While you attempt to make sense of this Dave Huff/Twitter flap (and let's hope that Huff takes this as his "organizational slap in the face" that turned CP Lee from an off-the-playoff-roster nonfactor to…well, the guy you see today) and keep reading the outrageously insightful pieces on "The Betrayal" and I ponder High Life's re-design and why Schlitz ever went away from their "original formula", let's get going on a Lazy Sunday as I'm packing up the fam in the Family Truckster to hit the game this afternoon at the corner of Carnegie and Ontario.

So as The DiaTot runs laps in the backyard to practice running the bases (though he can't figure out why he won't be able to bring his glove on the field after the game to, you know…field grounders) while I marvel at the lack of Indians-related analysis and the presence of Reds-related analysis in this morning's PD, I'll let you delve into "A Day In the Life" from Castro's Saturday at the ballpark, and not just to read the quote from Carlos Santana after the second win that, "this is the baseball. Today, two game wins. So things are very happy."

This is "the baseball" and "things are very happy" as the Indians have rattled off 3 straight wins coming off of the All-Star break, attempting the 4-game sweep this afternoon, so let's get after it…

With the promise that I'll hit the Wood injury and the latest at the Trading Post, let's start off with Fangraphs' rundown of the Top 50 players in MLB in terms of Trade Value with the criteria being stated thusly:

"Essentially, the idea is to take all the information that goes into encapsulating a player's value to an organization – his present skills, his future potential, how long he's under club control, the expected cost of paying him over that time, and the risks involved with projecting his future

performances – and figure out which players currently have the most trade value in baseball."

Again, just to be clear - we're not talking about the BEST players in baseball today, or the most valuable on the field RIGHT NOW. Rather, it's more of a projection of estimated future value balanced against salary, club control, etc. With that explanation attempted twice, here are a couple of names that you may recognize:

#28 – Shin-Soo Choo, OF, Cleveland

Over the last three years, Choo has posted wOBAs of .402, .389, and .382. He's been consistently above average at every facet of the game, and yet he flies under the radar because his teammates haven't performed up to his level. An thumb injury has derailed his 2010 season, but his long-term future is still very bright. He'd rank higher if he wasn't headed for arbitration with Scott Boras as his agent, making a long term, team friendly deal less likely. Still, the Indians should be able to get three years of reduced rates out of a high-quality player before Boras takes him elsewhere, and every team in baseball would love to have him.

In case you were wondering, Choo is nestled between David Price (#29) and Clayton Kershaw (#27) on the list, and falls below this guy:

#21 – Carlos Santana, C, Cleveland

Of all the good young catchers on this list, Santana is the best. A switch-hitter with power and a tremendous approach at the plate, he projects as a better version of Victor Martinez at the plate, only with much better defensive skills than his predecessor. He's wasted no time in establishing himself as one of the game's best young players, and because he wasn't called up until June, the Indians will control his rights for six more years. The Dodgers will regret trading him for a long, long time.

In this case, The Axe Man comes in just ahead of Pujols (#22) because this list is about FUTURE value based on projected production versus cost and club control and just behind Zack Grienke (#20).

As a quick aside here and just to remind you what still sits on the 40-man roster, if not the 25-man, Sizemore was ranked #12 last year and was #3 in 2008 . Going back to Cameron's USS Mariner days, the 2007 list includes Sizemore at #6 and Hafner (!) at #17 , which of course illustrates how quickly things can change in "the baseball".

Obviously the line on Santana that "because he wasn't called up until June, the Indians will control his rights for six more years" is lost on most fans, but the amount of hand-wringing that has already taken place in terms of Choo's new agent – one Mr. Scott Boras – has been hashed, re-hashed, and hashed over again.

Since Boras's name is suddenly and intrinsically linked to almost everything related to Choo, does everyone know that Choo is not the only Boras client on the Indians? Boras also represents Matt LaPorta, Jason Donald, and (much less importantly) Ant Reyes. Just to go a step further, I'm not sure if you remember this, but back when AC reported that The BLC had switched to Scott Boras, he wrote that , "Top prospect Carlos Santana might be another story. Boras is apparently pursuing him hard. No surprise there, I suppose", prompting me to throw up

in my mouth a little bit.

As if on cue this All-Star Break, there was this little bit about Boras and The Axe Man :
Agent Scott Boras said as far as young hitters go, he puts Tribe catcher Carlos Santana in the same class as Manny Ramirez when he first emerged with the Indians.
"He's had the best at-bats anybody has had against Stephen Strasburg," said Boras, Monday at the All-Star festivities. "He was on every pitch. I don't think he's going to be a catcher for long. He's too good a hitter to keep back there."

