With the big news of the week obviously coming with the passing of Bob Feller, your required reading (other than this , of course) is contained in a piece that I threw up over at Hitting the Fan the day after Feller's death. Most of the reading you probably did on your own (and I'll link Joe Posnanski's again because it is that good), but the HTF piece also has a photo of the Commemorative Patch that will be worn this season by the Indians. If I may make a suggestion to further honor Feller it would be that the Indians' players honor Feller on specific days by wearing their socks as Feller does in the picture to the right, in addition to donning the patch. You just can't beat that look from Rapid Robert, still toeing the slab in his Ponys and vintage stirrups. Regardless, if you feel like you've read every Feller piece possible...let me suggest one more as Chris Jaffe of the Hardball Times put out a tremendous piece that you may have missed on your required reading list, as it contextualizes the greatness of Feller as a player better than anywhere else I've seen.

Since all of the talk has been about the greatness of the Greatest Indians' Pitcher of All Time,

let's use the opportunity to segue into a little discussion about the starting pitchers currently on the roster and expectations for 2011. While the 2011 staff doesn't figure to evoke comparisons to the 1954 Tribe staff (and here's a great read comparing that 1954 staff with the soon-to-be-unveiled Quartet from the Quaker State that everyone is so quick to anoint the best rotation ever), that doesn't mean that the principals of the staff haven't been in the news, even if their inclusion feels forced and ultimately inconsequential.

When I say "forced and ultimately inconsequential", I mean the Fausto Carmona trade rumors of course, as Jon-Paul Morosi had a little bit about Carmona generating interest on the trade market , along with Zach Grienke, with CP Lee off of the proverbial market. I suppose there could be some fire with this smoke, but doesn't this strike anyone else as a report that teams are "calling about the availability" of a particular player, with the team being called listening to any offers?

The Morosi blurb doesn't strike me as anything more than a writer's speculation of "who else might be out there that people that would be interested in and might be available" and being confirmed by some MLB sources that conversations did take place. Dismissing it as conjecture and, you know, acknowledging that conversations take place all the time in MLB, particularly in the off-season, I'm not sure how seriously I'm taking this "report", particularly given that the other name in the piece (Grienke) has actually requested a trade or that there are other starting pitchers who may legitimately be available because of contract impasses, like Ricky Nolasco . Interestingly, it is worth noting that both of those linked pieces are from Morosi of FOX Sports, so maybe he's on the "which SP will the Yankees acquire" beat for the next few weeks.

Regardless of other situations out there, if the Indians are going to simply hear out proposals to wait to see if someone (like the Rangers and Yankees) are going to over-react to not getting Lee and vastly overpay for a guy like Carmona...yeah, I'm all for that. If a team chooses to act irrationally to pacify a large and demanding fan-base watching the rest of their division improve while they swing and miss, I'm all for seeing the Indians as the beneficiary of another team's irrational decisions.

However, dependent upon what would come back and remembering that Carmona was sent to Arizona in 2009 because he was such a mess, let's all acknowledge that Carmona is probably the best pitcher and the closest thing that they have to a "sure thing" in their rotation. If you don't buy the "sure thing" assertion, remember the career highs for MLB innings for the other players that legitimately figure into the 2011 rotation – Masterson (180 IP), Talbot (159 2/3 IP), Carrasco (44 2/3 IP). Those totals all came last year and if you want to include Gomez (57 2/3 IP), Tomlin (73 IP), or even Huff (128 1/3 IP) and consider their career highs for MLB innings in one year, it still doesn't elicit much confidence.

In contrast to that, Carmona has thrown more than 210 MLB innings twice in his career and

while his career was on life support at this time last year, but if the Indians think that he's fixed and that he can continue to improve, let's remember that Fausto finished 24th in the AL in ERA last year.

