Spring Training games plod along in Arizona while us poor saps in Northeast Ohio get to dig out from another 6-12 inches of Al Gore's antithesis. It is quite amazing really. Every time I say, "I would love this weather for Opening Day", the next day, it rains. I would be okay with this coincidence if the rain only lasted one day. But, in true March fashion, it rains for three days. And then the white stuff falls again. At least I have Spring Training statistics to interpret while the foundation on my house cracks with each snow plow rolling through the pot hole on the street in front of it.

Normally, I would reserve the top part of this piece, after the introduction which goes on the main page, with the past week's results. This week's are too ugly to go here. But, luckily, they are only Spring Training games and really do not matter a whole hell of a lot. That being said, there are some uncomfortable trends forming, which will be discussed further down the page, including the Wahoos giving up 41 runs in three games this past week.

Did I forget to mention something that happened last week? Ah, why yes, I did. Austin Kearns's DUI arrest
. Huh, that's ironic because Austin Kearns forgot to mention it, too. Somehow, at the counsel of his attorney, Kearns and his lawyer felt that the best course of action was to keep Kearns's employer in the dark about the arrest.

(Disclaimer: No offense meant to any Kentuckians who read this column) Maybe it's just me, but I cannot fathom how you can get busted for a DUI in Kentucky. Doesn't the NASCAR defense work? I thought we were under a caution, so I wanted to swerve to keep my tires warm. No? It has to work better than the, "I'm a baseball player" defense. That defense may work if you are a

well-known player. Then again, Kearns's is probably in the top 25% of Kentucky-born baseball players .

In any event, the Indians have yet to do anything, commenting that they will let the justice system handle it. Honestly, I don't know what the course of action should be. It is probably likely that most of us have driven over the legal limit at some point in our lives. No reason for that group of us to act high and mighty and call for his release. On another hand, this is a very young team. Tolerance of actions such as this might send the wrong message, though Kearns is reportedly one of the more well-liked guys in the clubhouse. For the time being, Kearns is still here and our de facto fourth outfielder.

I applauded the Indians pitching in last week's column. Apparently, I jinxed them. Last Saturday, the Tribe had a couple split squad contests, and split them. They had a well-pitched effort on Sunday. Then, the wheels fell off. In back-to-back games, the Indians allowed 32 opposition home plate touches. They got 43% better on Thursday, allowing only nine runs!

Very few pitchers left this past week unscathed. Fausto Carmona and David Huff's sterling ERAs ballooned to 7.88 and 5.14 respectively. Yet, Justin Masterson's dropped following three perfect innings on March 10. Mitch-A-Palooza Talbot was smashed for nine earned runs in 1.2 innings of work on Monday. That gives him a spectacular(ly awful) 27.00 ERA in 3.2 innings this Spring. New father Carlos Carrasco struggled for two hitters, allowing back-to-back home runs to Arizona on Tuesday. Other than that, he looked good and threw the ball well.

Unfortunately, the disconcerting trend that is already beginning to develop is that when the

pitchers get shelled, the offense is competent, but not good enough. When the pitching is good, the offense needs Viagra. For four of this week's games, the offense was flaccid.

None more flaccid than Matt LaPorta. LaPorta leads the team in at bats with 29. This speaks to how important Manny Acta views him for this season. LaPorta has spent the last couple springs rehabbing various injuries. This year, he is reported to be healthy. His .138 batting average says otherwise.

Perhaps he is working on some adjustments from hitting coach Jon Nunnally. But I would be lying if I said I wasn't concerned about LaPorta's inability to hit a fat chick in a Roethlisberger jersey at Primanti Brothers Restaurant on a Sunday in November (yes, it's in Pittsburgh). He only has six strikeouts over those 29 at bats, a slight improvement from last season where he struck out in 21.8% of his at bats. That makes me more concerned, however, because it means he's making contact in a hitter-friendly environment, and still making outs 86% of the time.

