Now that my ears have finally stopped bleeding after having to listen to Bobby Valentine – as he waxed poetically about how a (then) 1st place team is probably going to start selling off their bullpen arms (and probably more) because Mark Sha-PEE-ro knows what he's doing – for 3 hours on Sunday night, it is comforting to know that Bobby Valentine is as close to the Tribe manager's chair as I am…and the distance between each of us and the helm of the Good Ship Wahoo is probably going to remain the same.

Frankly, I don't watch a lot of ESPN (or any of it really), so I don't know if Bobby Valentine is good or entertaining on TV most of the time or if he's reasonably insightful at any time as he's breaking down baseball or other teams. What I do know is that he came across as the know-it-all blowhard he has always been purported to be over just 3 hours and, as his "analysis" dipped further into the abyss, I began to question why anyone would willingly go to him (or ESPN) for insight or information on baseball at all. Unfortunately, we were all forced there on Sunday night as my pre-existing opinions and views on ESPN were reinforced as the Mothership flies further and further away from my line of sight.

Regardless, as much as Valentine's laughable opinion that the Indians "had some good bullpen arms that contenders would want" (and I'm paraphrasing there) hung in the air on Sunday night, the Indians recent performance certainly feels like a team whose once-firm grip of the AL Central has not just loosened, but broken free entirely. That said, it certainly does not look as if the Indians are ready to simply go quietly into the night as the organization acted decisively (or is it prematurely) in promoting top prospect Lonnie (apparently not short for Alonzo) Chisenhall from Columbus.

Since watching the move go down was akin to watching the kitchen sink break free from the wall and catch some air as the organization begins to throw everything that they have through this still-open window, let's get some Tomahawks in the air to go along with the kitchen sink that was just thrown…

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That's right Cleveland, Lonnie Chisenhall has arrived in an Indians' uniform to save our fair season (or at least that's what some would have you believe) as the Indians bypassed the more obvious promotion of Jason Donald to get their highly prized prospect onto the field for the parent club. While I'm as excited as any about The Chiz's arrival, there's not much question that he remains an unfinished product (with Al pointing out Lonnie's struggles against LHP) even if he came out both barrels blazing in the desert…against RHP.

Chisenhall is an interesting case study as he's been talked about in revered tones for the past three years and, this pains me to say it, I think a good deal of that has to do with Chisenhall representing something that had been in such short supply – an early-round pick by the Indians that gradually climbed up the ladder, posting consistent numbers on his ascent. Unlike Trevor Crowe or Beau Mills or Jerry Sowers or Dave Huff (who all hit their limited ceilings relatively quickly), Lonnie represented that first sign that "things had changed" for the Indians' drafting, with Al White and Drew Pomz following him as 1st round picks that the Indians could point to as likely starters for the Tribe.

That said, as much as we've heard about The Chiz, his performance in the Minors is not one that shrieks out that this is the next coming of Evan Longoria or Ryan Zimmerman or David Wright just waiting to burst onto the MLB stage. By that I mean that those three put up monster numbers in MiLB (all at young ages) while Chisenhall has been consistent in the Minors, if not consistently overwhelming:

Chisenhall by Year

2008 - .794 OPS in Rookie Ball as a 19-year-old
2009 - .797 OPS in A+/AA as a 20-year-old
2010 - .801 OPS in AA as a 21-year-old
2011 - .779 OPS in AAA as a 22-year-old

More than most, I would love Lonnie to arrive in Cleveland and have the type of impact that those players have had, but the fact is that he has never posted an OPS at a particular level

over .780 since he has left Kinston. Of course, numbers only tell us so much about any young player and scouts have universally and perpetually raved about Chisenhall's "sweet swing" and the ages listed above mean quite a bit as The Chiz has always been the youngest regular position player on his team. That's important because while numbers for guys like Jerad Head or Matt McBride may quicken the pulse, the fact that those guys are 28 in AAA or 26 in AA tempers any real thought that they're legitimate options in MLB, much less impact players on the horizon.

