And…breathe.

While the worst-case scenario was almost assumed to be on the horizon with Carlos' Santana's leg injury on Monday night, as medical terms like "deformation" and "massive leg trauma" were peppered around sports expletives like "Fosse" and "Theismann", it seems that The Axe Man's early prognosis is actually not that bad.

No seriously, knocking on wood and throwing salt over my shoulder, just a day after it looked like Santana's season and even career was in serious doubt (no, I'm not sure that the "career" part is hyperbole), he's headed off to the DL with a "high grade sprain of the LCL in his left knee" . He still has to see a knee specialist at the end of the week and it certainly could require surgery, but the words that actually passed through the lips of Manny Acta in terms of his return were that "the best-case scenario we wanted him back in three days, but the way he looked, we thought it was going to be much worse, so hearing this is a little bit of relief."

They wanted him back in 3 days as a best-case scenario?
Yeah, that's a little more optimistic than my initial "I hope he's ready for Spring Training in 2011" as a best-case scenario reaction, which was obviously echoed by the training staff who was on the scene as Lonnie Soloff said, "all of us feared the worst and you never know what to expect, you fear for potential fractures, ligament injuries inside the knee joint, cartilage issues…At this point with the examinations we have undergone, we are not under any of that, so we feel fortunate."

Maybe this is premature, given the cloak-and-dagger nature of the Indians and the manner in which they report injuries (wildly apropos on a day when Hafner heads to the DL again with shoulder issues), but it would appear that the injury to Santana's knee may need no more than rest and some therapy before he potentially re-enters the Indians' lineup. Of course, the nature

of Santana playing C (and let's hold off on the idea that we should move him out from behind the dish after one play like this…as horrific as it was) does involve some major knee activity, so I'm hoping that the Indians are cautious in terms of easing Santana back into the mix.

It almost goes without saying, but in a lost season in which nothing is really accomplished by Santana coming back (other than to prove to himself that he can come back), the Indians should make sure that Santana's fully healed…and then maybe wait two more weeks, just to make sure that he's REALLY fully healed. While getting Santana back in the lineup would make the lineup much more palatable for the next month (hello Jordan, Jayson, Shelley, Trevor, and Luis), there is no reason to see Santana back in the lineup at any point in 2010 unless (as I said) it involves some mental aspect of allowing him to realizing that he's fully healthy and giving him the confidence in his knee heading into next season.

At this point, Santana has proven that he's a capable MLB hitter and was well on his way to establishing himself as a rising star in the league (yes, even in 192 PA as he posted an .868 in that time, which is the 15th highest OPS in the AL for players with more than 190 PA) and the momentum that he's built up to date should be used to waterfall into the 2011 season much more than it should factor into any consideration of wins and losses for 2010. Obviously, if Santana is able to come back and put some AB under his belt before the 2010 season draws to a welcome conclusion, that should be facilitated, but there should be no accelerated plan for Santana to resume his position in the middle of the Indians' lineup prematurely.

Of course, this could all go wildly in the other direction as news that Santana's knee will go the way of Hafner's shoulder, Miller's finger, and Sizemore's knee is always possible (never discount the worst possible scenario when it comes to the Indians…make that anything in Cleveland sports), but the initial reports certainly don't intimate that the outcome that was almost assumed in the aftermath of the collision is imminent.

For now, other than hoping that Santana's knee continues to pass test after test and that "lingering issues" doesn't become attached to his knee the way that it is inextricably linked to other Indians' body parts, the Indians should simply put Marson in the everyday lineup and cross their collective fingers with Santana. For Marson, the next few weeks represent the chance for him to show that he's a legitimate option at C (even if it's to prove it to another team for an off-season trade or one in the near future) and to make the adjustments at the plate that he was never able to in his first stint with the team or even in AAA.

At this point, even Marson has to know that he's not necessarily playing for his future in Cleveland (pending the results of the test) and that his performance in the early going and the performance of a pre-injury Santana mean that he's either destined to wear a caddy's outfit in Cleveland or that he's headed elsewhere at some point to get a chance to become a starting C. Regardless of what Lou Marson's future is with the Indians, the only thing that really matters over the next week or so of the season is seeing what the ongoing tests reveal about Santana's injury.

Santana, more than any other current Indian, provides something tangible for the future that is hard to see in this open audition of a 2010 season, and that is as an impact presence in the

middle of the lineup for the foreseeable future. Taking Santana out of that “future lineup” eliminates quite a bit of confidence (yes, he’s that much of a linchpin) in the outlook for the offense and Monday night certainly brought a good deal of doubt into the equation.

For now, the prognosis clouds some of those early doubts as the feeling that the Indians may have dodged a bullet on this one (the only one they’ve avoided in about 2 years) is the sense from the news that he’s simply headed to the DL with a hyper-extended knee and a “high grade” sprain instead of the imagined horrors that descended upon Cleveland as that play unfolded.

With the Indians, it’s always too early to trumpet any kind of good news, as bad news usually lurks around every corner, but the early reports on Santana just allowed an entire city to exhale.

That is, until the next batch of test results come back…