With the Indians still sitting in 1st place, winning games that they have no business winning (Monday) or somehow remaining in games that look like lost causes until the final at-bat (Tuesday), the opinions on whether the Indians' success is sustainable has been the hottest topic to hit the North Coast since a certain athlete sat in a Boys and Girls Club in Connecticut. While the current vibe is unquestionably positive about the Tribe – regardless of what the future months may hold – it is stunning to look at the makeup of this team, off to such a hot start and to remember from whence they came.

Since every national (and local) publication that piled on the Indians for their off-season, questioning the intentions ownership and the competency of the Front Office, has had to begrudgingly acknowledge that the Indians have some pieces and parts that could keep them in contention, let's all remember that it has now been just over a season-and-a-half since those horrible couple of days in late July of 2009, when Victor sat crying in front of his locker, consoling his son while CP Lee could hardly contain his glee in TV interviews about being with a contender in Philadelphia as the hope that the success from 2007 would lead to something flitted away.

That was 21 months ago and in those months, the Indians hit rock bottom (seemingly digging for new bottoms a couple of times along the way), scraped along the bottom for about a year until about the All-Star Break last year, then began to swim slowly and largely unnoticed upwards. With the performance of the first couple weeks of the season, there is a sense that the Indians' struggle against the current has not been in vain and the early hot streak has the look of a salmon, leaping from the water in the midst of swim upstream – with a kind of a "remember us?" feel to it.

With this hot start though, it's fair to ask how the Indians got here, and to that end my TCF colleague Andrew Clayman has penned an interesting piece regarding the manner in which the current Indians were built, comparing them to their partners in the penthouse (for now) of the AL Central, the KC Royals. The whole piece is worth your time as it is extremely well-researched as Clayman attempts to quantify how the current Indians came to be, going much further than simply rehashing the draft failures of the better part of a decade that are already well-known. His takeaway thought on the manner in which the Indians have been built is a particularly interesting one as he asks, "did Shapiro and Co. manage to clean up the mess of their draft failures by trading away the old core for a new one?" Just to carry that thought further, did they really do it this quickly?

With a lineup, rotation, and bullpen full of players that made their way into the organization in a manner OTHER than the draft, is it possible that "The Plan" (v2.0) to add similarly-aged, similarly-controlled players into the organization has already started to come to fruition, just two-and-a-half-seasons after the decision to trade CC and, to a lesser degree, Casey Blake?

While so much focus is placed on the trades of CC, Clifton Phifer, and El Capitan (and I'll get to that) in terms of the Indians adding potential building blocks, since Blake's name has been evoked, it is worth noting that the Indians' current #2 through #4 hitters came about in trades for Eduardo Perez, Ben Broussard, and Lacey Cake.

Read that again and add Einar Diaz and Ryan Drese on the list if you want to include the Tribe's #5 hitter and how he found his way to the North Coast. For all of the high-profile trades that the Indians have been involved in, they made silk out of sows' ears in each of those trades, and the middle-of-the-order is a daily reminder of that.

Just to expand on how impressive that is, Eduardo Perez had all of 102 plate appearances for the Mariners (.545 OPS in those PA) before retiring after that 2006 season while Ben Broussard strode to the plate only 530 more times (.695 OPS in those PA) after being traded by the Indians that same season. The Indians have their #2 and #3 hitters to show for those two trades in July of 2006. Going further, Casey Blake has been the most successful of the trio that was moved for the Indians' middle-of-the-order as he's posted a .779 OPS over the last 4 seasons in LA, but the Indians traded him when he was 34 years old and they netted one of the best young hitting prospects in baseball (2011 numbers considered) from a premium defensive position.

However, for as many accolades as the Indians have received for netting The Axe Man for a 34-year-old infielder, everyone realizes that Mark DeRosa has played in a total of 102 games (posting a cumulative .669 OPS in 381 plate appearances in 2+ years) since being traded by the Indians in the middle of 2008, right?

Meanwhile, the main player acquired for DeRosa (the other is Jess Todd) has become enough of a force on the local landscape that T-shirts are being printed with his likeness (and how could you not order one of these) with all of the attention certainly well-deserved. If you think that C. Perez – he of the wild hair, the braggadocios Twitter account, and the direct path from the mound towards home after every pitch – is just "sound and fury, signifying nothing", realize that since the beginning of last season, Pure Rage has a 1.54 ERA, a 1.02 WHIP and has struck out nearly a batter an inning en route to 29 saves. Chris F. Perez hasn't allowed an earned run since August 6th of last year, when he allowed 2 earned runs. Those 2 earned runs are the only ones that he's allowed since the end of June last year.

Let me re-state that in different terms so it isn't lost on anyone – in his last 41 1/3 IP over his last 40 games, Chris Perez has allowed 2 earned runs. That's a 0.43 ERA for a 25-year-old that the Indians control THROUGH the 2014 season…all for ½ of a season of Mark DeRosa.

While you may not have realized what those players (E. Perez, Broussard, Blake, DeRosa) did after leaving Cleveland, the knowledge that the Indians committed some grand larceny in those deals is pretty well-known. Without delving into the fact that Kelly Shoppach has played in all of 75 games since being traded to the Rays (with 6 HR and a .641 OPS since the trade from Cleveland) or any of the other trades that have netted the Indians a roster full of other teams' prospects that are winning, suffice it to say that the Tribe has found success identifying when a player is close to the end of his usefulness, and flipping said player for a young player with some potential.

But seeing as how we all know that the Indians were proficient in these deals, realize that those trades may have brought a middle of the order to the North Coast while settling the back end of the bullpen, the trades of CC, Lee, and Victor are the ones that have received the most attention. On those deals, Chris Antonetti had this to say to ESPN's Jayson Stark , "if you look back at the deals we made in 2008 and 2009, we made them because we weren't competitive. If we had been the team we wanted to be in 2008, we wouldn't have traded CC [Sabathia]."

As much as people wail and gnash over those trades, the Indians made those moves because they weren't winning enough to justify keeping those guys around, particularly CC in 2008. While the trades of Lee and Victor were/are much maligned locally, the current 1st place Indians boast 40% of their rotation from those moves, with more players likely to arrive in Cleveland – be it in the coming months or coming years.

[redacted]

[redacted]