Today starts the rest of the day of the rest our year as Cleveland Indians fans. If the Tribe is going to take us to the promised land of the playoffs this season, earlier than expected, but much welcomed, it begins now as the official second half of the season kicks off in Baltimore.

But to look ahead would be impossible. You can try and try, make your valiant attempts at predicting , but as the first half of the season shows you, that is simply impossible. If you called it, congratulations, you've got some amazing luck and perhaps some really optimistic outlooks in life.

And this is coming from one of the few people who actually picked the Indians to finish third in the division. Not even I was that optimistic to think that the Indians could actually shock the world , unless a certain list of benchmarks had been cleared.

Low and behold though, here we sit, with a little over half of the season completed, the Indians sitting in second place, just mere percentage points away from the Detroit Tigers. Let's revisit the wild ride it has been, because before we can move forward, we best look back at how the Tribe reached this point.

If not to remember, to at least enjoy the ride it has been. Because it has been an incredible four months since the Indians arrived in Arizona to start spring training and their 2011 campaign.

Just remember. Nothing is impossible and the first half was no dream.

The Birth of an All-Star

The crowning jewel of the Indians right now is their American League All-Star starting shortstop, Asdrubal Cabrera. With some nifty defense and a now potent offensive bat, Cabrera has become the Indians best all-around player with Shin-Soo Choo's struggles. He's cemented himself in the middle of the lineup and at times, has carried the offense.

Not only is he best defensive shortstop around, he may be just the best offensive shortstop in the American League and potentially top three in the whole game. He's making a name not just for his jaw dropping defensive plays, but now his offense as well.

Cabrera is a veteran in just his fourth full season at the big leagues. He was the catalyst of the Indians second half run in 2007 and now has become the leader of a squad aiming to make another run here in 2011.

The Re-Birth of Pronk

It seems silly to keep repeating it, but whoever thought that when the Indians started 2011, we'd actually be jumping in to the DeLorean and visiting 2007, much less 2005 and 2006 with the re-birth of our slugging designated hitter, Travis Hafner.

For years, he was known as Pronk. The lovable big guy given the nickname by Bill Selby, who combined his other two nicknames, Project and Donkey has enjoyed a renaissance season.

Almost in creating that nickname, Selby helped created the identity of a super-hitting machine that crushed fastballs into the upper deck in right field, later named Pronkville, and struck fear into the opposing pitchers.

To me, Pronk is the story of 2011 so far. His re-birth into a feared slugger in the middle of the order has spurred the revival of the Cleveland Indians this season and without him, the offense shows clear signs of missing him.

And how amazing is it to watch? Not only is he swinging like the Pronk we remember, crushing incredible majestic grand slams into the dark night, he's refined his game. As if the injury to his shoulder and subsequent rehab forced him to become a singles hitter. His approach has been altered. Not only can he slam whatever fastball he wants in his nitro zone out of the park, he can take outside pitches to the opposite field to beat the still present shift given to him as a left-handed hitter.

His comeback has certainly put him in line for Comeback Player of the Year, but perhaps his contributions and the look of an offense without him should garner him consideration for American League MVP. No doubt, the birthed All-Star Asdrubal Cabrera kept the Indians afloat and running on high-octane fuel for a good portion of the season, but without Pronk, where would this team be offensively?

And you can almost assure yourself of one thing. No one is more pleased with Pronk's comeback than Travis Hafner himself. "Pronk" went into hiding a few years ago with the shoulder injury. Pronk is, as stated earlier, pretty much an identity. Without the fear, Pronk is merely Travis Hafner. And while Travis Hafner is a marginally decent player, it was Pronk that earned the big contract and slammed the big home runs.

Pronk is back and he's making up for lost time and reclaiming old territory. Perhaps he should get back Pronkville in the upper-right field deck, a place that is now inhabited by Subway.

Grady's Second Act?

When Grady Sizemore trotted around the bases after his first home run of the season on April 17th, also his first game back from an extended absence and micro fracture knee surgery that ended his season on May 16th of 2010, many thought he was in the midst of a revitalization of his own.

Unfortunately, it hasn't been the case exactly. Grady Sizemore is back, but unlike Hafner, he isn't exactly "back." It may feel a little bit like 2007 all over again, but there is still one thing missing.

Grady Sizemore is at least healthy and playing the game he loves and he doesn't look like he's swinging a 50 pound bat. But he hasn't returned to the form of Grady Sizemore we all know and love. Pronk's in the second act of his career, and perhaps Grady is too. But will Grady's be as successful? Is there ever going to be a return to glory for Sizemore?

