11 outings…you notice the "earned" designation) and Tony Sipp, I'm fine with moving some of these pieces and parts around in the bullpen to see if the Indians can find some of that lightning in a bottle that every other team in MLB seems to find in their crawlspace.

Wherever that lightning is coming from, the Indians shouldn't be reticent to make some moves and the first move needs to be taking The Scarecrow out of the field before the fire spreads.

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This little "prediction" was written at the beginning of April as part of my convoluted "Season Preview" where the crystal ball may have actually had some clarity:

May 22nd vs. Cincinnati Reds

The widespread roster machinations continue as Luis Valbuena, being used increasingly in recent weeks in a platoon with Mark Grudzielanek at 2B, is sent to Columbus after failing to get to three groundballs induced by Jake Westbrook in a 7-4 loss to the Reds. After the game, manager Manny Acta proclaims that, "with as many groundball pitchers as we have on this staff, failing to get to those balls is inexcusable and Luis knows better than that". To replace him at 2B, Jason Donald is called up as he is scorching AAA pitching for Columbus while providing stellar infield defense for the Clippers. Donald begins to play everyday for the Indians at 2B after his call-up, posting average numbers at the plate but combining with Asdrubal Cabrera to provide an airtight middle of the infield defense that improves the "luck" of the groundball starters dramatically. The move of Valbuena to AAA and Donald to MLB is one that will remain

in place until Valbuena ascends after rosters expand in September as he prepares to assume his role as Future Utility Infielder with Donald using the opportunity in 2010 to cement his place as the Indians' 2B.

Maybe the quote wasn't there from Acta after Wednesday's debacle and I'm not sure that you make a move simply because of one play (Louis V had the double in the 8th to make it a 2-run game), but this move is coming and it is not far off…

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While I'm not one to subscribe to the notion that one can't drink clear liquor from Labor Day to Memorial Day, I often find that my preferences in beer do vary wildly by the season. That is, a light wheat beer certainly doesn't play as well against the Winter wind the way that a hearty stout does…and vice versa. Call it Drinking by Season, or whatever you want to, but the fact that most beer labels have developed a full "seasonal" line lends some credence to this idea. Of course, the High Life remains in steady rotation throughout, but the idea that I like to hang with a particular beer for a season is a practice that I find to be more than enjoyable.

That being said, with Memorial Day (and Carlos Santana) fast approaching, it's time to start narrowing down the Beer of the Summer for 2010. Realizing that some past winners (312 by Goose Island, Blonde Bombshell by Indigo Imp, Pale Ale by Bell's) are not eligible for inclusion in the running, it's time to ask for some suggestions.

Generally, the rules are that I won't go with a seasonal offering from a brewery because of the variance that will go from year to year (Christmas Ale, 2009 – Tremendous; Christmas Ale 2010 – Not So Much) and don't even THINK about including a beer brewed by a large brewery (even if it is done in an underhanded way, like Blue Moon is) or anything that is coming out of a certain Boston brewery as I have my feelings about Boston that prevent me from drinking anything brewed there.

The leader in the clubhouse is another Bell's Brewery offering, Third Coast Beer, that I just had at the local Winking Lizard (though I have yet to find it on the shelves anywhere) and I've ruled out Holy Moses from GLBC because of the fruitiness. Also, all of the Dogfish Head IPA's have been ruled out due to the way my head feels the next day after drinking more than 3 or 4…same with Stone's Levitation Ale. I like the Southern Tier Phin & Matt's (plus, I've been to that brewery), though I can't find that on the shelves anywhere either…which is another prerequisite.

So, let's hear it…if I'm going to be watching this Indians' team all summer I'm going to need to be sufficiently lubricated to do so.

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While it was written a while ago, I thought that the recent uptick in Lou Marson's performance (his OPS over the last 6 games that he has started is 1.049) merited a mention for a piece by Ken Rosenthal
as he explained why the A's Kurt Suzuki won't end up in Boston:

So, why won't Suzuki be in Boston by July 31?

