With another fantastic Fall weekend on our doorstep here on the North Coast and as the Indians assure themselves of a maximum of 98 losses with their little 2-game winning streak (which has pushed them back from the 4th pick in next year's draft to currently sitting on the 6th position), the final brushstrokes are being put on the canvas of the 2010 season. Lest you think that this one is going be hanging in some gallery, much less in plain sight of anyone…it will not as it is destined for the trash bin and the end is thankfully coming near for the Tribe's season of nightmares.

Seeing as how the end of the year is rapidly approaching, it is accompanied by the end-of-the-year recaps coming from all angles for all teams. While we've obviously already read the "Dear John" letter from Vince Grzegorek , another (perhaps more clinical and certainly much less entertaining) autopsy comes as the Indians go under the microscope in the "Kiss 'Em Goodbye" series.

If you're unfamiliar with the "Kiss 'Em Goodbye" series that is put together by Baseball Prospectus and ESPN, the eulogy consists of a little write-up by Buster Olney giving an overview of a particular team that is (obviously) not making the playoffs, a more exhaustive analysis of "What Went Right", "What Went Wrong", and "What Won't Happen Again" by a B-Pro writer, a "Rumor Central" piece by some ESPN lackey, and an "Organizational Future" piece by the consistently terrific Kevin Goldstein of B-Pro.

In the recent piece in which the collective group has puckered up and said their farewell to the Tribe , the Olney intro is pretty superficial as it notes that the Indians' rotation is lacking (shockingly mentioning that CC and Lee are doing pretty well this year) and saying that "given that the Indians have so little margin for error, they needed production from their handful of pricey stars", going on to mention the Sizemore injury, the Hafner shoulder "issues" and Kerry Wood's strange tenure as an Indian.

Olney hits on what he sees as the "building blocks" with Santana, The BLC, CF Perez, and a rejuvenated !Fausto¡ (which, not so coincidentally are the same four mentioned in the "What Went Right" section), but finishes the his bit of the piece with the realistic view that the Indians need to "find more starting pitchers, and Cleveland is hopeful about what it saw from Carlos Carrasco in the last month of the season" before hitting on the big finish that, "until the Indians'

rotation stabilizes, Cleveland probably won't be in the AL Central conversation in September."

Of course, this is not an earth-shattering analysis as you only have to look at the players that the Indians have been targeting in trades and in the Draft for the past two years to see how they're attempting to "find more starting pitchers". Between Carrasco, Masterson, Talbot, White, Pomeranz, McCallister, Pino, Kluber and the litany of other arms (and those are just some of the guys who figure in as starters) added to the organization in the last two years, there's no question that it still all goes back to the pitching issues (and specifically the rotational questions) with the Indians going forward as the needle seems to flip from "they don't look to be all that close to cobbling together a consistent rotation" to "maybe these guys just need time to mature and thrive" on a nearly weekly basis.

This is, of course, where I drop in Carmona, Carrasco, and Masterson's numbers for September – 2.35 ERA, 1.07 WHIP, 63 K and 21 BB in 80 1/3 IP – and try to take a look at that glass and call it half-empty, attempting to avoid Gomez's September (7.78 ERA, 2.03 WHIP) and ignoring that Tomlin has allowed nearly as many earned runs (34) as batters he has whiffed (39)…even with his most recent complete game.

This is pretty well-worn territory around these parts and for the sake of everyone involved and since this is worthy of more than just this cursory look, let's get back to the "Kiss 'Em Goodbye". For the sake of everyone's sanity, I'll spare you what the ESPN "Insider" had to say in the "Rumor Central" category as nearly all ESPN coverage has devolved further and further into what "Entertainment Tonight" and "TMZ" are in terms of actually reporting the "news".

Since we'll avoid the ESPN "Insider" section (seeing as how I forgot my Haz-Mat suit to wade through the mindless toxicity for what passes as "insight"), let's get right to the most intriguing part of the entire piece as it comes from Christina Kahrl of B-Pro, who lists the main component of "What Went Wrong" for the 2010 Indians as "injuries, injuries, and more injuries", pointing out specifically the injuries to Sizemore, Cabrera, and Santana.

Given what we've seen recently from the "offensive" side of the Indians (see what I did there?), does anyone know that Cabrera played in 90 games this year, Santana played in just 46, and Sizemore played in only 33 games?

Certainly, the performance before the injuries to Cabrera (he had a .689 OPS when Jhonny broke his arm) and Sizemore (.560 OPS before being shelved) don't merit the assertion that any promising seasons were "derailed" by injury, but the issue of when Sizemore's injury occurred remains up for debate (as it was intimated at one point that it happened in Spring Training and he attempted to fight through it) and Cabrera's .689 OPS is actually not that far off how he has started the last few years.