Or is he simply just what he has now become and displayed this season: A marginal player with the capability of getting hot for a short period of time?

It took Hafner a few years to get past shoulder issues that rendered his shoulder, well, dead. Sizemore's injury is a little different. He had major knee surgery, for an outfield who not only plays center, but also predicates his offensive game on running as well, that could be a career derailing injury.

Sizemore can still play. He's shown that this season he still can swing the bat, belting nine home runs in 57 games. And that mind you, is third on the club and one more than Hafner's eight. But Sizemore has attempted just two steals and has been caught both times. He went bonkers after his initial debut in terms of hitting doubles, but since his re-activation from the disabled list on May 27th, he's hit just nine doubles. It pales in comparison to the 10 he hit in just under a month of action before his second stint on the disabled list.

We we're beginning to see the Grady Sizemore that Mark Shapiro boasted about at the start of the 2010 season. The Grady Sizemore that looked better than ever before. Sizemore was proving it too during Spring Training, hitting three home runs and batting .364 in 17 spring games.

We never saw that Sizemore, because towards the end of spring, he tweaked something and was never the same. Over compensating and getting into unaccustomed slumps at the plate. He never hit a home run that season and was lost not far into it with the surgery to his knee.

But now we have Second Act Grady. What will we get from him as he continues to return and learn his limitations from his micro fracture surgery? One can only hope that we've yet to see his full transformation and he's still making his way back. But we certainly can't even assume that.

Confounding Downfalls

To every season, there are some downs and perplexing issues for any team during any season. The issue becomes whether or not those issues plague the team and those downs become downfalls.

Luckily for the Indians, Fausto Carmona's season hasn't become a downfall and Shin-Soo Choo's perplexing 2011 ride hasn't taken them on a turn for the worst.

A team like Minnesota has had one rock storm thrown at them after another. Mauer hurt, Morneau hurt again, pitching has gone south, rocky closer situation, etc. Cleveland has avoided many of the rocks thrown their way.

But the two rocks that have hurt the most, regardless of how the Indians as a team have managed to fair, are the struggles of Fausto and Choo.

We know the issues at this point. Carmona has looked inconsistent and flat. His 2010 comeback is now rearview mirror material and he's now heading down the path of year-to-year nomad. What will you get from him this time? He's become a series unknown and now sits on the disabled list, hoping to only miss one start after taking a nasty tumble running to first during Interleague play.

And Choo. Well, where do you even start? The broken thumb? The DUI? The horrible start before he even hurt himself or got caught driving impaired? The whole first half of the season has been a mental test for Choo and one that he believes he's ready to overcome. Choo readily admitted his struggles were getting to him and he lacked confidence.

Lack of drive is certainly something you can throw out the window, despite finally attainting a gold medal and freedom from his South Korean military obligation. That freedom has almost turned into pressure, as Choo said he now feels the weight of South Korea on his shoulders, not wanting to disappoint his nation, the one he represents in the game of baseball as his countries biggest star in the sport.

Choo will be out until September, or so one would think. Rumbles around Choo say he could be back a little sooner, a return that would be Pujols-esque. But assume he won't be back until late August, if that. The Indians will need to continue to survive until then, and even if he returns, there is no guarantee that 2010 Choo shows up. We we're still waiting his arrival here in 2011 for nearly three months.

Carmona meanwhile can turn his season around a lot quicker. It only takes a few starts for a starting pitcher to get on a roll and he can certainly do that. His issues too might be between the ears and simply a lack of focus. Either way, the Indians are stuck with him for better or worse, so we better hope he makes it for the better.

Defending the Defensible

One of the biggest downfalls to last season was the fact that they simply had no defense, especially on the infield. Third base was a spinning wheel of frustration with no spoke holding place throughout the course of the season. Second base was compounded by that and the starting shortstop, Asdrubal Cabrera was playing injured.