Does that mean that Chisenhall is about to come an impact player?
Watching him stroke doubles into the gap in Chase Field certainly gives all of us something to dream on, but the reality of the situation is that he's likely to be a solid-to-good player at the hot corner for the Indians for the foreseeable future with that "future" starting on Monday. Don't discount that in the context of the 2011 season as "solid-to-good" is a lot more than what can be said about what we were seeing with Hannahan/Everett/The OC at 3B this year as each player proved/are proving themselves to be the flawed veterans that everyone knew they were when they were signed.

Regardless, back to Chisenhall, who immediately becomes the best hitter the Indians have had as a 3B (platoon split considered) since Casey Blake and the Blake mention is interesting as it was a comparison that was invoked by Ben Lindbergh at B-Pro , regarding Chisenhall's prospect pedigree and perhaps his ceiling:
Chisenhall didn't debut with the same sort of hype that a true blue-chipper commands, and for good reason, since little about his record suggests outright stardom. Above-average is well within his reach, though (at least eventually), so his arrival is something to celebrate, if not to salivate over. As Kevin Goldstein suggested, his perfect-world projection looks like a more consistent Casey Blake; Blake peaked close to the five-win level, and Chisenhall might have the same sort of ceiling, though he's likely to approach it earlier and more often than Blake did.

Realizing how (inexplicably) reviled Blake was in Cleveland, given the black hole that has existed in Cleveland at 3B since Blake left, that's a breath of fresh air, as is the thought that another former Indian 3B perhaps provides an interesting comparison for Chisenhall – Travis Fryman.

This has been brought up before in this space, but Chisenhall's former manager in Mahoning Valley moved quickly through the Tigers' system despite never having a breakout season in the Minors (he had a .710 OPS in AA as a 20-year-old and his highest MiLB OPS was .723 in the first half of his 21-year-old season in AAA), before he debuted in Detroit as a 21-year-old. From the time he broke into MLB as a precocious infielder, he posted an OPS somewhere between .766 and .865 every year as a Tiger, compiling a cumulative .779 OPS in 8 seasons manning 3B for the Motor City Kitties.

That may not be what how you remember Fryman at the plate, but given what we've seen at 3B in Cleveland, if that's what the next 8 seasons turn into for Lonnie as an Indian, would you take that?
Every single day…and it is interesting to note that the most HR that Fryman hit as a Tiger was 22 and never hit 40 2B in a season during those 8 seasons in Detroit

. As much as many Clevelanders may remember Fryman only from his days donning the Chief, Fryman's best two seasons statistically were as an Indian, when he was 29 years old in 1998 and when he was 31 years old in 2000, so his years in Detroit are probably more instructive as a possible career arc for Chisenhall.

Is all of that pointed out to discount Fryman's career or Chisenhall's potential?
Of course not as Fryman was a solid, steady contributor who generally batted 3rd or 5th for the Tigers (although those Tigers weren't particularly good teams) for a stretch of seasons in which he was a constant presence for them in the lineup and on the field. He won one Silver Slugger award as a Tiger and made a couple of All-Star Games (though what does that really tell you), but generally he was a good – not great – player for the better part of 8 seasons in Detroit.

That said, perhaps putting Fryman (or Robin Ventura) up there as a model of what Chisenhall might be – instead of assuming that he's going to go Longoria/Zimmerman/Wright from Day 1 is just attempting to put the proper context of who Lonnie Chisenhall is and who he could be as the PD irresponsibly posts headlines from their columnists that "Lonnie Chisenhall is the best young hitter I've seen in years" .
Which gets to the point that too much is being pinned on this kid to be the savior for a muddling offense and as much as it represents an upgrade over the Adam Everetts and Jack Hannahans of the world, let's hold off on any grand pronouncements that the only local paper in town seems intent on doing in their attempt to stay relevant.

What the Lonnie Chisenhall promotion means is that the current Indians' Front Office (not the previous one helmed by the current Team President) has acted quickly and decisively now to add their top prospects – ready or not – to the parent club as the opportunity afforded to them by their fast start is something that they're trying to capitalize on. Maybe you wanted to see Cord Phelps sooner (and I did) or maybe you wonder what took the Indians so long to jettison Adam Everett, but the fact of the matter is that the calendar has not yet flipped into July and the Indians have promoted The Chiz, Al White, and Bobby Phelps (among others like Gomez, Zeke, and Judy) as they pushed the fast-forward button on ingratiating their top young talent at the MLB level.

