Remember a couple of weeks ago, when the Indians took 2 of 3 from Kansas City and it was thought (prematurely, I might add) that they might be able to fatten up on some of the bottom-feeders of MLB prior to the team heading off for the Bronx?

From that time, the team has gone 4-9 (and that includes taking 2 of 3 in Baltimore) against the Orioles, Royals, Rays, Reds, and White Sox, lost their starting SS for 2 months, their starting CF for who knows how long (more on that in a minute), and are about to head to Yankee Stadium for a 4-game set.

All told, things are not looking good for the Erie Warriors and brighter days don't look to be on the horizon…and with the events of the last week firmly establishing the Indians' current place in the MLB pecking order (and it's not looking down at anyone), let's get those Tomahawks in the air…

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In case you haven't noticed (and The DiaTot has, when he asks me every morning how Grady's knee is feeling), the cloak-and-dagger culture around Indians' injuries continues as most indications are that Sizemore's "knee injury" could be something much larger and could have been something that's been lingering since the beginning of the season.

Leading off, we'll go to the essential source for all things Indians, Mr. Anthony Castrovince : *Grady Sizemore has consulted with the Indians' team doctors regarding the left knee injury that has landed him on the 15-day disabled list. This week, he's getting a second opinion. And a third.*

Sizemore is visiting doctors in Vail, Colo., and New York this week to determine the best course of action with regard to treatment of the deep bone bruise he suffered in the knee. Head athletic trainer Lonnie Soloff told reporters last week that surgical intervention is a possibility.

The Indians are mum on how long they expect to be without Sizemore's services, though obviously his timetable is directly tied to whether or not he has the surgery.

When this new information hit, the immediate comparison was made nationally to the situation currently underway in Queens with their shelved CF, Carlos Beltran. Looking a little further into this, it's easy to see why as here's an excerpt from a story from the New York Daily News earlier this month in which Beltran talks about the surgery that took place in mid-January:
Since his January arthroscopic surgery on the troublesome right knee, the date for Beltran to begin running has been pushed back several times. Unable to do certain rehab exercises without severe pain, Beltran visited Dr. Richard Steadman - the Vail, Colo., physician who performed his January procedure - on April 20.
--snip--
"(Steadman) said the bone bruise in the tibia was the same (right below his right kneecap). He said that was the (bruise) causing me to feel that pain. And I probably will need to play with (the brace) until my knee recuperates from everything. If I feel comfortable and I feel like it doesn't harm my knee - it will be good protection, probably."

Everyone notice where Sizemore is getting tests this week?
Now do you notice where Beltran had the surgery in January?
Everyone notice the use of the word "bruise" in the context of impending surgery for both?

This may be a shot in the dark, but I don't think that Sizemore being in Vail with a "bruise" that could require surgery after Beltran had surgery in Vail because a "bruise" caused him to feel pain is any coincidence. Maybe the team is just covering all of the bases on this one, but since we're talking about the Indians and injuries, here's the math on the worst-case scenario – Beltran had the surgery in January and is **still not able to run on the knee 4 months later**…see where I'm going here if Sizemore's visiting the same doctor?

To go even further on this, Sweet Pete Gammons provides more information in the context of a piece as to how Miggy Cabrera and Grady have taken disparate paths in the past few years:
Diving back into the first-base bag, he severely damaged his kneecap, and there is question precisely what is the extent of the damage. If, as some fear, there is serious cartilage damage, Sizemore could be out for the season, this after a star-crossed 2009 in which he was limited to 109 games and ended up having operations on his left elbow and for a hernia.
--snip--
But back in April, Sizemore hurt that left knee diving back into second base. Doctors assured him that there was no structural damage, so Grady went right back to flying around center field. He didn't complain that he wasn't at full strength when the season opened and that the knee was bothering him. He thus was hitting .211 with 35 strikeouts and nine walks in 33 games.

See that part that Gammons mentions about the kneecap, the same place that Beltran

identifies as where his "bruise" was?

I'm not sure if all of this news makes me feel better or worse about the future of Grady Sizemore, given that it would certainly explain his dreadful start and debunks the notion that his talent had simply left him, but it also means that Grady (as we once knew him) may be a long way off from ever returning to form…if that happens at all.

