On a Sunday in which the All-Star rosters are announced and some other prolonged nonsense is occurring on the Cleveland sports scene, let's get going right off the bat to talk about the fact that The BLC (the assumed All-Star Rep for the Indians prior to today) is off to the DL, where he's likely to stay for 6 to 8 weeks. Just doing some quick math, that would put Choo's return sometime in late August or September as the Indians are about to spend the rest of the month of July without the three players who projected as their best players (Sizemore, Cabrera, and Choo) going into the season. While Choo's injury is certainly unfortunate, as the offense had finally started to show prolonged signs of life with a Choo-Santana-Hafner middle of the order with other pieces complementing that mix (mainly LaPorta since his recall), the Indians ready themselves for more time without a key component to their team.

If there was any thought that everything (and I do mean EVERYTHING) had to go perfectly for this team to sniff contention and get a look at .500, the injuries to Sizemore, Cabrera, and Choo just provide another sobering realization that the Indians are quite a bit away from being able to absorb the loss of one of those players, much less all three.

In Choo's place, Mike Brantley returns to the North Coast with the assumption that Kearns would move to RF, Crow would move to LF, and Brantely will assume the CF spot and presumably the leadoff spot. While that may look to be optimistic in terms of putting Brantley right back into the mix at the top of the order after his struggles earlier this season with the parent club, he's just replacing Trevor Crowe (who I think stays in the everyday lineup, just further down it) and his .306 OBP (with a .280 OBP in his last 20 games from the leadoff spot)...so yeah, why not?

One aspect of the Brantley call-up that bears watching is where he plays as it could be telling in terms of where Grady Sizemore's eventual position will be. Most indications are that Brantley will be playing CF, which could mean that the Indians see Brantley-CF, Sizemore-LF as the alignment for 2011 and beyond. While any intimation that Sizemore wouldn't automatically return to CF could be seen as heresy in some parts, the assumption that Sizemore will come back from a very serious knee surgery in the same shape as he was before it shouldn't be taken for granted.

Thus, where Brantley spends most of his time through the 2010 season in the field could provide som clues as to what the Indians realistically expect from Sizemore in the OF after his surgery. That may be overanalyzing it, but you would imagine that the Indians would want to get Brantley as much experience as possible in the outfield of Carnegie and Ontario in what is assumed to be his permanent position for the next 6 years or so.

As for Choo's injury preventing him from being the All-Star Rep for the Tribe, my esteemed TCF colleague Steve Buffum (as usual) nails the case for the player who was all but certain to be the lone Indians' All-Star representative as he lays out the case for The BLC to be included on the All-Star roster for 2010.

Truthfully, I'm of the mind that the All-Star game selection process and inclusion /exclusion of certain players simply doesn't really interest me. Like Buffum, maybe I would have stayed up to watch Choo hit once and go to bed, so if you care about the All-Star Game, bully for you as there's going to be a waterfall of pieces coming at you on "who made it who shouldn't have" and "who got screwed the worst". For me, it's a three day break from baseball that I care about, so…no, I'm not a fan of it.
As for who makes it instead of Choo…sorry it just doesn't interest me that much.

Back to the news of Choo hitting the DL coming after the Indians have won 6 of their last 7, some will take the injury as a sign that "just as the Indians were getting some momentum…this happens". While that may be true to some extent and certainly the last week has been much more enjoyable to watch and follow than the previous three months, isn't there something to seeing a lost season go deeper into the wilderness?

My first reaction when I heard that Choo was out for 6 to 8 weeks was not one of anger, more one of resignation, as in "well, if this is going to happen…this might as well be the season for it". It's not going to make the next two months that much more compelling to watch, but the Indians now have ANOTHER opportunity for a young player to establish himself in MLB with consistent AB. Seeing as how the Indians know what they have in Choo, why not keep the conveyer belt going to the parent club to find out as much as possible about as many players as possible in 2010?

It's an interesting concept in the context of a Tim Marchman piece in SI.com as he relates the idea that the early success of the Padres and Blue Jays, conveying that the teams winning in the beginning of the 2010 season may not necessarily be the best thing for both of those franchises, who are in need of a continued overhaul:
There is always a broader picture, and playing to win today is not always the same thing as playing to win. This is generally understood in baseball, a sport where executives will in certain circumstances privately admit to being more interested in high draft picks than in fielding their best team.
--snip--
Winning is of course a good thing, the best thing, and no real fan or real ballplayer is ever going to care a whit for the carefully laid schemes of executives when weighed against the prospect of their team not embarrassing itself...A win now is not the same as a win when it counts.

That's not brought up to intimate that this feeling of rock-bottom that pervaded every thought in the first couple of months of the season is preferable to the excitement that some in San Diego and Toronto (though the turnstiles there don't suggest that the excitement is translating to attendance as each ranks in the lower third of MLB attendance, both DOWN from last year's average attendance number), nor is it to suggest that this tear-it-down then build-it-back-up mentality is the most prudent path to take every 5 years or so, as the answer to that is coming in the...well, next 5 years or so.

