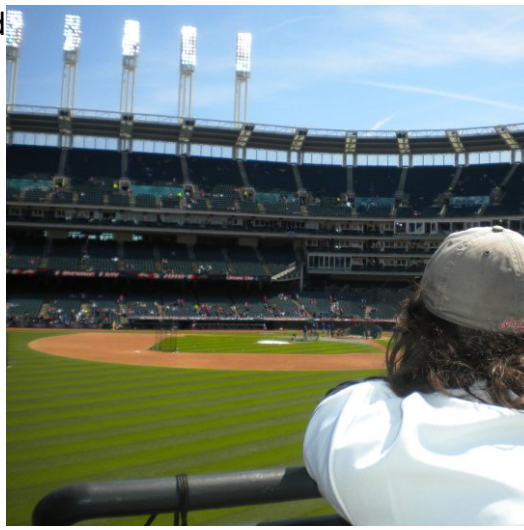
As Travis Hafner spiked his helmet rounding third base and 33,773 other people screamed and jumped, I stood silently, with a smile from ear to ear. Soaking in the moment seemed like the proper reaction to have. Beginning around the seventh inning, I had



started to get that excited feeling in the pit of my stomach. It wasn't the same feeling that I get when making a left turn into the Swenson's parking lot. It wasn't the same feeling I get tying up my skates before heading out for a game. It was the feeling I have not felt since 2007. The feeling that there's going to be something magical happening very soon.

The Indians did not disappoint me. After going five whole innings plus a batter without a hit, the Tribe erupted in the 9th to send the largest crowd since Opening Day and largest May crowd since May 9, 2009 when the Tigers were in town and helped to draw 33,640, most of them probably wearing an olde English D on their hats or shirts.

Between pitches during Carlos Santana's at bat, I watched Travis Hafner pace like a caged lion shot up with adrenaline in the on-deck circle. He had not hit a home run since April 17 and desperately wanted a chance.

Brandon League fired a 96 mph fastball that got too much of the plate. Travis Hafner did what 2004-2006 Travis Hafner would have done. He barreled it up, centered on the ball, and crushed it 410 feet to center field. We're talking about a guy here who has had trouble getting around on 92-93 mph fastballs for the last two seasons. In a 0-1 count, Hafner easily could have looked offspeed, been late, and fouled it off or grounded out to third. Instead, win number 24 was in the books.

I have to admit, there's a part of me that cannot stand bandwagon fans. I hate the concept of supporting something based on convenience. At some point, I probably need to accept that everybody's definition being a fan is different. To me, it's supporting the team come hell or high water. Even from 2008-2010, I still went to somewhere between 25-30 games per season, standing on the Porch for a majority of them. In my mind, if the team has to put in the effort and suffer through the bad years to get to the good ones, then so do I.

Lately, I have been putting it in perspective. As legendary hockey coach Herb Brooks used to say, "The legs feed the wolf". Wolves are highly intelligent and deadly creatures, but it's their speed and agility that allow them to survive. Before Friday's game, I got to have lunch with a friend (and idol) of mine, Bryan Leonard. Leonard is a professional sports handicapper, originally from the Cleveland area. We talked about "squares", the people who bet on games who have no idea what they are doing. Those people fuel the Vegas sports betting market, and further, fuel the gambling market in general.

As such, I connected the dots and determined that the bandwagon fans are the legs of the wolf or the squares of the gambling world. They drive the profits. They drive the revenues. And it takes winning to get those people on your side. While I can still look down on them, and will continue to because of my personal convictions, their return to the ballpark is wholly necessary to run a successful operation. It is their ticket, concession, and apparel purchases that can lead to the ownership spending money to improve the product.

At least I can take solace in knowing that when the bandwagon gets full, I won't be the one suffocated by it. Because my transportation is already at the ballpark.

This week, I found the joy of rain delays. Obviously, everyone appreciates a good tarp slide from a player or a poor groundscrewman crawling out from underneath the tarp , but when a game is delayed and no rain is falling, the fun in the stands begins. While standing in my usual spot on the Porch this pastTuesday night, talking to a buddy from high school whom I hadn't seen in a few years, I noticed an attractive blonde who was *slightly* (and by slightly, I mean incredibly) overdressed for attention. Her skirt made it approximately four inches down from her waist and her shirt showed off, as my friend eloquently put it, her "kangaroo pouch".

At first, it seemed innocent and playful. She slapped and punched at the male companion she was with while the other couple they were with looked on with expressions of confused concern. Things would calm down for the next five minutes or so. Then, things exploded like she was being filmed for an episode of *Cheaters* and had just found out of his unfaithfulness. Open hand slaps that would have made the most fervent *Maury* viewer impressed began flying about.