As I've said too many times, I don't think that Fausto v.2007 is ever coming back, but consider what Fausto's numbers looked when you compare 2007 to 2010:

Year	ERA	FIP	IP	H/9	HR/9	BB/9	SO/9	BABIP
2007	3.06	3.94	215.0	8.3	0.7	2.6	5.7	.281
2010	3.77	4.11	210.1	8.7	0.7	3.1	5.3	.284

Yes, his ERA+ is significantly lower as the rest of MLB pitchers posted much better lines in 2010, then they did in 2007 and ERA+ is a comparative stat. Going further than that, his GB% is down from 2007, but couldn't that mean that he's evolved into more of a PITCHER than simply a THROWER of sinking fastballs, as hangover-inducing as they may have been at one time?

To wit, Carmona threw fastballs (either two-or-four-seam fastballs) for 88% of his pitches in 2007, utilizing those two fastballs and a slider (thrown the other 12%) exclusively. In 2010, his pitch mix was more varied as he threw his fastball 68% of the time, that slider 18% of the time, and incorporating a change-up for the remaining 14% of his offerings.

Again, maybe Fausto never gets back to the success that he saw in 2007 in terms of dominance, but the most compelling reason to keep Carmona is tied to his performance from year-to-year, but not for the reason that you may think. The best case for keeping Carmona around is the value of his contract, particularly to a team like the Indians.

Lest you forget, Carmona is guaranteed a $6.1M salary this year…and that completes the guaranteed portion of his contract. Unlike players with contracts that outlive their usefulness (ahem…Hafner), Carmona's contract after this year moves into a series of club options that the team has no obligation to exercise UNLESS Carmona's performance justifies the option being picked up from year to year.

That is to say, that after the 2011 season, the Indians can cut Carmona loose after any given year with no financial ramifications or they can decide to keep Carmona around through the end of 2014 on affordable options (2012:$7M club option, 2013:$9M club option, 2014:$12M club option) as long as his performance dictates his worth to the club the next year.

With that arrangement, the onus is on Carmona EVERY SINGLE YEAR to compel the Indians to keep him around for the following year by picking up that club option. If he falls apart as he did in 2009 and the Indians find themselves at their wit's end once again with him, they can simply decline the club option and move past Carmona. For a team like the Tribe, whose margin of error on long-term deals is razor thin, Carmona's contract really presents them with the best of both worlds, where a player's performance will determine whether he will be worth his next year's salary every year and where, if Carmona puts up suitable numbers, the Indians can gauge his value against those contract numbers from year to year.

Looking at potential suitors for Carmona, the contract may not be that much of a factor in NY (where they just…you know, "write it off"), but it could be for Texas, who would have to be interested with the groundball-inducing Fausto and that bandbox they play in. However, Carmona's contract is overwhelmingly more valuable to the Indians, who are not tied into long-term money with Carmona after this year and can use him as they see fit for the next three seasons AFTER this year.

Back to the fundamental question at hand in all of this though - could trading Carmona benefit the Indians in the long-term?

Of course and it will be interesting to see what the Royals are able to procure for Grienke, and if this Brewers rumor is true , the Royals are getting a defensive specialist SS who posted a .614 OPS for the Brew Crew last year, a 24-year-old OF who could be no more than a 4th OF, and a AA reliever who missed 100 games in 2009
because of a suspension for "drug abuse", which has been chalked up to marijuana use.

Regardless of what happens with Grienke, after experiencing about 2 ½ years of "long-term" decisions at the corner of Carnegie and Ontario, isn't it about time to start to line up some pieces and parts that are going to be contributing in 2011 AND in 2014?

Obviously, Carmona remains a wild card and the case could be made that if he's going to be moved, that he should be traded a close to peak value and coming off of a reclamation 2010, that this is the time to move him. That being said, given what is currently around Carmona in the rotation and the (relative) stability that he provides compared to the rest of the assumed rotation, keeping Carmona and that contract around would make sense for the Indians at this juncture.

If Carmona is going to stick around, an upgrade of their infield defense is certainly in order, right?

Of course, particularly when you consider that among AL starters with more than 40 IP , the Indians had the pitcher with the highest GB% (Masterson at 60.3%), the 2nd highest (Carrasco at 56.8%), and the 4th highest (Carmona at 55.6%), with the 26th highest (Talbot at 47.8%) and 30th highest (Gomez at 46.8%).

