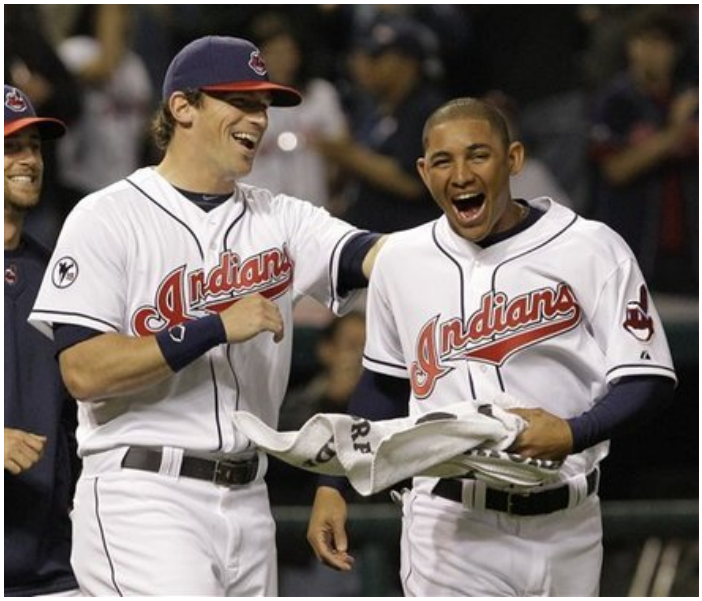

As the magic continues down at the corner of Carnegie and Ontario, with the Indians pulling victory from the jaws of defeat taking the first two games of the series against the Reds (I refuse to call it anything else than that), there is a growing sense that something really is happening here. With Zeke Carrera drag-bunting the Indians to victory on Friday and Travis Buck blasting the team into the win column the next day, the Indians found their heroes in players that were wearing Clippers' uniforms just last week…with all of this coming against the reigning NL Central Champs, fighting tooth and nail for the lead in their own division.

Despite being shut down for the better part of the starts of both games, the Indians scratched, clawed, bunted, and blasted their way to victory in two games that, quite frankly, they had no business winning. And it is games like these that provide this feeling that, for the first time in a long time, the Indians are the team for whom the bounces smile upon and for whom every managerial decision ends up looking brilliant.

The calendar says it's not quite June, but there is the old baseball axiom that a team "is what it is" at the 40-game mark of a season and now – 3 games past that – the Indians are STILL winning at a clip over .650, holding a 7 game lead in their division. For some perspective on that, in 4 of the 6 divisions in MLB, EVERY team in the division is closer than 7 games off of the leader's pace.

The last place Nationals are as close to the first place Phillies as the Tigers and Royals are to the Indians while the last place Orioles are a mere 4 games back from the division-leading Yankees…waiting a beat to let that sink in…
Seriously.

But it's still early, with plenty of baseball left to be played, right?
This team is still flawed with players playing over their heads, who are destined to come back to Earth, breaking our hearts once again?

If that's really where you're still at in this, it's time to live in the moment, enjoy this for what it is, to imagine "What If We All Believe?" (and this terrific team-produced video is unquestionably based on this from my friend Scott Bricker), and get off on a Lazy Sunday, of course…

From the top, let's answer that question of whether it really is still early, something that was tackled a couple of days ago by the Wall Street Journal
. With a hat tip to longtime reader Tyler, it presents an engrossing look at what a hot (or cold) start means to a team's chances for the playoffs. While it feels wildly premature to talk playoffs, the findings of the WSJ research are more than compelling, even if they use June 1st and the 50-game mark as the lines of demarcation, because their research seems to offer a message that is contradictory to everything that was spouted from the manager's office in the mid-to-late-90s, when the results of those seasons validate what the WSJ asserts – that starts do matter.

The piece is well-done because it doesn't avoid the fact that it's attempting to debunk a fallacy (that baseball men and beat writers lazily lean on) and goes right after the "it's a marathon, not a sprint" philosophy that pervades MLB:
Since 1996, just 9% of teams with a losing record on June 1 wound up with 90 wins, the number teams usually shoot for to make the playoffs, according to data crunched by The Wall Street Journal and Ben Alamar, founder of the Journal of Quantitative Analysis in Sports. During that early season period, the average correlation between a team's win percentage on June 1 and its final winning percentage is 0.76.
--snip--
The best explanation for why 50-games is all it takes to sort out the winners from the losers has to do with a combination of mathematics, psychology and the secrets of winning baseball games. ***While any bad team can have a good week or month, excelling for a 50-game stretch without very good players is virtually impossible.***

The point is that the way a team starts a season means a LOT more to their playoff chances than you may have thought and that 50-game mark indicates that old "you are what you are" idea. That last line was admittedly bolded by me, though it is an absolutely fascinating piece and worth your time, even if the overall slant of the piece is to explore the expansion of the playoffs and the reasons for doing so. What is interesting is to look at it in the context of the current standings and this belief that somehow…someway the White Sox (or fill in the blank because EVERY other team in the AL Central is now under .500) are going to barrel their way back into the divisional race.

[redacted] Sizemore told MLB.com's Jordan Bastian [redacted]

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