Because A's general manager Billy Beane would want an even better package for Suzuki, who is under club control for three-plus seasons, than the Red Sox traded for Victor Martinez, who was under control for one-plus.

The Sox parted with pitchers Justin Masterson, Nick Hagadone and Bryan Price for Martinez, and they actually had leverage over the Indians, who needed to clear payroll.

They would possess no such leverage over the A's.

Suzuki is a better all-around player and more valuable asset than Martinez was last July. The A's are capable of carrying him through his early years of arbitration. At least for the moment, they lead the AL West.

The Red Sox will need to target other catchers.

Lots of little nuggets in those 129 words, what with the "leverage over the Indians, who needed to clear payroll", that the Indians are looking to move Vic to 1B (where he is decidedly less valuable, if you remember), right down to the idea that the "Red Sox will need to target other catchers". Also interesting that the rest of the piece focuses on Steve Strasburg being in the Minors because of Super 2 concerns, which brings us back to the idea that the Indians may be sitting on some MLB catching depth in June because of the imminent arrival of Carlos Santana, who will ostensibly relegate Marson to AAA.

Just to take this a step further, on March 23rd of last year, Nick Cafardo wrote this in a story about the Red Sox looking for a defensively-minded young catcher
:

The Phillies have been talking to the Sox about prospect Lou Marson, but the price tag seems to be Buchholz or Daniel Bard and the Sox aren't going there.

Starting to connect the dots?

While the idea that the Phillies' price tag was Buchholz or Bard (putting Marson's value prior to the 2009 season into context, but also perhaps the reason that Marson was included in the Lee deal), wouldn't it stand to reason that Marson would remain on the Red Sox radar?

The price tag probably would come down precipitously, but don't be surprised in Marson is the latest in a suddenly long line of catchers to make their way from Cleveland to Boston (Bard, Victor) or vice versa (Shoppach).

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Speaking of Boston, momentum is growing in Beantown for the Red Sox to limit the playing time or even cut ties with a rapidly declining Big Papi, for reasons laid out here by Craig Calcaterra , if you're not aware of the situation.

In hearing this (the idea that the Red Sox should SERIOUSLY consider getting rid of Ortiz), I thought it would be interesting to lay down some numbers:

David Ortiz – 2010
.171 BA / .266 OBP / .414 SLG / .680 OPS with 5 2B and 4 HR in 79 plate appearances

Travis Hafner – 2010
.213 BA / .310 OBP / .363 SLG / .692 OPS with 3 2B and 3 HR in 97 plate appearances

David Ortiz – 2009
.238 BA / .332 OBP / .462 SLG / .794 OPS with 35 2B and 28 HR in 627 plate appearances

Travis Hafner – 2009
.272 BA / .355 OBP / .470 SLG / .826 OPS with 19 2B and 16 HR in 338 plate appearances

David Ortiz
Owed $12.5M in 2010 with $12.5M club option for 2011 (no buyout)

Travis Hafner
Owed $11.5M in 2010, $13M in 2011, $13M in 2012 with $13M club option for 2013 ($2.75M buyout)

Lest you think that this path being suggested for the Red Sox (that they're unlikely to follow) applies to the Indians' similar struggles with their rapidly declining DH, that would be $12.5M still owed to Ortiz and $40.25M still owed to Hafner, counting this year in both cases. Hafner's here, for better or worse, for the next couple of years (at least), which is why the company line is toed so often in that he's going to return. GM-in-waiting Chris Antonetti recently said this to AC :

The primary issue is just getting him going. He still has all the ingredients of what we saw at the end of Spring Training. He was certainly locked in for a couple weeks, and we just need to get him back to that point. It's still really early in the season, and there's a lot of time to get him on track.

They're still optimistic because they NEED to be optimistic. Whether they truly believe that a successful Hafner is somewhere in there, just waiting to break out is a completely different story.

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Finally, a quick reminder that I'll be up in the Tribe Social Deck for the Friday night game, so if you're a glutton for punishment like I am (or aren't aware that the Cavs are playing at 7 PM on Friday as well), pop your head in to say hello.