Look at that again, #1, #2, and #4 on that list of highest GB% among AL starters with more than 40 IP last year…and from the three pitchers who probably factor most obviously into the 2011 rotation – mind-blowing, right?

Now do you start to see some logic in adding Adam Everett and Jack Hannahan on Minor League deals, even if these are largely insignificant "additions" (term used loosely) as both Everett and Hannahan have reputations of being above-average defensively?

To wit, Everett received the 9th most votes as a SS in 2009 in The Fielding Bible tally and Hannahan finished 4th in The Fielding Bible voting for 3B in 2008
, the last time he spent significant time in MLB. While neither of them can hit, they can both field

very well and if you remember how Sonny Nix stumbled around 3B last year and how Jay Donald looked at SS last year when Asdrubal was missing, not to mention how Louie the Fifth took a butcher's knife into the field with him, some upgrade of defensive ability is welcome.

Certainly I'm not saying that you're looking at the left side of the infield for 2011 as – say this with me here – both have merely been signed to MINOR-LEAGUE deals with no roster spot guarantee. However, with Josh Rodriguez and Carlos Rivero exiting the organization in the past month, it looks as if they're serious in upgrading the infield defense to some degree at the very least.

That degree may be down in Columbus or simply in terms of depth out in Goodyear or a gentle prodding for Cabrera and Nix that better defensive options are in camp with them, but given the GB tendencies of the rotation, shoring up the infield defense, even marginally, isn't such a bad idea.

Back to that rotation, there was reportedly some Tribe interest in Bart Colon , who has thrown 100 1/3 innings in MLB since the beginning of the 2008 season and didn't pitch in MLB last year. However, this rumor was dismissed by Paul Hoynes vehemently enough that you would think that the Indians aren't really interested in Colon, if Hoynes is working his sources.

However, peeling back the layers of this "Acta in the DR to watch Colon" thing though, here's what a newspaper in Santo Domingo reported (and forgive the awkward language as it is a translated page) as the needs of the Indians, according to Acta – "sign a third baseman, a starting pitcher right, a veteran reliever and an outfielder". Later in the piece, the three players identified as piquing Acta's interest in the game that he attended were "third baseman Edwin Encarnacion, Bartolo Colon, who was even observed in Tuesday's game between the Eagles-Bulls, as well as Miguel Batista, a veteran of 16 seasons in the majors."

Now, if Encarnacion had been picked up by the A's at the time of this attended game (and he's now made his way back to Toronto, where he'll make $2.5M next year) and Hoynes vociferously denounces Colon as an option, what are we left with…is it a "veteran reliever" like Miguel Batista?

Batista will be 40 in February, who posted a 3.70 ERA (109 ERA+) and a 1.33 WHIP for the Nationals last year. After the Diamondbacks and the Mariners attempted to use him as a starter from 2006 to 2008, he transitioned back to being a reliever, a role that he thrived in as the Blue Jays' closer in 2005, saving 31 games.

Does mentioning Batista as the real reason that Acta went to watch that game in the DR feel like dumpster diving?

Sure, he walks too many guys and HE'LL BE FORTY in February, but in a world in the three-year contract for the set-up man has become accepted practice again (in the face of precedent and reason), I could think of worse ideas for a team whose young RH relievers still need to sort themselves out and to assert themselves in either Goodyear or Columbus in 2011.

Going back to the rotation but keeping it in the bargain bin, scrap heap guys like CM Wang ($1M with $5M in incentives from the Nationals, after having not pitched since mid-2009) and even Ryan Rowland-Smith ($725K with the Astros after posting a 6.75 ERA and 1.67 WHIP with the M's last year) have started to come off of the board, so that "veteran" addition is going to have to come from somewhere else and it probably isn't going to come cheaply. Then again, the Indians are the team that mined Carl Pavano out of a deep hole in the ground a few years back when no other team wanted anything to do with him.