Rather, it raises an interesting question that needs to be asked to all of MLB, less about 6 to 8 teams, which would be – is it better to muddle along in a middling sense, trying to hit 82 wins every year on a nice even plane, hoping to get lucky and sneak into the playoffs once a decade or is it better to ride the roller coaster and hope that the peaks of the hills are high enough that they take the sharp edges off the depths of the valleys?

As frustrating even as the down years were in the late-2000's and as soul-crushing as the horrific starts were, let's not forget that the "down" years of the late-2000's were actually instrumental in some of the bright spots that we've seen over the last few years and are seeing today in terms of young players.

Not following me?
Well, the 2006 "issues" that undermined the momentum from the 2005 push ultimately brought Choo and Cabrera in for Benuardo and that the 2008 "struggles" that likely deep-sixed the idea that 2007 was ever happening anytime soon brought Santana in for Casey Blake.

Anybody miss Benuardo or Lacey Cake, players who almost certainly would have stayed on the roster through the 2006 and 2008 season if things had gone according to "The Plan" and the Indians had contended throughout?

Sure, the CC deal is one that certainly turned the knife a little, but the last week has seen the Matt LaPorta that we all thought we were getting back in 2008. After hitting just 5 XBH in his first stint with the Tribe over 131 PA, LaPorta has 4 in the 28 PA that he's accumulated since returning en route to a 1.189 OPS (small sample siren) since his return.

As horrifying as 2006 and 2008 were, where would this team be without Choo and Santana and Cabrera and (perhaps) LaPorta and Brantley?

Certainly that, if nothing else, is a stunning indictment of the teams' inability to generate the type of players who should be arriving WITH the likes of Choo and Santana and LaPorta instead of playing bit parts like Trevor Crowe is, but some good can come from these completely lost seasons and we're going to see more of the fruit from the seeds sown during the 2006 and 2008 trainwrecks. What the seeds of the 2010 abomination will bear won't be known for quite a while, but the Indians certainly have mastered the "lows of the low" rather than walking that line of mediocrity.

As a quick aside here in light of some intimations that the Dodgers should consider trading Matt Kemp because of his regressions

this year and his clashing with Joe Torre, does anyone remember this report back in the summer of 2006 about Los Angeles' owner Frank McCourt nixing a deal that would have sent Sabathia, Blake, and Carroll to the Dodgers for a package of players:

Shortly after the Milwaukee Brewers finalized a trade for reigning American League Cy Young Award winner CC Sabathia on Monday, the Daily News learned that sometime in the days leading up to that deal, ***Dodgers owner Frank McCourt nixed a trade that would have brought Sabathia to Los Angeles, along with Indians third baseman Casey Blake and utility man Jamey Carroll*** *.*

--snip--

The Indians are looking to fill several holes for the future, with a corner outfielder believed to be high on their wish list. That probably means power-hitting Matt Kemp, arguably the Dodgers' hottest commodity as the July 31 non-waiver trading deadline nears, would have been included in the deal.

It also is unclear whether the Indians would have been willing to pay a portion of the salaries of the players the Dodgers would have been acquiring. If not, the trade presumably would have pushed the Dodgers' payroll to somewhere between $125 and $130 million.

In case you clicked on the link, you'll notice that the link is to a forum as it looks like the original piece is not in the archives of the paper in which it originally appeared. Nevertheless, have you noticed where Blake and Carroll are currently drawing paychecks (it's Chavez Ravine...if you didn't know) and did you catch the part about "whether the Indians would have been willing to pay a portion of the salaries of the players the Dodgers would have been acquiring" as the Indians DID pay all of the remaining money on Blake's deal to net Santana and the already-forgotten Bones Meloan.

What could that haul have meant?

Obviously, this is all conjecture (even on the part of the original writer), but Kemp, Santana, and one of their young starters like James McDonald or Scott Elbert (both of whom have struggled to date in MLB) or a young infielder like Blake DeWitt or Chin-lung Hu (both of whom have also struggled to date in MLB) could have certainly been an agreed-upon deal.

Ultimately, it was nixed by Frank McCourt so that answer remains out in the air somewhere…

What is interesting about that bit of conjecture in hindsight is to look at all of the pieces being written about Cliff Lee's perceived value as he now is in the same place that Sabathia was in 2008, where his acquiring team is renting Lee for only a few months with draft picks likely to come their way when (not if) CP Lee dons the pinstripes in 2011.

To wit, check out what Sweet Pete Gammons had to say on the topic of Lee's current trade value:

But before you start to thinking about the Mariners getting the equivalent of what the Indians stole from the Expos (Lee, Grady Sizemore, Brandon Phillips) for Bartolo Colon, consider what Lee brought the Indians and Phillies. After he won the Cy Young Award. And had a favorable contract.