The guy was caught in a no-win situation. With no tranquilizer darts or frilly cocktails available, he had no options. He pleaded, unsuccessfully, to calm her down. She continued wailing away and so since fight was not an option, flight was the choice. While finishing a half circle dart around the trash cans on the Porch, and not being chased because 10-inch wedges must not be easy to run in, the victim was provoked by the resident sh*t-talker on the Porch. If you have been there before, you know the type. The guy who has elaborate stories that you know he witnessed but was not part of, though he pretends to be the center of the story's attention.

After a drink went flying and posturing was complete, the police broke up the incident, escorting the first guy in handcuffs while the blonde darted behind the bleachers to get out of the limelight. As the now empty-handed joker regaled his friends with hypotheticals of how he "would have gone Muhammad Ali on his ass" (I assume he means the current state of Muhammad Ali), the blonde returned to a smattering of applause from the entertained (read: mostly male) crowd.

The moral of this story: Rain delays aren't always a bad thing. Sometimes they give you a chance to examine your life and really feel better about yourself.

View from the Porch: Don't be "that guy". No matter the game or the size of the crowd, I always have to hear the not-so-ambient noise of the egomaniacal guy who tries to impress his friends with fabricated tales of bar fight conquests and the time he struck out that guy who once played baseball for a junior college who was managed by that guy whose brother used to play with the cousin of Travis Buck. Save your lame-ass stories for the already-drunk girl at the end of the bar who can at least pretend to give a damn.

In terms of on the field action, there comes a point in every player's career where he simply must be moved down the lineup. For Grady Sizemore, that time is now. I will preface this by saying that I have never been a Grady Sizemore fan. I appreciate his athleticism, talent, and skill set, but to me, he is one of those guys who can take it to another level and just never does. I guess I might be a bit of an old school guy, in that I'd rather not have a 20-30 HR guy batting leadoff and I'd rather take the .295 singles hitter who works the count. Grady is not a .295 singles hitter who works the count.

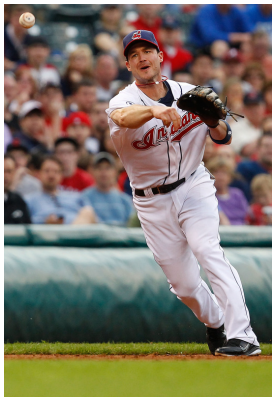
Michael Brantley, however, is. Can Grady be a more valuable asset to this lineup batting sixth or seventh? Potentially. But, he has been a rally killer so far this year and really over the last three seasons. I realize that they have been injury-plagued, but he is unwilling to change his pull-happy approach. Base hits drive in runs too.

Also, a leadoff hitter needs to be counted on to start rallies. Many people make the argument that after the first inning, whoever is batting in the leadoff spot is irrelevant. I disagree. There's a reason that lineups are put together the way that they are. Guys are the top of the order, regardless of the inning, are supposed to be table setters for the heart of the order. Grady Sizemore is not a table setter. He is a run producer. Table setters have a different approach. They slap the ball to left field, content to make a slight left turn at first than a wide one and head for second because of a double in the gap.

View from the Porch: Sizemore Matters, but Not as Much. The Indians had to use Grady Sizemore in the leadoff spot for years because they had no other alternative. When Grady was going well, everyone wanted him to hit third and drive in runs. Now, the Indians have a leadoff hitter. Michael Brantley's hitting .329 in the leadoff spot and has walked 11 more times than Sizemore.

Grady Sizemore does not have to be the catalyst anymore. While his contributions are definitely helpful, and I will readily admit that this is a much better team with him in the lineup, he does not need the pressures of being the leadoff hitter. Allow him to relax and get back in to a groove at his own pace rather than a hurried one with enhanced responsibility as a leadoff hitter. He has shown jumpiness at the plate and the four walks are evident of that. This is a guy who in three of his four full years walked 75+ times.

One issue to this idea is that the ideal place to bat him is sixth to protect Travis Hafner, but neither guy hits lefties very well and makes for a perfect matchup scenario for the opposition. The manager's job is to put players in the best position to succeed. Right now, that's Michael Brantley batting leadoff and Grady



Sizemore's extra base hit prowess and ability to hit home runs down toward the bottom of the order.

And finally, just an overall observation of this team that makes me extremely happy is that they collectively have a high baseball IQ. They're picking the rightpitches to steal on, executing squeeze bunts and delayed steals, taking a lot of borderline pitches, and taking extra bases on

bad cutoff throws or hustle plays. Those are the things that make teams start 24-13. Little things are crucial to the game of baseball. The three-run homer will not always be there. But, hustling first to third and playing sound defense will be. The Indians have done that to this point and it's been a refreshing change of pace from the teams of the past few years.

I said last week that this team is very likeable. That has not changed and it won't change. Climb aboard.