Keep in mind, Santana is not a Boras client (to my knowledge), so why is this so relevant?
I'm not sure if you saw Boras' recent comments on Prince Fielder when discussing whether the Brewers and Fielder were anywhere close on a new contract, but here it is :
"When you have a player that performs like Mark Teixeira, you have to look at Prince Fielder's performance in comparison," said Boras. "You want to know the value of a player? Take a look at it."

For the record, Teixiera (another Boras client) signed an 8-year, $180M contract a few years back and with Choo, LaPorta, and Donald in his stable already and Santana perhaps making his way in that direction, the Indians could be seeing quite a bit of Mr. Boras, and these grand statements regarding his clients, in the coming years.

Speaking of Boras and Choo (who might even be back next week) and contracts, do you want something interesting to watch this off-season?
Watch the payroll for 2011 as there will be a LOT of money coming off of the books after the season (or earlier if the Indians can move some of their veterans…but we'll get to that) and where the 2011 payroll number falls in relation to the past 10 years will give a pretty good indication as to how close/far this organization truly thinks it is from contention.

Just to put hard numbers on this, take a look at the cyclical nature of the Indians' payrolls over the last 10 years :
2010: $61,453,967
2009: $81,579,166
2008: $78,970,066
2007: $61,673,267
2006: $56,031,500
2005: $41,502,500
2004: $34,319,300
2003: $48,584,834
2002: $78,909,499
2001: $93,360,000
2000: $76,500,000

This isn't breaking any new ground, but the payroll is going to continue this cycle as it will hit the peak (2001 - $93M payroll) then drop down gradually to the valley (2004 - $34M), building its way back up gradually to the peak (2009 - $81M) before it comes back down. For the foreseeable future, the Indians look to be attempting to move between the $40M and probably

$90M mark as the team matures, depending of course upon success and attendance. In terms of where we currently are in this “cycle”, 2010 ($61M) was probably close to 2003 ($48M) in that it represents the time in which the big contracts from the previous few years are jettisoned as the team goes back to they young, cheap talent that became the backbone of the mid-to-late-2000s made their way to MLB, albeit at the MLB minimum.

So what does the 2011 payroll figure to look like?
Here are the deals on the books that have set prices:
Hafner - $13M
Sizemore - $7.667M
Carmona - $6.288M
On top of those, Peralta will get $250K when the club turns down his $7M club option for 2011.

That’s it...$27.21M that is set for 2011 on the payroll obligations.
Past that, you’re going to have Rafael Perez entering his second year of arbitration eligibility (he is making $795K this year) and there’s the next group that will hit their first year of arbitration eligibility in Choo and Cabrera with the possibility that Chris Perez, Joe Smith, Jensen Lewis, Aaron Laffey, and Andy Marte hit it, depending upon service time. Even if that group past Choo and Cabrera hit arbitration, you’re talking about relief pitchers and an erstwhile 1B/3B that aren’t going to touch anything higher than what Rafael Perez netted in 2010.

See that number above for 2004?
It was $34M and while the payroll for 2011 will be higher than that (22 players to fill out the 25-man past the 3 under contract means at least $10M at MLB minimum added to the aforementioned $27.21M already on the books)…don’t expect it to be by much.

If you’re thinking that the Indians are still looking to cut this payroll to the bone, the obvious question becomes whether the Indians perhaps unload Carmona and the remaining money on his deal. I suppose it is still possible, though most reports from people who would know (and aren’t just mindless speculation) has the Indians holding onto Carmona.

On the topic of Carmona (and others), SI.com’s Jon Heymann has a little run-down of available arms with these three entries holding some interest on the North Coast
:

6. Fausto Carmona, Indians, SP.
All-Star pitcher has had a nice turnaround, from 5-12 with a 6.32 ERA last year to 8-7 with a 3.64 ERA this year. "They like their rotation," said one GM who envisions Cleveland holding on to Carmona. Another noted that the club has three option years for 2012, '13 and '14 on Carmona, and said, "They have to figure they'll be a factor within four years." Probably will stay.
7. Jake Westbrook, Indians, SP.
Solid starter, who missed most of 2008 and all of 2009 while recovering from Tommy John surgery. In the words of one competing GM Westbrook "could be a year away from full strength."
17. Kerry Wood, Indians, RP.
Big salary (what’s left of a $10.5 million salary this year) and small production (1-4, 6.30 ERA, only eight saves) means the Indians would likely have to contribute toward the bottom line. Still,

he does average almost one strikeout per inning and someone might see something.

