As the Indians finally leave the “friendly confines” of Carnegie and Ontario, after dropping 5 of 6 at home in the past week, there is an inescapable feeling that all of this momentum that the Indians had built over nearly two months has been put to a sudden and uncomfortable halt. While the idea existed that the Indians could perhaps tread water and prey on the cellar-dwelling Twins this week in an effort to keep afloat, the same problems that had been exposed in recent weeks continued to sabotage the Indians chances at pulling out victories in winnable games as the offense’s silence became deafening and as the late-inning magic has disappeared in a poof.

The Indians now find themselves only 1 ½ games up on the Tigers in the Central as their lead has evaporated not only because they’ve been losing at an unmatched pace, but also because Detroit is about as hot as a team can be right now, as they’ve gone 11-5 over their last 16 games. So, while this may be lost on many as we watch the Indians give up ground in the Central, if you were to put the Tigers in the AL East, they would be 2 games back and they would be 1 game back if they were in the AL West.

Of course, they reside in the Central, where they remain 1 ½ games back and while looking at where they would be in other divisions doesn’t make me feel as good as it should given the Indians’ lead just a few weeks ago, it speaks to how quickly the Tigers have catapulted themselves up the ranks of not just the AL Central, but in all of the AL thanks to their recent run. As much as I’d like to say that “baseball is a game of streaks” and that “these things happen”, the performances of the last two weeks (for both the Indians and the Tigers) are more than a little disconcerting as the Tribe and the Motor City Kitties seemed to have changed places from where they were only a month ago as the Indians are seemingly incapable of a winning streak and the Tigers just keep cutting into that lead.

While the Indians' recent struggles have been jarring (as they look like a completely different team from the one we saw in April), it is not untrue to say that everyone saw this stretch of the schedule coming, if you think back to the beginning of the Reds' series when they were faced with some tough challenges. They've gone 8-11 since the Reds arrived to the North Coast and while that's disappointing for a 1st place team, it could have been a LOT worse, given the Tribe's struggles. All told, they won two series (Reds and Blue Jays) and lost three series (Rays, Rangers, and Twins) being swept once (against the Rangers) and sweeping an opponent (the Reds) since the "meat grinder" portion of their schedule began.

Don't take that rationalization of the tough schedule for the recent struggles and don't expect the argument that, "well…they didn't plan on being here, so we should just enjoy it while/if it lasts", because the Indians are still in 1st place in early June and the Front Office has shown some level of urgency with the call-ups of Al White and Cord Phelps (albeit a couple of weeks late for my liking) as they've acknowledged that the Indians are not content to simply batten down the hatches, attempt to ride this out, and see if they could have recaptured the magic of the first few months with what was a flawed team, despite what the record showed.

Now that the Front Office has started to tinker and as the Manager's lineup card continues to represent attempts at jump-starting the team, the sense of urgency needs to arrive now for the players (and it coincides with a trip to the Bronx, obviously) as the onus is now on the players to prove that their success in the early going was not a mirage. While nobody expects them to get back to the .700 winning percentage that they once boasted, the Indians need to find that happy medium between what they were when they were winning 2 out of every 3 games and this recent stretch when they've lost 2 out of every 3 games (and they've lost 14 of their last 21) to even out a little and get their sea legs back under them.

Perhaps it comes back with one great push of a game that gets the offense on track or perhaps it comes gradually as the players that should be carrying this team start to shoulder the load while the young players get back to playing the developmental, complementary roles that they were thought to fill when the season started.
Then again, perhaps it doesn't come back at all…

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Obviously, most of the focus on the Tribe's recent struggles has (rightfully) been aimed at the toothlessness of the offense and the inability of the team to put enough runs on the board to sustain a run of consistent victories. That said, I thought I'd pass along some interesting quotes from B-Pro's John Perrotto earlier in the week from a manager, a CF, and a SS from a struggling offensive team
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Quotes from the manager:
"I think this lineup is going to hit. It has to hit…I don't see any reason why we won't hit. We can get started any time we want, though. That's how I look at it. I like the lineup, but we've got to start scoring some runs."
--snip--

"I don't sit back and worry about the ones we won or lost, I just think about today's game and putting my best team on the field. Hell, tomorrow might never come."

And…from the CF:
"Our team has relied on our pitching, and they've done a great job. We need to get going as an offense, though. I think it's good timing that we've got everybody together now. We've relied on the pitching staff all year, and we need to start giving them help."
--snip--
"To have the season we're having so far, I think we have to step back for a second and say we're playing pretty well. Still, you always want to do better, and I know we can do better."

Finally from the SS:
"Teams have won 114 games and still had times when they didn't score runs. When a team goes 162-0, then you'll see a team that never had a slump."

Those words must be coming from Acta, Sizemore, and Asdrubal looking for some patience, right?
Actually, those are quotes this week from Cholly Manuel, Shane Victorino, and Jimmy Rollins on the Phillies' recent struggles at the plate, passed along by B-Pro's John Perrotto.

Look, I'm not going to sugarcoat this and attempt to put some lipstick on a pig and tell you that the Indians' offense is a thing of beauty or that it's something that it's not, but those quotes are fascinating in terms of how most Indians' fans have tunnel vision on the Tribe (with good reason) and to see a team like the Phillies having similar struggles (over the same timeframe) at least lends some perspective on the Indians' offensive situation. That said, the two situations are much different as the Phillies have players that DO have a track record of hitting, something that the Indians do not boast…outside of Choo, Sizemore, and Hafner.

However, even with those "established" offensive threats in Philly, in their last 30 games, the Phillies' hitters have "boasted" the following hitting line:
.237 BA / .308 OBP / .357 SLG / .656 OPS
In that span, the Phillies have averaged 3.5 runs per game for a team that has gone 15-15 in those 30 games.

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