When a team that was expected to start out 2-8 suddenly starts out 8-2 you're obliged to take notice. The Cleveland Indians, a rag tag collection of projects and misfits, has played as solid of baseball thus far as any team outside of the Texas Rangers and the locals are doing just that, taking notice.

It's how they're taking notice that is probably more of the story than the fact that the Indians currently on pace to win 130 games and make a mockery of the American League Central.

But no true Indians fan dares to even think that way or even risk getting too excited by a quick start. There are a variety of reasons for this.

You can start with the history of the franchise if you want. The phrase "swoon in June and die in July" may not have been invented specifically to describe the Indians teams of the '60s and '70s, but it fit them like a glove nonetheless. Fans tend to know their history when it comes to this team.

If you want to focus just on recent history, then you could look to the Eric Wedge years. Under Wedge Indians fans got used to seeing even objectively good Indians' teams start slowly and spend the rest of the season trying to make up ground. Conditioned more to records like 2-8 than 8-2, it follows that there will be some confusion, like the kind your dog gets when you move his dinner bowl.

If you want to get institutional about the whole thing, then you can blame the ownership of Larry and Paul Dolan, coupled with the management of Mark Shapiro, for conditioning the fans to hope for much but expect very little.

Larry Dolan, upon taking over the Indians, made the kind of unfortunate promise that tends to get made in Cleveland sports. It may not be as descriptive as "mad dog in a meat market" but Clevelanders still roll their eyes when they think about Dolan's famously saying that he would spend money on this time "when the timing was right." Perhaps the timing just has never been right.

While it is technically true that Dolan has had relatively high payrolls during his tenure, those were essentially players and contracts left over from the Jacobs/Hart years. As those players and their contracts peeled off the books, the payroll purposely has been kept small as a concession to the economic realities of the city they play in and the other teams they consort with.

The one year Dolan really had the chance to fulfill his promise, following the 2007 season, he and Shapiro instead went into a different direction. They dumped payroll, slightly, while failing to add any player more meaningful than 2008's version of Austin Kearns in the form of utility player Jamey Carroll. There would be no run at the championship as the Indians ended up winning 15 less games than the season before.

If you want to look at a seminal event in the recent history of this franchise, that was it. More than anything else, that level of inaction sent a message to both the fans and the other players on the roster that ownership was never going to spend the money necessary to maintain a club at a high level.

Since then, of course, Shapiro has taken to trading any tradable player who could otherwise bust the budget. Shipping away CC Sabathia, Cliff Lee and Victor Martinez were important moments in Cleveland history certainly but all those transactions really did was give voice to the direction the Dolans and Shapiro had already set in motion.

All that is why an 8-game win streak at the top of the season generates smiles but not enthusiasm, except among that small group of eternal optimists.

In truth, I admire those eternal optimists and I say that without a shred of sarcasm. Their ability to look at Jack Hannahan and see Brooks Robinson in his prime is heartwarming.

Though my admiration is sincere, where I do draw the line however is the underlying notion that somehow this group in all its rose-colored glasses glory represent the only true fans in this town. They aren't and not by a long shot.

I have just as much admiration, for example, for the complete cynics whose numbers overwhelm the Pollyanna set. They aren't any less loyal to their team, just far more skeptical. They look at Orlando Cabrera and see not a savvy veteran but a cheap player well past his prime able to find work only because there are too many teams in baseball.

Simply because this group wants something more tangible to believe in than an early season win streak is no reason to question their loyalty. They're comfortable in their misery in the same way that the optimists are comfortable in their blissful ignorance.

The truth is that the fan base of this team is no different than that of any professional sports team. Since everything can be graphed into a bell curve, the same holds true for fans. There are the extremes at both ends and a large segment in the middle that float between optimism and a cynicism on a daily basis.

The other truth is that you never really know what kind of baseball season you're going to get until it actually gets going. All evidence thus far to the contrary notwithstanding, the Indians aren't a very talented team. Their starting pitching is suspect (or is supposed to be), their bullpen is a bit of a Rorschach ink blot and their hitting is average at best (or is supposed to be).

And yet as the season has gotten underway, outside of the first two games, every one of those suspect elements has performed beyond all expectations. Do Justin Masterson and Mitch Talbot really have 11 or 12 more of those same kinds of performances in them? Is Asdrubal

Cabrera really going to hit 30 or so home runs? Has Chris Perez really turned into Dennis Eckersley?

Perhaps the best take away from those performances thus far is that each of those players actually has it within him to play at that level. That's comforting until you remember that the fact that they are in the major leagues suggests that they should be able to perform like that.

The fact remains that Fausto Carmona along with Talbot and Masterson has demonstrated an ability to shut down an entire team's offense. Perez can close out games and Cabrera can hit.

The real test comes in the ability to be able to perform at that level consistently. That's not just the goal in baseball, it's the goal in every professional sport. The golfing world is full of guys that can hit as good a shot as any player in the history of the game has ever hit. What distinguishes Jack Nicklaus from your brother-in-law is the ability to consistently hit those great shots.

The same is true in baseball. There's a reason Ryan Garko is in Japan and Derek Jeter is still with the Yankees. Consistently producing is the difference and ultimately will determine if the cast of characters wearing Indians uniforms this season are the real deal or just another in a long line of pretenders.