Up until 11:37am on July 31st, 2010, Jake Westbrook had inexplicably spent the better part of a decade as my favorite Cleveland Indian. I'd like to say it was because of his humble demeanor, or his captivating ability to induce groundballs, or even his always-entertaining fluctuations in beard growth. In truth, though, my Westbrook fandom was always considerably more cosmic in nature. While I've never been one for superstitions, there's no simpler way to put it than this: when Jake won, good things seemed to happen to me. And when he lost… well, let's just say we'd both take the L for the day.

Of course, if there were an actual algorithm I could run on BaseballReference.com to see how my life faired on days in which Westbrook pitched since 2001, I'd probably find that my long-running theory is absolute bollocks. But that's neither here nor there. The point is, when a guy is with a team for that long (only 14 Tribe pitchers have enjoyed longer tenures than Jake), it's pretty easy for an overly dedicated sports fan to start seeing quirky patterns in his performances. As it turns out, this is particularly true when the player in question is of a mediocre or average sort, as opposed to some of my previous favorite Indians like Albert Belle and Omar Vizquel—who were more suited to traditional types of appreciation, rather than the cult variety.

Aside from his gutsy performance in the 2007 ALCS, I can't honestly think of too many truly standout Jake Westbrook moments (he made the All-Star team in 2004, but didn't even appear in the game). Odder still, considering he was my favorite player and all, I really don't know much of anything about Westbrook as a person, either. Maybe it was a result of Jake's notoriously brief pauses between pitches, but Tom Hamilton never seemed to have time for any

long-winded anecdotes about the dude. I do seem to recall that he hails from Athens, Georgia, and—like 90% of Caucasian Major Leaguers—enjoys huntin' and fishin' and possibly ridin' four-wheelers. Judging by Paulie C's post-trade piece (a far more eloquent and well researched one than this, I might add), Westbrook also seems to be a genuine class act. He gave the Indians a break by taking less money in his trade buyout, claiming he felt he owed the organization after failing to live up to his hefty contract. All things considered, though, I define Westbrook far more within the context of my own life than his. And in the end, isn't that what being a sports fan really boils down to; having that extra zest or seasoning to sprinkle over our own daily drudgeries?

For example, while working a summer groundskeeping job in the year 2000, I actually remember listening on my little portable radio when WKNR reported that the Indians had dealt Dave Justice to the Yankees for Ricky Ledee, Zach Day, and a mid-level prospect named Westbrook. When the latter got his call-up the following season, he asked for the number 37—which happened to be my lucky number. And so it began.

During the next few years, as I was finding my footing in college, Westbrook was trying to earn a permanent spot in the Tribe starting rotation. Once we hit our respective strides in 2003, Jake was well on his way to unwittingly becoming the yin-and-yang meter for my life (on every fifth day, anyway). A successful date with that girl from English class… Westbrook beat the White Sox. A flat tire or a failed exam… Jake got pummeled by the Red Sox. Naturally, he took the hill on my graduation day and got the W, even though Jose Jimenez nearly blew it in the 9th.

I'd like to say that Westbrook's two years on the disabled list in '08 and '09 sent me adrift into a world without meaning or consequence, but again, my thesis is already a shaky one to begin with, so let's stay on point.

When Jake took the mound on July 26, 2010, it was well understood that it could very well be his final bow in a Tribe uniform. Even for fans who hadn't served as #37's personal voodoo doll like I had, it was a sad day—yet another era crumbling into dust, and not even in the cool special effects kind of way like *Inception*. Sure, Jake's jersey was never exactly a hot seller in the Team Shop; he didn't have his own fan club in the bleachers; and as far as I know, not a single little kid ever aspired to be a "solid #3 starter like Jake Westbrook some day." But fans—especially Cleveland fans—always appreciate a workhorse, and if there was one word

that seemed to define Westbrook's days with the Indians, it was "consistency."

That doesn't mean he was consistently good, mind you. Nor consistently bad. He was just consistently *there*, in the background-- occasionally winning, occasionally losing, and sometimes not figuring in the decision at all. For every game in which he'd pitch five strong innings only to get hammered in the sixth , there'd be another where he'd get bombed in the first inning only to settle down and work through the seventh . Nothing about that sounds particularly consistent, until you start looking at Westbrook as I did—as a dull, bearded, but genuinely likeable metaphor for, well, life.

In that final start as an Indian on July 26, Jake entered the eighth inning with a 2-1 lead, looking as sharp as he had all season. That's when Curtis Granderson parked a 2-run shot in the right field seats, giving the Yanks the eventual 3-2 win and handing Jake a tough-luck, farewell L. To the fans in attendance, it may have seemed like a disappointing conclusion to the Westbrook-Cleveland narrative. In reality, though, it was the only way this story could have ended. For as much as we'd all like to see a good guy go out on top, it's the shortcomings of a so-so sinkerballer that really make him relatable to us. He's not a superstar we strive to be like. He's a guy who wins just enough to balance out the losses, just like we do. We already *are* him.

And so, naturally, Jake Westbrook had to take one last game on the chin, thus bringing his Cleveland Indians career to a close with a final record of exactly… 69 wins, 69 losses. That's right. Dead even. 50/50. Yin and Yang. Harvey Dent. Perfect harmony in the universe. That's Jake Westbrook for you. And hey, we wouldn't have had it any other way.

Update: Jake Westbrook is now a St. Louis Cardinal and wears the number 35. Somewhere, a kid in St. Louis is weighing new options for a favorite player…