According to Terry Pluto , the Indians have had discussions about Kevin Millwood, who would make sense on some level, just like a guy like Freddy Garcia would, but when a team like the Yankees is asking for Garcia's medical records and is likely to guarantee a roster spot and a rotation spot, when one may not be deserved, that gives you a sense of the starting pitching market. Which is another way to put across the idea that if teams are asking about Carmona, then they're going to give too many years and too much money to ANYONE that can start every five games, expected results seemingly be damned.

If nobody is added, perhaps the Indians are content to go with the Gomez, Tomlin, and Huff troika to see if any of them can separate themselves in Goodyear next year and get a leg up on that 5th spot. For a long while, I was under the belief that Dave Huff had spent his nine lives (or was using them up) in the Indians' organization, via the Twitter misstep or Acta calling Huff out on multiple occasions for not following the gameplan laid out for him by the coaches.

If you were like me and thought that Huff was not long for the Indians' organization or that he was destined to be buried in Columbus, take a look at the recent comments by Tribe pitching coach Tim Belcher on Huff :
"I love David Huff. I think he has a chance to be a big league starter, and a big league starter for a long time. I just hope it's with us -- soon. I've been wrong before. We've all been wrong before. But, man, you just can't look at David Huff, look at the total package and total picture, and think anything but that."

Look, I've been holding the pom-poms for Dave Huff for some time now, back to the time when

he was, in fact, a legitimate prospect and wasn't Jeremy Sowers v.2.0 ...no seriously. Going further, I was the one preaching patience and a long leash with Huff , but he was so maddeningly awful in 2010, obviously bickering with the Indians and blissfully unaware that prospects with lesser resumes (ahem…Tomlin) were leapfrogging him on the organizational depth chart.

And now THIS from Belcher?
Maybe it is a "vote of confidence" or an indication that somebody is in his corner in the organization (because, trust me, others aren't), but the reality with Huff is that he simply hasn't turned the corner into being even marginally effective and he was, in fact, WORSE in 2010 than he had been in 2009 when some sort of progress was to be expected from Huff, who turned 26 last August.

The progress was non-existent in 2010 and Huff had the 4th worst ERA+ in MLB last year among the 154 pitchers who started 15 or more games. Granted, Kevin Correia had the 6th worst ERA+ last year by the same criteria and he just inked a 2-year, $8M deal with the Pirates...but that's a different discussion for another day. The topic is Huff and as long as we're bringing out the dirty laundry on his 2010 season, realize during the previous season (which he was "successful", because he was the teams' "wins" leader), Huff had the 7th worst ERA+ in MLB in 2009 among the 117 pitchers who started 20 games or more. That's two bottom ten finishes in ERA+ (which, again is a comparative stat), meaning that Huff has been among the worst starters in MLB for two years running. The fact is that Huff doesn't miss enough bats in MLB, with only 5.5% of his pitches resulting in swinging strikes in 2010 , a percentage that puts him among the worst in MLB, a year after his 5.7% of swinging strikes put him at the bottom of the league as well.

If Belcher really believes what he said on Huff, here's hoping that he's willing to take Huff on as his pet project as he had a hand in resuscitating the career of Carmona last year and probably played a role in Masterson's improvement down the stretch. It's been said a couple of times, but with Carmona, Masterson, Carrasco, and Talbot as the "top" 4, all of those pitchers are RH and, ideally (though not necessarily) a LH arm would be a nice addition to that rotation. I suppose that Tomlin and Gomez could get that look, but wouldn't all three parties be best served by Huff

being given an extended look out of the gate, with Gomez and Tomlin going to AAA to gain some momentum and slot themselves to be the first arm to be called up?

There's plenty of time to argue all of that as the off-season winds on and the possibility that the Indians add a rotational option still exists (though these pickings are slim and don't guarantee any more success than the internal options), but during a week in which the Greatest Indians' Pitcher of All Time passes on and while rumors (created or real) swirl around the Indians' "best" starting pitcher currently on the roster, things are going to be interesting from that spot 60 feet and 6 inches away from home plate at the corner of Carnegie and Ontario…and I don't mean just because Bob Feller won't be firing his fastballs from that rubber anymore.