In the midst of a pretty dark stretch of Cleveland sports, the brightening news that pitchers and catchers report in just over a week should be enough to get us past the Steelers in the Super Bowl (again), right? Since the Milwaukee-born-and-bred DiaBride has turned The Reservation gold and green for the day and as the DiaTot runs around in his Packer gear, pretending to be Aaron Rodgers (well, alternately with Grady Sizemore), let's all don our cheeseheads (and we have them here), sip either High Life or PBR (there is plenty of both here) and root for a team that many on the North Coast can relate to, if not through recent success.

That lack of recent success on the shores of Lake Erie is something that has become a focal point in the printed word as of late, with Steve Buffum interviewing Scott Raab on...well, on a number of topics, but mainly LeBron, and a couple of the guys at LGT putting out some great pieces first, from Andrew Humphries, on why Indians' fans are well aware of where their organization stands and why the continued beating that the team and city have taken nationally (and there's another cheap shot from Heymann in the middle of another "WHAT WILL THE YANKEES DO WITH NO ANDY?!? piece) is unnecessary, then, from Adam Van Arsdale why hope springs eternal in the heart of every baseball fan around this time of year in the context of getting past Groundhog Day.

If you haven't read all of them yet, they are all worth your time (well, not Heymann's) because...really, what else are you going to do before 6:30 PM today besides attempt to remove whatever amount of inches of ice (and now snow after yesterday…at least here) have accumulated on your driveway/sidewalk over the past week...

With that, let's get going on a Lazy Sunday as I have to get the summer sausage cut and the

cheese curds to room temperature before the “Packer Party” begins in earnest as I attempt to allow my sons to enjoy a championship season from one of their “teams” (remember, their mother is from Wisconsin and their grandparents shower them with green and gold gifts) because...well, a championship season may not be in the offing on the North Coast for a while.

That’s not to say that brighter days may not be ahead and we’ll start there with (of all people) Paul Hoynes, who actually looks to be coming around to some perspective and logic (if intermittently) after all of the doom-and-gloom and potshots of the Indians’ off-season. Exhibit A of perhaps a different tone from the beat writer of the town’s only newspaper comes as a response in last week’s “Hey Hoynsie” that (once you get past the requisite idiocy), actually conveys a message worth pasting after a “question” comes about that the Dolans should sell and that fans should not go to games until they do.

Hoynes responds, in part, thusly :
You can go to the ballpark and watch this young team go through a developmental stage and see if they can turn themselves into a contender. Even the Indians great teams from 1995 through 2001 stumbled in the early 1990s.
If they do emerge as a contender, ownership has showed in the past it will spend to improve the team.
You can stop going to the ballpark, thus sending ownership a message of your disapproval of their operating plan. Believe me, it will make an impression.
Or you can keep writing me and complaining as if Indians fans are the only fans going through this situation. Check out Pittsburgh, Kansas City, Baltimore and Toronto.

Admittedly that line was bolded by me, but I do find it fascinating that people can complain about the Dolans’ cheapness, then wonder when Hafner’s albatross of a contract is set to expire as if those two issues are mutually exclusive.

That’s another topic (and probably one I hit on some time ago) for another day, but it is worth mentioning that the answer to the aforementioned “question” did not appear in the print edition of the PD that arrived on my doorstep last Sunday morning, just in the online version...and let’s just say that I don’t think that it’s a coincidence.

Regardless, what Hoynes writes in response to that “question” is something that you’ve been reading about here for the better part of a year, in that the Indians have positioned themselves with similarly-aged and similarly-advanced players once again to see if the success of 1995 to 2001 and 2005 to well, 2007 can be replicated, perhaps with sustainability closer to that of the first incarnation of the “new” Indians.

Without question, there are many answers that need to come in 2011 and much of the focus leading up to Spring Training has been on some of the more important pieces that figure to reveal themselves (good or bad) as 2011 marches on. It should come as no surprise (if you’ve been around here) that chief among those pieces is Matt LaPorta who, along with Carlos Carrasco, represents the biggest question mark whose answer is going to go the furthest in

determining how quickly/slowly the Indians get back to an advanced level of competition and contention.