Shin-Soo Choo is continuing to suffer through his struggles at the plate to the tune of a .188 average with three hits in 16 trips. All three hits are singles. I am not worried about Shin-Soo Choo. Choo did hit .393 last Spring Training. Even still, great hitters get it together. Choo is a great hitter. Matt LaPorta is not. Hence my concern.

The Indians do have one guy doing some yardwork (read: raking) this Spring, and that's Lonnie Chisenhall. @TheChizKid is hitting a cool .524 with five extra

base hits. My TCF colleague Nino Colla put together this Chisenhall-based column this past week, exploring the possibility of Chiz opening the season in Cleveland. This will not happen. Both for the reasons Mr. Colla outlined, along with the fact that we are looking at a small sample size from a guy who could not hit sand if he fell off a left handed camel. He hit .234 off left handed pitching with Double-A Akron last year. Imagine that at the big league level with highly-specialized southpaws matching up with him at every key at bat. Love the kid, but ready he is not.

Not that he is very relevant to discussions with the Indians at this stage of the game, but Luis Valbuena, a darkhorse to be the utility infielder, is slugging .619 right now. It goes along with a .190 average. Nine of his 21 at bats are strikeouts or home runs. This is lovingly referred to as a "Matt Stairs".

This week's transactions: The Indians signed Nick Johnson to a contract this week with an option for 2012. One caveat to this signing is that Nick Johnson still cannot swing a bat while recovering from offseason surgery. If he makes an appearance with the Indians at any point this year, the option for next season kicks in. It is a solid low-risk, medium/high-reward signing. Johnson does have a career .844 OPS, but it is unclear what he will have in the tank upon returning. No move was required to accommodate Johnson on the roster because his deal was a minor league contract.

This week's bold prediction: Chris Perez will notch 35 saves this season. I know what you are thinking. That would mean Chris Perez will save roughly 45-50% of the Indians wins this season. Hear me out. First off, the starting rotation will give the team more length this season. The message is loud and clear from Goodyear. Throw strikes. The Indians front office desperately tried to beef up the defense this season. With another tremendous set of hands at 2B in Orlando Cabrera, Jason Donald seeming to be doing well with the transition to 3B, and three guys who can cover a ton of ground in the OF, the pitchers will have more confidence in allowing the opposition to put the ball in play.

Second, the bullpen guys will have defined roles. The Indians will have the luxury of two lefties again. Tony Sipp has thrown the ball very well thus far and his adjustment period to the majors should be about complete. Rafael Perez was steady last year. Chad Durbin will pitch the 8th inning. That leaves the glut of righties of Jensen Lewis, Frank Herrmann, Joe Smith, and whoever else makes the bullpen as 6th/7th inning guys. With defined roles, guys will be better prepared.

Finally, despite how poor the team's record was last season, the Indians were 23-21 in one-run games. The pitching and the offense should be competitive enough to give the Indians a good amount of close games.

A final note: If you want the best Indians coverage, there is no place better than TheClevelandFan.com. Al Ciammiachella , Paul Cousineau , Nino Colla , Samantha Bunten , Steve Buffum , and company have you covered. You will not find better coverage than what these individuals can provide. Save yourself the time. Do not flip through the Plain Dealer or the Akron Beacon Journal. All of us may be fans first and foremost, but we do not have some deadline to meet to throw excrement at a wall and make it stick into an article.

Every article you will read from the Indians writers, and all the TCF writers in general, are written with the passion of somebody like you. Not chicken-scratched on the back of a napkin from the press box. They are written from the heart, but still informative and factual. They are from people who care, people who have not sold themselves to the business. If that is the kind of Indians writing you want to read, then I can tell you with complete certainty that you will not find better than what is offered to you here.

Now, if you'll excuse me, I have to go plan for our latest Snowmageddon and make sure that my canned goods are properly stacked, my flashlights have batteries, and see if I have some of Jobu's rum in stock.