For those players a certain track record exists in MLB that justifies the "injuries, injuries, and more injuries" as a card to play for the Indians (and I'll note that my season ticket folder had Choo, Sizemore, and Cabrera on the cover), but how about Carlos Santana?

While everyone remembers the manner in which Santana burst on the scene, with hype

surrounding him unseen in these parts since…well, probably Victor or CC, Santana proved to be the first Indians' youngster in recent memory to ascend to the parent club and actually, you know…perform right off of the bat. For an organization that constantly has to preach the virtues of "making adjustments" and "let guys ease into things" (for as long as I can remember) because nearly ALL of their prospects struggle when they arrive from the Farm, Santana came to Cleveland and showed that the talk that accompanied his arrival was justified by impacting the team immediately.

That being said, you know who has 90 more plate appearances than Santana did this year? Luis Valbuena…hell, Rusty Branyan strode to the plate 2 fewer times than The Axe Man did this year for the Tribe. Santana, for as much as he is being counted on as a pillar in the lineup going forward, has less than 200 MLB plate appearances and while he certainly seemed to have an impact on the club in terms of record, his impact on the lineup was not as profound as you might think:

Opening Day to June 10th (Prior to Call-Up)
Team Record: 23-36
.246 BA / .325 OBP / .367 SLG / .692 OPS averaging 4.1 runs per game

June 11th to August 2nd (Santana on team)
Team Record: 22-25
.250 BA / .322 OBP / .401 SLG / .723 OPS averaging 3.9 runs per game

August 3rd to Now (After Injury)
Team Record: 18-30
.244 BA / .312 OBP / .358 SLG / .670 OPS averaging 3.7 runs per game

Certainly other factors and situations with particular players affect those batting lines and (more specifically) the runs per game that exist independent of Santana's presence, but the Indians' offense was not evoking memories of the 1995 lineup with Santana in it, his presence simply made it more palatable and exciting to watch.

That being said, while it is true that the Indians were 22-25 with Santana on the team and 41-66 without him on the squad, the overall offensive numbers show that the return of Carlos Santana is not a panacea for this offense and that the Indians need to count on more than Santana to escape their current offensive doldrums if they hope to be a productive offense in 2011 and beyond.

Don't get me wrong, certainly Santana's return will help, but looking at Santana and the other players that have been missing – and more importantly, the players that have replaced them in the lineup – starts to shed some light on how this Indians' offense (which actually looked to be a strength of the team in Goodyear) came to the current state. Just to use Sizemore, Santana, and Cabrera as examples, here is how their replacements fared in 2010, putting their performance into the proper context:

Crowe
.255 BA / .308 OBP / .341 SLG / .648 OPS in 446 PA
There are 182 players in MLB with more than 425 PA.

Among them, Crazy Eyes ranks 170th in OPS, 158th in OBP, and 168th in SLG.

Marson
.197 BA / .273 OBP / .291 SLG / .564 OPS in 284 PA
There are 279 players in MLB with more than 275 PA.
Among them, Tofu Lou ranks 275th in OPS, 274th in OBP, and 274th in SLG.

Valbuena
.181 BA / .268 OBP / .246 SLG / .514 OPS in 282 PA
Again, there are 279 players in MLB with more than 275 PA.
Among them, Louie the Fifth ranks second to last in OPS, 275th in OBP, and dead last in SLG.

Maybe you want to use Brantley as the replacement for Sizemore (and, trust me, you really don't if you want to feel better about this team, given that Mike Brantley ranks 271st in that list of 279 MLB players with more than 275 PA) or think that Donald was the replacement for Cabrera (which isn't really true as Valbuena stuck around because of Cabrera's injury and was about to be replaced by Donald when Cabrera was hurt), but you start to see the point here. Essentially, when the team went to the Junior Varsity (or, in the cases of Marson and Valbuena, who both were the Opening Day Starters, the de facto "Varsity"), the Indians dipped into what can currently be seen as the shallow end of the talent pool.

That's not to say that these players have no value (except for Crowe, who is indisputably without value) as Marson is a solid back-up C at the very least who is still 23 and could be mature into a defense-first starting backstop in the league and Valbuena…well, he hits RHP very well (.891 OPS vs. RHP, .446 OPS vs. LHP), but it gets to that idea that everything needs to go right for the Tribe, regardless of whether we're talking about a year that they think that they contend or not, and when they start trotting out Plan B (much less Plan C or D) on the field, bad things are going to happen.

What is interesting is that there seems to be this pervasive idea (admittedly put forth here) that the Indians' offense is fine and that it lines up very nicely for the future with Santana, LaPorta, Donald/Kipnis, Cabrera, The Chiz, Choo, Brantley, and Sizemore figuring in as the presumed lineup that will take shape over the course of the next year or so. However, the fact remains that while that list looks good on paper, those players need to reach the potential that's become expected of them and they need to remain healthy or else this team devolves very quickly into the Trevor Crowe crowd.