The Indians traded Lee to the then-reigning World Series champion Phillies for Jason Donald, Lou Marson, Carlos Carrasco and Jason Knapp. Donald has done a creditable job as a utility infielder, hitting .254, with promise. Catcher Lou Marson has been a disappointment, hitting .191; he is better than that, but now Carlos Santana is in town, and Santana is a franchise player. Carrasco is 6-3 in Columbus but has yet to prove he can pitch in the Major Leagues, while Jason Knapp is working to get healthy and is 2-7 in low A ball.
That, from a big market team with a fabulous fan base that thought it could win it all again.
Then when the Phillies traded away top prospects for Roy Halladay and were told that it would take CC Sabathia money to extend Lee, they moved him to Seattle for Phillippe Aumont, J.C. Ramirez and Tyson Gillies. Aumont was demoted to A ball and has a 7.01 ERA, Ramirez is at Double-A and has a 4.31 ERA on the year, while Gillies is hitting .238 in Double-A.

Gammons then goes on to list all of the young players who will NOT be traded for Lee, saying that "those deals are hard to come by in today's economy, with what some traditionalists feel is an overinflated worth of young, low-salaried players."

Of course, the Indians' third annual "Sale of Everything That Isn't Nailed Down" doesn't coincide favorably with this "overinflated worth of young, low-salaried players", but the Indians' returns even since 2008 (Santana, LaPorta, Masterson, C. Perez, Talbot, Donald, Brantley, Hagadone, Price, Todd, Carrasco, Marson, Barnes, Bryson, etc.) surely don't embarrass.

Moving on (and as long as we're talking that third annual sale), here are a couple of nuggets from John Perrotto at B-Pro
having to do with the possible comings and goings of the next few weeks:
Indians right-hander Jake Westbrook is drawing increased trade interest with the Cardinals reportedly at the top of the list. … The Indians are also likely to call up Michael Brantley from Triple-A Columbus and install him as their center fielder and leadoff hitter no later than right after the All-Star break.

Since Brantley's already on his way to Cleveland…Westbrook to the Cardinals, eh?
You think they have any other hard-throwing relievers they'd be willing to part with?
Lord knows the Indians are familiar with the arms in the system as they chose Jess Todd as the PTBNL last year, allegedly passing on Francisco Samuel. If the Indians eat the remainder of Jake's deal, is it still too greedy to look at Eduardo Sanchez ?

While Terry Pluto reports that the Indians are looking for a "compelling trade" to move him , how about the Indians realizing that the compelling fact that Westbrook isn't likely to be pitching for the Indians next year and some of the pitchers who could be taking his starts for the last 2 months DO figure into the future?

Perhaps the Indians are serious about approaching Westbrook about re-signing with the team for 2011 and maybe longer, but him pitching in St. Louis (or wherever) for two months isn't going to change that possibility too profoundly. "Compelling" would be the idea that the Indians need to find out what they can about Carlos Carrasco in MLB, among others, and that Westbrook could net them a lottery ticket of a prospect, something that the organization has had success with in recent years.

For more perspective on what the next 27 days looks like for the Tribe, Jon Heymann files his report thusly :
They have been busy sellers the past couple years, as they are one small-market team that understands the need to retool, and they have two viable starters in Fausto Carmona (7-6, 3.68 ERA) and Jake Westbrook (5-4, 4.69) to shop this time. They are said to want to keep outfielder Shin-Soo Choo, young catcher Carlos Santana (of course) and a few of their younger pitchers, but there could be decent activity around them again. Carmona especially looks like a decent fall-back option for the teams that can't get Lee.

Carmona's name keeps popping up in all of this innuendo, but I'll take the word of AC on this when he wrote
that "the Tribe isn't going to move Fausto Carmona (contrary to rumor and speculation)" to settle my nerves on that one.

Apropos of absolutely nothing, how about Arizona GM Josh Byrnes being fired (with Jeff Passan of Yahoo having a great piece on Byrnes' ouster) in Arizona?

Not sure if anyone remembers this, but Byrnes cut his teeth, among others (and this is a must-click link
), in the Indians' organization and since most indications are that he won't be without a job for long (and that could mean he goes back to Boston), how about the idea that he could return to his "roots" and re-join the Tribe Front Office.

Finally, as we all settle in for some cold drinks at the barbecue before watching the night sky light up with fireworks, here's a bit of info that you can take to any Independence Day function and stop any sports fan dead in their tracks. It comes from Craig Calcaterra at HBT , who is relaying a
Darren Rovell report from CNBC on the Yankees' revenue in 2009
. There are too many punches to the stomach (like the fact that "the Yankees' postseason ticket revenue alone brought in enough money to cover the payroll for 12 Major League teams this year") to count, but if we're staying with the beatdown/bully analogy, here's the set-up...
Rovell goes on to report that the Yankees are suspected to take in about $600 million. Even with a $200 million payroll, a luxury tax of $25 million and however much they pay in revenue sharing, they're still able -- if they choose to anyway -- buy and sell more or less anyone they want.

...and the haymaker deeper in Rovell's piece:
A baseball insider told CNBC that the Yankees will have sold almost as many seats as they did all of last season by the all-star break.

Lest you forget, Forbes listed the Yankees' revenue as $441M a mere three months ago (the Indians' was $170M) and now the intimation is out there that the Yankees' revenue is closer to $600M and will likely increase as their attendance goes higher. Yep, the Yankees' money-making machine is just getting started once all of the ticket revenue becomes the icing on an already rich cake.

Enjoy a safe Independence Day everybody...