While you may say that this doesn't represent anything different than what happened in 2007, remember…Asdrubal didn't arrive in 2007 until August and Rafael Perez and Frank the Tank had spent time on the parent club in years past. The Indians have an opportunity in front of them (…still, thanks to the struggles of the AL Central) and they're promoting from within to see if answers can be found internally before perhaps exploring the trade market…if the Indians are still in contention at the end of next month.

As B-Pro's Lindbergh wrote in his aforementioned piece regarding the promotion of players that have already made it to Cleveland, "most of those players entered 2011 on track for 2012 debuts, but the Indians have made a reasonable response to a fluid situation, doing all they can to maximize their success in the short term while leaving their long-term plans intact".

And those "long-terms plans" remaining "intact" should not be overlooked here as the "present" is starting to resemble the "future" that has long been envisioned on the filed.

Ultimately, this is a very good thing as the chess pieces are starting to line up on the board and these players (Chiz, Phelps, etc.) are playing in meaningful games in June and July in a pennant race instead of cutting their teeth in meaningless August or September games.

Maybe the Indians jumped the gun in promoting Chisenhall as the idea that improvement, even if it ends up being incremental, carried the day and that the Indians wanted to get the "lineup of the future" one name closer to fruition. After the series in San Francisco, the Indians' offense looked like desperate times had arrived in the Indians lineup. Whether calling up Chisenhall constitutes as "desperate measures" can be debated away. What can't be debated is that Chisenhall (warts and all) represented an upgrade over what had been seen from the Indians' 3B for the last month or so.

How much of an upgrade or where Lonnie Chisenhall's career arc goes from here will now start to find some answers, with those answers coming in an Indians' uniform…

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Going back to that idea of desperation, the Indians now find themselves staring squarely in the face of replacing Choo for 8 to 10 weeks, so until September…maybe. As these Interwebs churn, there seems to be some talk of the Indians exploring internal options past Kearns and Buck, with the names of Jerad Head and Chad Huffman being bandied about as perhaps being possible options. Since I'm not going to defend any plate appearances given to Austin Kearns and feel that Buck should be simply given the keys to RF for the next month or so to see if he will sink or swim, let me illuminate you as to why Head and Huffman are (or at least should be) non-options for the Indians in RF.

First, consider the birthdays of the following players:
Jerad Head – 11/15/82
Travis Buck – 11/18/83
Chad Huffman – 4/29/85
If you're having trouble with the math, Head is a full year older than Buck, who is only 1 ½ years older than Huffman.

Next, career MLB numbers for the trio with total MLB plate appearances listed:

Head – N/A
Buck - .247 BA / .322 OBP / .411 SLG / .733 OPS in 782 PA
Huffman - .167 BA / .286 OBP / .167 SLG / .452 OPS in 21 PA
Small or no sample size for Head and Huffman, that's not the point that I'm trying to make here…

This is…as we look at AAA numbers for the trio, again with total AAA plate appearances listed:
Head - .296 BA / .357 OBP / .508 SLG / .865 OPS in 337 PA
Buck – .289 BA / .373 OBP / .440 SLG / .813 OPS in 668 PA
Huffman - .267 BA / .356 OBP / .442 SLG / .799 OPS in 1,244 PA
Head, who will be 29 this November, has 337 PA above AA and Huffman has a career .799 OPS with over 1,244 PA in AAA…and THESE guys are the ones that some want to give a shot to over Travis Buck.

Is this the devil you don't know being preferable to the devil you allegedly know, or what?

Realizing that everyone's looking for the next Casey Blake (and there's the 2nd time Lacey Cake makes an appearance here) as a late-bloomer who just needs a chance, Blake actually thrived in AAA for a full 4 seasons before coming over to the Tribe in 2003. Also, Blake was joining a 2003 team that was simply looking for a warm body to start the season at 3B, not one to enter a playoff race in late June.

Do you want Head (55 K in only AAA 60 games this year) or Huffman (63 K in only 69 AAA games this year) get any kind of leash to stick in RF in Cleveland this year?

