With the Indians sitting on a two game losing “streak”, resulting from a bullpen meltdown and the staff ace looking like the lost soul that he was on Opening Day, the doubt has begun to creep in again, hasn’t it? When everything seems to be going so right (as it had for the first three weeks of the season), the ebb and the flow of an MLB season is an easy thing to forget in that any team is going to go through their hot streaks and their down stretches simply because of the length of the season and the nature of the game.

However, if we’re not supposed to get excited about the hot start because “it’s too early” (and it still is), the team struggling in a couple of games shouldn’t force any grand pronouncement that the bottom is about to fall out of any team at any one time. There’s plenty still to come and as the Easter eggs that were all over the house have been found and as the sugar rush of Easter morning is upon my boys, let’s take a quick break from the Easter holiday to get loose on a Lazy One…

By now you know that national analysts and publications are weighing en masse to the Tribe’s start, from Rob Neyer providing an appetizer of sorts to Jay Jaffe of B-Pro serving up something that can stick to your bones
, going into the deep recesses of the Indians start while providing the best takeaway line at the end of his piece, writing that, “Given all of that, it’s not outside the realm of possibility that the Indians can contend, and at the very least, it appears they may be about to emerge from the doldrums. That alone would make this a positive season in Cleveland; anything else would be just gravy.”

That conclusion by Jaffe (which provides the proper context for the 2011 season) comes at the end of an article that is better than most of these pieces on the Indians, with the Cliffs’ Notes version of nearly all of these articles going something like this:

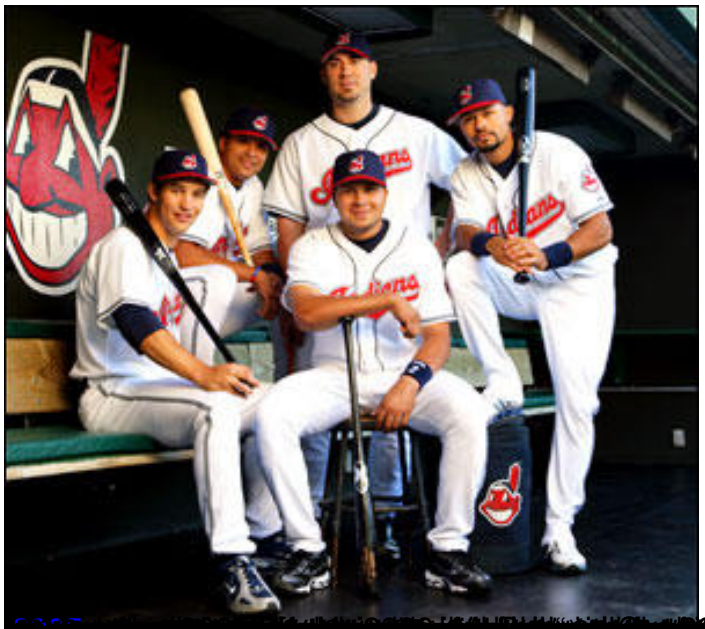
"Can the Indians keep this up?
They're a great story given what's happened to the Indians and Cleveland in the past few years and surely they're in for some regression, but it's possible that their starting pitching has turned a corner and their bullpen looks solid. There's no way that the current offensive contributors can keep this up, but Choo and Santana aren't hitting yet, so when they do, we'll see how the Indians' season takes shape. Certainly, they're not this good, but the other teams in the AL Central are all flawed so MAYBE the Indians can stay in the pennant race."

Doesn't that read like every national piece that you've read on the Indians in the past week?
By no means am I saying that the analysis is faulty (though I would caution all of these writers to be careful out on that limb that the Indians won't have a .650 winning percentage on the year), but it points to the idea that nobody really knows what's coming for the Indians, as much as Keith Law may want to justify his pre-season feelings on the Erie Warriors with a healthy dose of cold water for the North Coast
.

Their start has been a tremendous surprise on the North Coast, where nearly everything has gone right as the rest of the AL Central teams find themselves in unenviable positions. The attention that the Tribe received is appreciated, in that it represents a departure from what's been seen in the past few years (and Selig says Pujols in StL is "good for baseball" , which I never heard about CC in Cleveland) about the Tribe, but no analyst or publication is certain about whether the Indians will simply represent a "nice" early season story or if the current team has staying power.

While it would be nice to point to the Indians having the second-best run differential in the AL, the third-best run differential in all of MLB
and say "THERE…there is your proof that they're going to sustain this", it's still throwing darts. According to Baseball Reference's "Simple Rating System", which takes run differential and strength of schedule into account, the Indians,
the Indians have the best SRS in the young season
and Baseball Prospectus gives them
a 20% shot of making the playoffs
(yeah, I just went there…in April), but is that anything more than just exciting at this point?

Truthfully, I don't know and neither does anyone else…
That said, what was exciting this week was to open my current edition of Sports Illustrated (an island of unparalleled sports writing in the ocean with the 4-letter "name") and see a piece on The BLC from Albert Chen
. The entire story is worth your time as it explores Choo's odyssey from South Korea, through the M's farm system, past his Tommy John surgery in 2007 (boy, would he have looked nice on that 2007 Tribe team in FR), into his current status as a bona-fide superstar in MLB, if an oft-overlooked one.



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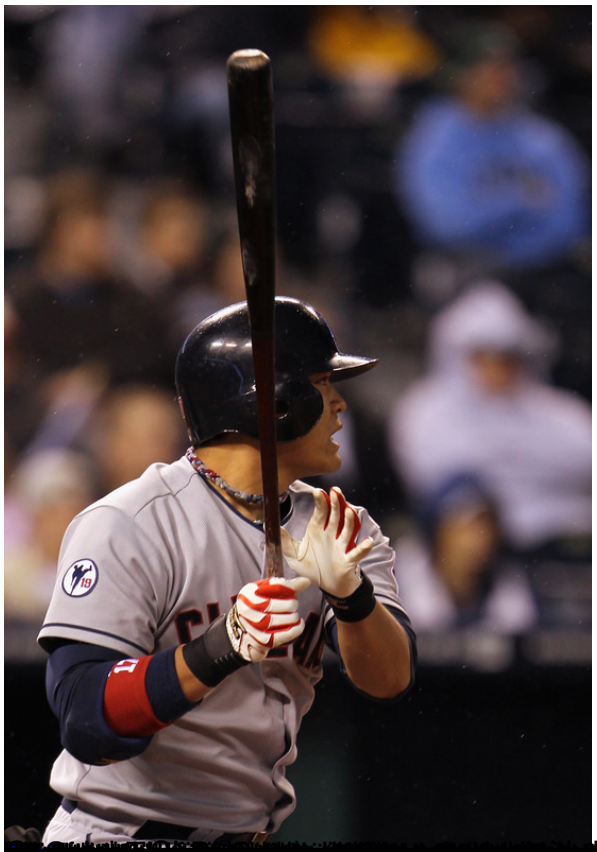

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