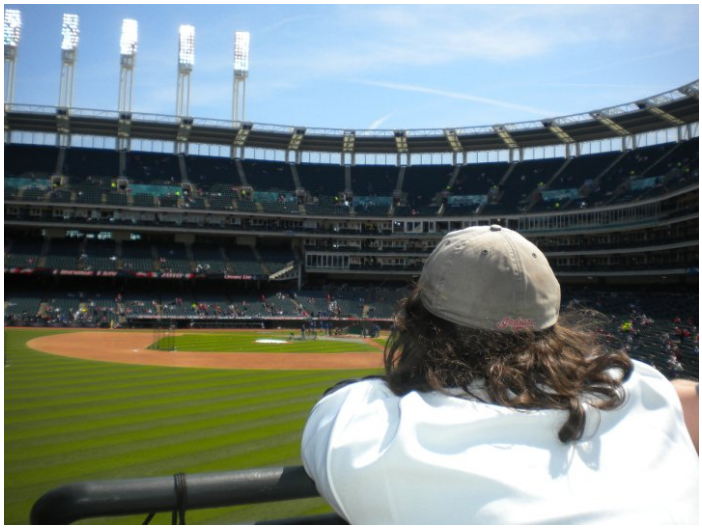


What if it never happened? What if Carlos Santana didn't have the biggest hit of his Major League career? What if Travis Hafner didn't look like the Travis Hafner of 2005? What is Carlos Carrasco didn't have nerves of steel at Yankee Stadium? What if Vinnie Pestano briskly jogged to the mound? What if Chris Perez didn't have an arm like a f****n' cannon?

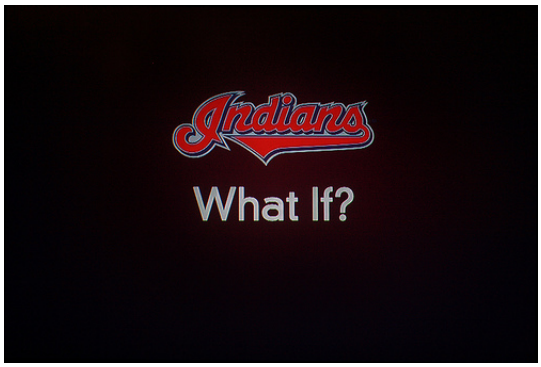
What if Asdrubal Cabrera didn't keep it fair? What if Jack Hannahan hit lefties like he always has? What if Orlando Cabrera didn't have a fairy godmother from April-to-mid-May? What if Rafael Perez began talking to reporters? What if Manny Acta could go wrong in the first 45 games? What if Michael Brantley was just known as "the other guy" we got for CC Sabathia?

What if Matt LaPorta could use the lower half of his body? What if Fausto Carmona didn't imitate an Italian grandmother serving food in the kitchen? What if Orlando Cabrera didn't turn in to a pumpkin? What if Alex White didn't Adam Miller himself? What if Carlos Santana could throw out a baserunner?

What if Jack Hannahan didn't hit righties the way he always has? What if Shin-Soo Choo had called a cab? What if Shin-Soo Choo didn't run routes like Josh Cribbs? What if Shin-Soo Choo didn't wear his ass as a hat? What if Carlos Santana didn't have a Mississippi River length swing? What if the Indians didn't get a hit? What if Adam Everett was a roving minor league fielding instructor?

What if the Indians pull it together and win the division? What if this recent stretch of terrible play truly is a bump in the road? What if Carlos Santana figures it out? What if Shin-Soo Choo

becomes a feared hitter again? What if Travis Hafner is actually healthy for the rest of the year?



What if the Indians finish 10 games out? What if Carlos Santana hits .225 all year? What if this is Fausto Carmona?

When the Indians concocted this year's marketing and PR scheme of "What If?", I don't know if they really envisioned this season being completely full of what if questions. As we sit here in the midst of losing 11 of 15 to start the month of June, answers are few and far between and questions are like taxi cabs at a Las Vegas strip club at 3 a.m. (I saw this firsthand on my way to McCarran Airport. Downtown NYC red lights have nothing on a Vegas strip club in the middle of the night.)

In this week's View from the Porch, I'll examine some of these questions.

The date was August 5, 2001. I was sitting on the basement floor, my father on the couch, and the Indians serving as the ESPN Sunday Night Baseball game of the week. The Seattle Mariners were in town. I was 14 at the time and I was just starting to get the point where I could really appreciate and evaluate the game of baseball.

My basement setup was conducive to playing with hockey mini sticks. They are small-scale, plastic hockey sticks that used to be relatively big souvenir items. I had a handful of NHL teams and a Cleveland Lumberjacks goalie stick. I would put on a cheap street hockey blocker and glove and have my dad shoot one of those stuffing-filled mini pucks at me. The landing of the

basement steps was the perfect width for simulating a mini net. We would play this for hours. Ironically, I became a defenseman and not a goaltender.

Anyway, it was on August 5, 2001, a day after my dad's 43rd birthday, that we were again playing this game. We took a break from playing and turned to the Indians game. They were down 14-2, to a team that was 80-30 on the season. Knowing that this team was accustomed to comebacks, in my head, I assumed that 12 runs were just too much. It was going in to the bottom of the seventh.