That being said, Jordan Bastian made MaTola the focus of his infield preview at the official site (and rightfully so) pointing out MaTola's prospect pedigree and providing a quote from his manager:
When the Indians acquired LaPorta as the primary piece in the July 2008 trade that sent CC Sabathia to Milwaukee, the hope was that they landed the power-hitting first baseman who tore through the Minor Leagues. In 242 career games in the Minors, LaPorta has hit .296 with 56 homers, 181 RBIs and a .953 OPS.
"He's done everything people were expecting him to do through the Minor Leagues," Acta said. "He's not rehabbing any injuries now. He's just training for baseball. Hopefully he learned from 2010 and he can help us out this year."

A lot of people likely forget what a monster LaPorta has been in the Minors and, realizing that there's a big difference between Dunn Tire Park and Yankee Stadium (hello, Jeff Manto) and acknowledging that MaTola turned 26 last month, it leads us into a thoroughly-informational piece from Hoynes, in which he compiles snippets of quotes from MLB scouts (as well as the Indians' GM, who is unsurprisingly optimistic on all counts) on some of the principals acquired in the CC, Lee, and Victor deal.

Hoynes leads the piece off with an acknowledgment that he hears the drum beat that I've been laying down since last off-season, once the notion that they punted on 2009 and 2010 with the Lee and Vic deals had been processed:
The idea behind these trades was to remake the Indians with talented young players who had as little big-league service time as possible. That way the team could develop and, theoretically, win together before the approach of free agency repeated the Sabathia, Lee and Martinez trifecta.
The Indians did all right with part of that equation. Brantley, Carrasco and Donald will enter this season with less than a year of service time. LaPorta and Marson have fewer than two years. Masterson has two years and 108 days.

Not too difficult to grasp and something you probably realized a solid 18 months ago, particularly if you're coming around these parts…

Obviously, the Lowest Common Denominator crowd at cle.com didn't take too kindly to Hoynes assertion (even that they "did all right"), so don't wade into the comments section of the piece unless you want to lose time off of your life that you'll never get back, an endeavor that Andrew Humphries of LGT puts out fair warning.

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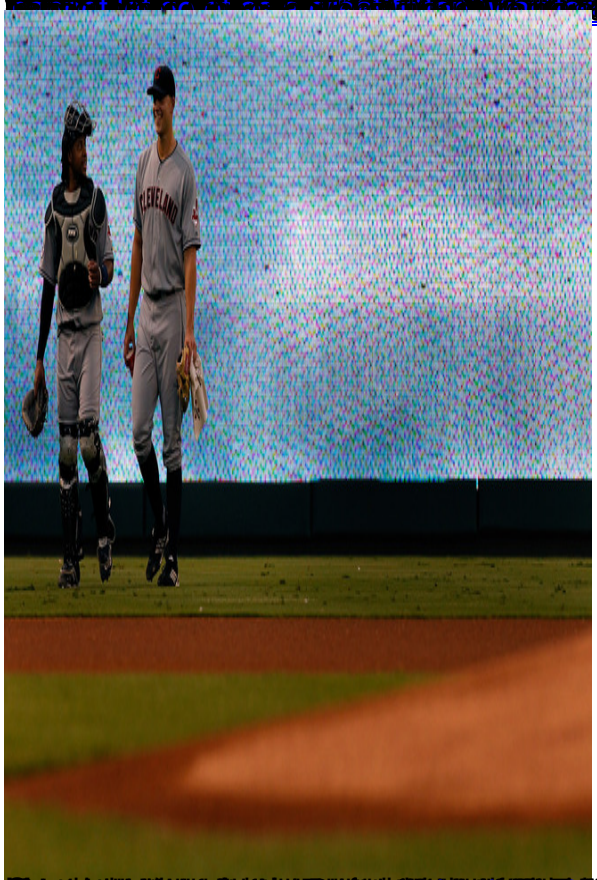

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