If these guys are the answers that some are coming up with, they're asking the wrong question as Buck should be put out in RF…above TRUE 4A fodder like Head and Huffman and past-their-prime OF like Kearns. Perhaps the argument could be made for Zeke Carrera as the 4th OF because of his speed and defense, but the best internal option that the Indians have to replace Choo is Buck…every day, and no numbers from Columbus by players on the south side of 25 are going to change that fact. If you're still thinking that a platoon is a good idea, just forget about it as if there is a kernel of truth to what Buck told MLB.com's Jordan Bastian , that he "played every day basically my whole career, or for the majority of my career. I'm finding out how tough it is to be a bench player", let's see if playing every day for a month or so can resuscitate his once promising career.

Don't take this comparison to non-prospects or that quote as a method to anoint Travis Buck as THE ANSWER in RF for the Indians, as he unquestionably has his flaws that shouldn't be looked past. That said, he's the best internal option that the Indians have (and not by a small margin) as a defensive RF (and this is where Shelley Duncan exits any conversation over who can and/or should play RF right now) who may actually have some upside if he can re-capture the success that he experienced as a rookie in Oakland.

In the interest of long-term viability from the position, the Indians should absolutely be exploring adding a piece on the trade market (and they're not alone as this piece is a nice primer on the RF trade market) because of the

length of Choo's DL stint, but while that shakes out, the Indians should be playing Buck every day as they plan for Kearns to eventually make his way off of the roster and recognizing the "options" in Columbus for what they are…non-options.

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You want some sunshine in the midst of all of these dark clouds?
How about these numbers for what is now the unquestioned front-of-the-Indians' rotation over their past few starts, not including Carrasco's Wednesday afternoon start:

Cookie Carrasco – Last 4 Starts
0.61 ERA, 0.77 WHIP, .432 OPS against with 21 K in 29 2/3 IP

Justin Masterson – Last 4 Starts
2.08 ERA, 1.34 WHIP, .646 OPS against with 17 K in 26 IP

Josh Tomlin – Last 3 Starts
2.70 ERA, 0.80 WHIP, .630 OPS against with 12 K in 20 IP

That's the good news and one of the main reasons that the Indians COULD remain in the AL Central race despite their offensive struggles, which unfortunately (and here's the bad news) led to the Indians only going 6-5 in those 11 games, another damning indictment of what the ineptitude of the offense has done to this team.

Regardless, the trio of Carrasco, Masterson, and Tomlin have pitched well enough (particularly recently) that you can think that the Indians should have a conceivable shot at winning a good portion of their starts. Of course, that hasn't happened recently because of the offense and maybe you want to still assert that the performance of that troika is unsustainable, but we're about to go into July and each of those three pitchers has an ERA under 4.00.

The Tigers have one pitcher with an ERA under 4.00 and while he may be Justin Verlander, the Indians are the only AL Central team with three pitchers with sub-4.00 ERA as the White Sox and Twins have two each while the Royals only have two starting pitchers with sub-5.00 ERA's. Obviously, the middle-to-back-end-of-the-rotation for each team is going to play a large role in what happens in the AL Central race, but the Indians have a developing front-to-middle-of-the-rotation in Carrasco, Masterson, and Tomlin, for whom success has now

been sustained over nearly ½ of a season…if not longer.

Though the bullpen will have its hiccups (and Pestano's Monday night reminded us that even the most formidable reliever is not invincible), the Indians are going to have to ride the arms at the front of their rotation and the back end of their bullpen for a while longer as the offense continues to find its footing.

Whether it can or not, to watch the development and maturation of Carrasco, Masterson, and Tomlin (particularly recently) with the knowledge that Al White may still come back in 2011 is enough to brighten up even the darkest of days that the Indians have had recently…and they've had quite a few.

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Still just 1 game out of the AL Central race (but with that gap widening and confidence in this team shaky at best), the Indians return to their home state to meet up with the Reds, a team that they swept just a month ago. There's no question that the Reds are looking to return the favor as the Indians try anything and everything to pull themselves out of this tailspin as the sense of urgency coming from the offices at the corner of Carnegie and Ontario grows with each passing day…