Perhaps it's the Clevelander in me, but I'm just gripping for the worst, that he's out for the season and that they "hope" that the surgery solves things so he's ready for 2011. If that were to happen, let's hope that the Sizemore knee doesn't join the Hafner shoulder in body parts that make the early-to-mid-2010s painful for more than just said injured players.

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We're now a week away from the beginning of June, which has been pointed to all year as the timeframe for Carlos Santana's promotion to the parent club. While Lou Marson has improved as of late, it has been known that Santana would be promoted once his service clock was managed to give the Indians an extra year of control of him. Thus, the announcement is coming soon that Marson will give way to Santana and while the "Chuck Norris is scared of 'Los Santana" sites may not pop-up en masse, it should generate a little bit of buzz (and improvement) for a team in need of both.

Maybe I'm just getting antsy waiting for the move, but I have a feeling that the Marson-Santana swap-out isn't the only move that's going to be made by the club in the next week or two. While it's easy to say "Trade X" or "Fire Y" or "Get a New Owner" (because that's the tenor on the North Coast, at least among Indians "fans"), here are the realistic moves that are likely to be made:

Masterson to AAA, Laffey to rotation

Since the idea that Masterson could end up in the bullpen (and the first two months has done nothing to change that), it may be finally time to pull the plug on the Justin-as-starter experiment and send him down to AAA (he has two options remaining) to clear his head, tweak whatever has gone wrong in his delivery, and get him accustomed (once again) to pitching out of the bullpen. I suppose the Indians could just slide Masterson into the Indians' bullpen, but watching him over the last few weeks, it's obvious that there are mechanical issues that need to be fixed, and those repairs are better suited for Columbus. Don't get me wrong, Masterson still projects as the nasty back-end-of-the-bullpen arm that he was in Boston, it just looks more like he could be a match-up/Jeff Nelson type reliever, where the Indians will have to pick their spots to limit his exposure to LH hitters.

As for the corresponding move, while I'd be more inclined to leave Laffey in the bullpen given the way he's pitched to date as a reliever (while he's eating up innings) and given the…um, still-unsettled situation in the rotation (read: Huff, Dave), there should be a point when Laffey is given an opportunity to seize in the rotation and this would represent a time as good as any. Certainly, a case could be made for 'Los Carrasco to essentially see what he's able to contribute at the MLB level, there's a very good possibility that Huff is not far off from a trip to Columbus himself, meaning that Carrasco would be the next man in line for a shot at the rotation.

Sizemore to 60-day DL, opening up a 40-man roster spot for a utility IF, Louie the Fifth to AAA

As noted above, I'm just fearing the worst on this and am already conceding that Sizemore is about to join Cabrera on the 60-day DL. If that happens, the Indians should use the open roster spot to promote a Utility IF from Columbus (and really, I don't care who that is) so the Indians can send Valbuena to Columbus for the everyday AB that he needs. With the injury to Cabrera, this demotion likely was put off for Louie, but if the Indians are going to continue to use him in a quasi-utility role, with Donald at SS and Grudzielanek at 2B, it would benefit Valbuena to get down to Columbus in an attempt to recapture the momentum that his career had.

By no means has Valbuena earned the right to play regularly at 2B in the early going, and perhaps he ultimately projects as that utility IF for the Indians, but to slot him into that role now, where he's suffering through every AB for the parent club is hindering his development.

Rafael Perez to DFA-land, promotion of Frank Herrmann to bullpen

Having worn my arm down banging this drum, I think that the tipping point for Perez is not far off where the Indians decide to cut ties with him and give another organizational arm a shot. Sure, the case could be made for Jensen Lewis (2.08 ERA, 1.15 WHIP, 9 K, 1 BB in 8 2/3 IP in Columbus) or, to a lesser degree, Joe Smith (3.09 ERA, 1.46 WHIP, 11 K, 6 BB in 11 2/3 IP in Columbus) as both are on the 40-man roster, as is Jess Todd (3.80 ERA, 1.36 WHIP, 25 K, 4 BB in 21 1/3 IP in Columbus) and all of them have had a taste (or more) of MLB hitters.