As a quick aside on Crowe, did everyone see this from Terry Pluto this morning :
After Shin-Soo Choo, what Indian has the most at-bats? It's Trevor Crowe, who entered the weekend hitting .256 (.651 OPS) with 2 HR and 31 RBI in 406 at-bats. He also leads the team by hitting into 13 double plays. He's had the opportunity to establish himself as a possible regular, but he's shown to be a backup -- especially at the age of 26.

Since Pluto stops short of saying it, inferring that Crowe is better off as a "backup", I'll take that next step and point out that a 26-year-old OF with a .651 OPS who has no instincts in the field and seems to be generally more concerned about HOW he looks while making a play than he

is about, you know, MAKING the play shouldn't be a viable MLB player for the Indians, affordability or not. The hope is that 2010 represented the first and perhaps last shot for players like Crowe and their ilk, where an opportunity was extended to them (despite a Minor League track record that did not justify it) and the player turned out to be the marginal MLB player who should not be counted upon to hold a spot on the 25-man roster (and probably the 40-man roster) going forward.

Back to that presumed lineup, don't take this a cup full of mud on your cereal (as I do remain optimistic about nearly all of that "presumed" lineup), but as much as the pitching gets the teeth-gnashing and the wringing of hands, this team needs the offense that looked to be "lined up" to start producing and to improve nearly across the board. While certain bright spots may exist, there are more players that need to make that adjustment to MLB and make it in short order to make this offense viable for next year.

Unfortunately that "presumed" lineup for 2011 consists nearly completely of players that are coming off of injury (Santana, Sizemore), players coming off of disappointing years perhaps exacerbated by injury (LaPorta and Cabrera), players that are either still adjusting to MLB (Brantley and Donald), players that have barely made it to AAA (Kipnis and The Chiz), a part-time DH (Hafner), and the one bright spot – Choo.

That doesn't take into account the idea that 3B is still a hole and that those players that are "still adjusting to MLB" are likely to do so into next year. To go further on that, and I don't mean to continually be the bearer of bad news, Mike Brantley's numbers since he was most recently called up to play in the everyday lineup are .283 BA / .317 OBP / .358 SLG / .675 OPS and while the SLG is not a surprise, let's hold off on extolling Brantley's "readiness" to be a lead-off hitter based on those 39 games (19-game hitting streak or not, because his OBP was .309 during the streak) and see if he's able to improve that .317 OBP which, I might point out, is lower than the OBP mark put up by Jason Michaels in both 2006 and 2007.

Back to the injury front, the issue that seems to still exist is something that Kahrl addresses in the aforementioned "Kiss 'Em Goodbye" piece when she indicates this as "What Won't Happen Again":
Injuries, or so you'd have to hope. The Tribe was below average offensively at eight of nine lineup slots, and while prospects like Santana, LaPorta, and Brantley should get established enough to help reverse that next year, they desperately need Sizemore to revert to the form that made him one of the game's rising stars.

Given the uncertain nature of how Sizemore and Santana will recover from their injuries (and you would assume that Cabrera and LaPorta, assuming his injuries are lingering, would be fully healthy), the issue with recovery time and expectations now starts to affect how the Indians approach the off-season.

That is to say, if Sizemore's recovery is going to extend into the 2011 season (and I've seen no indication that it is supposed to, just figuring that these are, after all, injuries to Indians…which have a history of "lingering"), do they look for a LF who could be playing every day for ½ of the season so they don't have to leave it up to the likes of Trevor Crowe to start the 2011 season?

Additionally, how aggressive do the Indians get with finding a RH bat to augment Hafner at DH and should they be looking for a guy who can share time at 1B (because of LaPorta's hip) or LF (because of Sizemore's knee) or C (because of Santana's leg) or are they confident enough in the recovery of all three to simply let it ride with those internal options and, frankly, hope for the best?

If the approach is the former, the likes of Mike Napoli jump out as a backup catcher/part-time 1B/RH partner for Hafner , but even mentioning names feels premature given the uncertain nature over the recoveries to those injured players.

Whether "injuries, injuries, and more injuries" are truly to blame for the Indians' offensive struggles for 2010, the idea that "recoveries from injury, recoveries from ineffectiveness, and recoveries from inconsistency" are on the docket for 2011 in the Indians' lineup. If they are not, the 2011 lineup (which looked to be moderately "set" going forward) may start to resemble the squad that's been on display for much of this year, full of placeholders, non-prospects, and young players struggling (as usual, given that they are Indians) in their first exposure to MLB.

A widespread "recovery" is needed for the Indians' offense to cement a turnaround for 2011 and while the names and the pedigrees may elicit confidence for the future, the performances and injures sustained by some of those names in 2010 have done little to project that the offensive trouble that's been on display all year at the corner of Carnegie and Ontario is going to be remedied any time soon.