Nice to see the "probably will stay" with Carmona, but did anyone else notice that this is the second intimation that Westbrook is still not fully back from TJ surgery (remember, Perrotto had it as well) and that it will affect his attractiveness to other teams.

As a quick aside here in the aforementioned Heymann piece, he lists the Royals' Joakim Soria and asserts that "the Royals are usually reluctant to trade off big pieces because they sometimes think they're still in contention even though no one else does", then dealing another body blow with "a trade of Soria would 'surprise,' one competing GM said. 'They do a very good job of believing they're in it every year,' he added."

Say what you will about the Tribe Front Office, "believing that they're in it every year" is not something that they fall prey to and they have Choo, Cabrera, Santana, LaPorta, and Brantley (among others) to show for their self-awareness.

Back to the Trading Post, Wood's trip to the DL obviously will affect his trade value although Buster Olney points out that Wood is more likely to be dealt prior to the August 31st Deadline instead of before the end of July "because he will clear (more) waivers next month, given the $4 million still owed to him for the rest of this season." It was an idea that Olney didn't originate as Anthony Castrovince had a similar thought, pre-injury of course:

…keep in mind that, because of his contract, he has the potential to be dealt all the way up until the end of August. As far as what the Indians would look to accomplish in such a deal, getting salary relief, believe it or not, is not the main objective. The Indians, already operating on a slim payroll, are not looking to move salary but rather to acquire talent and/or open up opportunities for the young kids in-house. I could see them eating all or most of Wood's contract if it means getting young talent back.

While that is certainly marvelous news that the Indians "are not looking to move salary but rather to acquire talent and/or open up opportunities for the young kids in-house" and that they could pick up "most or all of Wood's contract", the timing is obviously not great for Wood's value as he looks to be eligible to come off of the DL just before that July 31st date (that may not be all that applicable to him regardless), although Peter Gammons had this to say about Wood's desirability:

He'll get traded because it's hard not to take a shot with that stuff. He's still throwing 97-98, he doesn't have great results but he's still throwing very hard. I think one issue you want to think about is with Kerry's presence and ego, will he pitch in the seventh inning and how is he going to react? I think someone will take him. I don't know if the Dodgers will give up prospects … but I think that might be a possibility. I think the Cardinals are definitely a possibility.

That came from Gammons prior to this injury, but does anyone else find it strange that the

Dodgers and the Cardinals are the two teams that keep showing up among those are interested in Wood and Westbrook?

Sure the Mets keep floating around the periphery on Jake but, according to Dennis Manoloff of the PD, a Dodgers' scout was in attendance for Friday's game to watch Westbrook (and was also staying to watch Carmona, which I hope will be in vain) to evaluate whether Westbrook can do what Sabathia and Lee were never able to do…make their way to Chavez Ravine when the Dodgers were looking for pitching for their playoff pushes.

While we're in "The Ravine", I know that I seem to be mentioning this far too often, but everyone is aware that the Dodgers traded Carlos Santana for Casey Blake two years ago and Josh Bell for the recently cut reliever George Sherrill (cut less than a year after the deal) last year, with the Dodgers even picking up the remaining $1M on Sherrill's contract last year, right?. It is worth noting that SI recently listed Santana and Bell as "the most important figure for their teams in the 2nd half" …so, can the Indians parlay either Westbrook or Wood (or even both) into some Dodger farmhand (maybe LHP Scott Elbert, for whom some shine has come off of his apple and could benefit from a change in scenery) if they're willing to pick up the salary on either or both?

Regardless of the moves that the Indians make prior to the July 31st Trading Deadline (which is now less than two weeks away), it is very possible that Wood and Westbrook and even Peralta clear through waivers (because of their salaries) and are dealt in August. Here's hoping that the Indians are able to find some new homes for that trio (and Kearns, who is more likely to be dealt in the next two weeks because of his contract) so the youth movement can continue in earnest.

As the last three games have shown, that "youth movement" is inordinately more pleasant to watch as the team is not devoid of talent, just experience, and removing Wood, Westbrook, Peralta, and Kearns from that equation will not make a appreciable difference.

Finally, let us all have a moment of silence for the passing of one James Gammon on this Sunday.
Who is James Gammon?
If I told you that he'd get back to you because he had somebody on the other line about some whitewalls, would that put a lump in your throat?