However, if Perez's DFA (and it's going to happen) opens up a roster spot, why not give it to a player who, like Perez, is a former starter in the Minors who has thrived since his move to the bullpen, particularly this year. To date, Herrmann has a 0.37 ERA, a 0.90 WHIP with 17 K and 7 BB in 24 1/3 IP and while he may not boast the gaudy K numbers that a guy like Ambriz did in Columbus (Ambriz struck out 15 hitters in 8 IP while a member of the Clippers), there has to be something said for the Indians trying to find lightning-in-a-bottle when it comes to identifying potential relievers going forward and riding the hot hand (which Herrmann currently possesses) is certainly a strategy that has worked for them in the past, as it did in 2007 with the aforementioned Jenny Lewis and Rafael Perez.

Will Herrmann come in and prove himself to be a viable reliever?
Who knows, but there's going to be plenty of opportunities when Masterson potentially comes to Columbus for a bit (and that may happen before a Perez DFA), Jamey Wright finds his way off of the roster or when Kerry Wood is traded, much less when injuries or ineffectiveness hit one of these relievers who retain options, so Todd and Lewis and Smiff will all get their chance again once more to lay claim to a bullpen spot past 2010…and really, that's what this season is all about at this point.

Regardless of whether these exact moves occur, expect a lot of movement in the next couple of weeks as the roster will start to take shape to set up the trades that are coming, but also to set up the 25-man roster for the second half of the season

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Speaking of the "trades that are coming", while it would seem that the Indians have an obvious in-house replacement for many of the veterans that figure to be moved this summer, there does seem to be one exception:
1B – Branyan to LaPorta
2B – Grudzielanek to Donald/Valbuena (when Cabrera returns)
LF – Kearns to Brantley (depending upon Grady's health)
SP – Westbrook to Carrasco, Laffey, Tomlin, Pino, maybe even Rondon
CL – Wood to Perez/Sipp/Masterson
3B – Peralta to…Marte? Louie the Fifth?

Seriously, while a compelling case can be made for replacements for 1B, 2B, LF, the rotation, and the back-end of the bullpen, the obvious replacement for the day when (not if) Peralta is moved isn't apparent.

What are the options?
Well, there's Marte (more on him in a moment), but the guys who have played 3B in Columbus this year are…wait for it…Brian Bixler, Brian Buscher, Chris Gimenez, and Jerad Head. With Wes Hodges a full-time 1B now and with The Chiz on the shelf in AA (non-prospects Jared Goedert and Josh Rodriguez have filled in for him), any one have any better ideas?

Certainly, Marte's name is in the mix, although even the public comments on Marte are less than glowing and the Indians certainly seem resigned to the fact that Marte is not much more than a RH bat off of the bench. In fact, it will be interesting to see how Marte is handled once he returns from the DL as Kearns isn't going anywhere (for now) and the Indians may need to keep Shelley Duncan around as a backup corner outfielder if Sizemore's injury is serious.

Regardless, I don't think that the organization is sold on Marte (fair or not) even as a stop-gap and I wouldn't be surprised if June and July includes some deals for players in other organization may need a change of scenery and a long leash to see if their potential can come to any sort of fruition.

With that in mind, what about 25-year-old 3B Brandon Wood, who may be on the outs in Southern California ?
Yes, he's been terrible this season for the Angels…
Yes, he's out of options and actually just hit the DL with a hip flexor, which buys the Angels a little more time on him, given that he'll go out on a rehab start…

However, Wood was a Top-20 prospect for 3 straight years and the Angels don't seem too likely to give him a full year of AB to see if that potential can be realized. Perhaps this is akin to nothing more than giving Andy Marte another look, but Wood dominated at AAA (cumulative OPS of .902, hitting more than 20 HR in fewer than 120 games each year) while being blocked by Chone Figgins in Anaheim for the last couple of years and the Indians are in need of a bridge between Peralta and Chisenhall…so why not Wood?

Wood certainly seems to fit that profile of a player needing a fresh start and the Indians may be the team to give Wood the opportunity to get consistent AB at 3B to see if he can be much

more than a can't-miss prospect that missed.

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The roster machinations are about to start in earnest and, while some are going to equate them to re-arranging deck chairs on the Titanic, the moves are going to start coming that set this team up for 2011 and beyond.

Some of those moves are going to make 2010 even less palatable than it already is, but the time to start separating the wheat from the chaff in terms of the prospects that have been acquired in the past two years, as well as the ones developed by the Indians, has come. Finally, "service clocks" fade into the distance and the roster should start resembling the way it's supposed to look going into the future instead of resembling this land in-between hell and limbo.