Rather than go back to tending my net, I took the remote so that my father couldn't change the channel. I wanted to see how this was going to play out. In my heart, I held out hope that they could perform magic on national television. Heading to the top of the eighth, it was 14-5. Even at 14 years old, I had watched enough sports to know that getting it all back at once with a big deficit is near-impossible. I kept watching.

After the eighth inning, it was 14-9. I was pretty good at math in grade school, I would find out over the next four years that I loathed math and that algebra and I didn't get along, but needing five runs with three outs and having some of the bench players in already probably didn't bode well. Omar Vizquel's two out triple down the RF line taught me a lesson. One that I have conveyed to you many times in this weekly column. Nothing is over until it's over. Which, as I've said numerous times, is why I never leave a game early or turn off a game early. I did last weekend for one of the Yankee games and beat myself up over it for the rest of the day and into

the next.

So, for my own “What if?”, what if I turned off that Sunday night baseball game? Luckily, I don’t have to know the answer to that.

With that, a Happy Father’s Day to my father Larry, and a Happy Father’s Day to my fellow TCF scribes, their fathers, and to all the fathers and grandfathers who read my column.

Back to this season. I have not given up hope or put on a lifejacket. There’s too much baseball left to be played and too many things that can happen. Case in point, what if Miguel Cabrera tears his ACL? How about Paul Konerko blows a hammy running to first? 63.2% of the season is left to play.

Sure, the Indians are 7-16 in their last 23 games since they reached, arguably, the highest point of the season at 30-15 with their win over Boston on May 23. The same culprits are killing this team right now. Unfortunately, they are four of the biggest pieces, and the ones we thought we could count on the heaviest.

So, what if this is the Carlos Santana we’re stuck with? The guy who is allowing nearly 80% of runners to be successful with stealing bases? The guy who appears to be clueless at handling a pitching staff? These things are somewhat tolerable if he’s hitting .285 with an OPS of .800, but he isn’t. He entered Friday’s game hitting .216 with a .712 OPS. At those numbers, you better be the best defensive catcher in the league.

What if Shin-Soo Choo is like this the rest of the year? Can the Indians possibly with the AL Central with their best all-around player hitting .237 and striking out two-and-a-half times more than he walks? I would have to say no. He has shown signs of snapping out of it at times and then he reverts back to the guy we’ve seen all year. I literally cannot think of one big hit he has had this year. Even with the other struggling guys, I can think of at least one crucial knock at some point this season.

But, above all else, I ask myself, what if the Indians finish 10 games out in the Central? They had finally achieved something they hadn't done since 2007. They had the city excited about them. People scarfed up the $10 bleacher seats in season ticket packages to get the perks associated with getting season tickets this year. Advance ticket sales for key series the rest of the summer were likely pretty high.

Now, you have a team that pissed in to the wind for a month at the worst possible time. They built a seven game lead to watch it drop to a one game deficit. They lost 16 of 22 while the Tigers got hot. And you have a city built on a "here we go again" mentality. What happens to this fan base if they get everyone's hopes up and then completely fall apart?

The true fans will always be there. But, it's the bandwagons who drive revenue. That group who only shows up when the team is winning. The group who only wears their Indians shirts when the team is 31-17 instead of 17-31. What if Cleveland won't get fooled again? What if this was the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back? Even in 2007, when the Indians had as good of a start as they had this year, the people really didn't start showing up until August. This year's team had some of the best walkup crowds in the history of the ballpark in the month of May.

Basically, how much more can the psyche of the Cleveland fan take before it's completely worn down? We just saw a city celebrate another city's championship just because our Darth Vader lost and looked awful in the process.

The perfect storm was right there in the Indians grasp. The NBA is almost sure to lockout, though Cavs interest has waned to the point of almost nil after Lebron's departure. The NFL was staring square in the face of a lockout, although it looks like they might bypass a labor stoppage. The Indians had their chance to win back a large portion of this city's sports entertainment dollar.

They have not failed completely yet. If they rattle off a string where they win 8 of 12 or 10 of 15, and do so in exciting fashion, opinions will change. After all, 45-35 or 47-36 looks pretty good at this stage of the game.

The Tribe's in a precarious spot right now. There is not much impact help down below. This is not a team that has an Eric Hosmer or Dustin Ackley to call up. They have solid, inexperienced talent in the minor leagues that will not create the necessary buzz to drive up excitement and ticket sales if called up. Really, it's up to the guys in that clubhouse, and the return of Travis Hafner, to fix this thing.

This season has two possible endings. What if they didn't win all those games in dramatic fashion in April and May and propel themselves to the playoffs? Or, what if they didn't have that start, get the city excited, and then fall from the sky like a malfunctioning hot air balloon full of cinder blocks and boulders? Because when you start 30-15, look like everything is going right, and then miss the playoffs, it's a gigantic failure.

Lately, they've changed their marketing slogan to "Creating Memories". I may tackle this one in a later VftP column, but, they'll certainly be creating memories one way or another. What remains to be seen is if they want to be remembered.

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