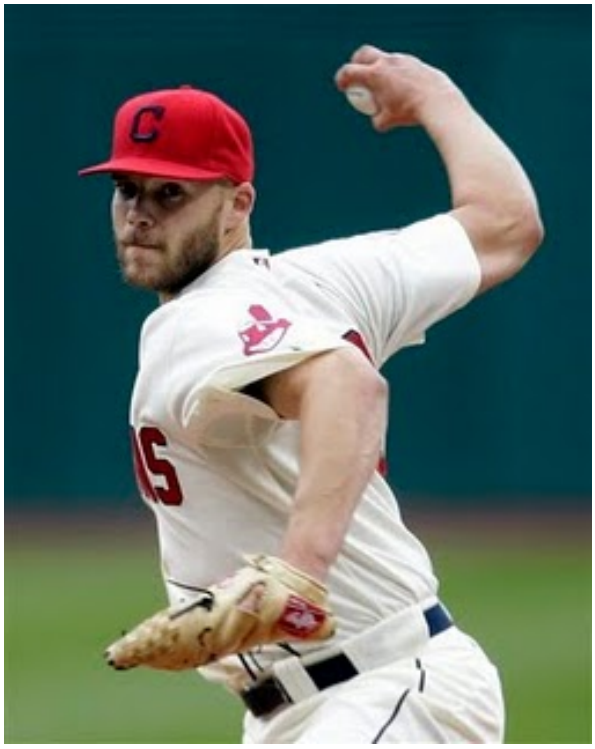
This year, new General Manager Chris Antonetti made a commitment to stitching up the infield defense and whether it was by luck or design, he pulled through in that commitment. Orlando Cabrera was signed to play second and give nephew Asdrubal a suitable double play partner

and add a big veteran influence into the clubhouse.

And here is where the luck comes into play. Originally intending to go forward with convert Jason Donald at third, the young infielder acquired in the Cliff Lee deal got hit in the hand with a pitch and so the job was pretty much given to non-roster infielder Jack Hannahan. We all knew he had a glove, but did we all know he was such a wizard at the hot corner?

Hannahan's offense during the spring put him in position to be the benefactor to Donald's injury. But it was his glove that helped the Indians off to a tremendous start. Doing it offense in the early going garnered him the "Super Mannahan" moniker, but his true value was with his defense.

And Orlando's transition wasn't spectacular, but it certainly didn't put the Indians in any holes defensively. Add in a healthy Asdrubal Cabrera that is capable of many spectacular feats, the defense has been something to write home about.



Pitching Takes Center Stage

No one is happier about that defense than the pitching staff. A big reason Antonetti desired a solid defensive infield was the simple fact that his pitching staff was set to be comprised of many groundball pitchers. Fausto Carmona, Justin Masterson, Josh Tomlin, and Mitch Talbot are all guys the for the most part, pitch to contact. Carmona and Masterson specifically make a living of getting double plays.

So it should be no surprise that some starters have found such success with a revamped defense that has a lot more range and is less prone to make mistakes.

Beyond that though, some pitchers have actually taken visible steps towards being what you see right now. Carlos Carrasco, after returning from a short stint on the disabled list seemed to come into his own, recent struggles aside. Josh Tomlin has continued his reliable consistency, setting a record for most starts going at least five innings to start a career.

But above them all has been the season Justin Masterson has put together. After a perfect 5-0 April, Masterson fell back a bit, and went through a long bout of finding very little run support. Right now though, Masterson is the best the Indians have to offer and after being continually thrown into the bullpen by the fans, the Tribe has been rewarded for sticking with him as a starter.

And there's more where that came from. Carmona has his struggles and Mitch Talbot hasn't been all that good. But there's a wealth of depth with first place Columbus and Alex White on his way back from a finger injury. We've already seen White and two of those depth options in Jeanmar Gomez and Zach McAllister and many are already familiar with David Huff.

It's only the beginning of what the pitching staff is capable of and hopefully the current pieces are joined by Carmona and some of the youngsters looking to make a mark.

Introducing: The Bullpen Mafia

While Travis Hafner has returned, Asdrubal Cabrera has become a bit of a star, and the defense and starting pitching has taken the stage, no group has become more popular than the

fun-loving bunch in the Tribe's bullpen.

It was pure accident that they gained the "Bullpen Mafia" moniker. I should know, considering I'm responsible for it. It simply started out as a nickname for both Justin Germano and Vinnie Pestano, the two members in the pen, at the time, with Italian names.

But the day Germano and Pestano both joined Twitter is the day it spread as more than just a nickname for the duo. It soon became the entire bullpen's calling card. Having visited the MLB Fan Cave and taking part in a funny skit, to getting the entire bullpen roster (including muted Rafael Perez) onto Twitter, the Bullpen Mafia are full-blown rock stars.

It comes with backup though. It just isn't some funny way of referring to the collective unit. It actually represents how this may just be the strongest part of the team and they collectively own that responsibility, as well as welcome it with their swagger. Just look at the key cogs of the Mafia.

Chris Perez - 36 G, 33.1 IP, 2-4, 21/22 SV, 2.43 ERA, 1.17 WHIP, 2 HR, 15/22 BB/K

Rafael Perez - 40 G, 37.2 IP, 3-1, 1.91 ERA, 1.19 WHIP, 0 HR, 12/25 BB/K

Tony Sipp - 40 G, 36.1 IP, 4-1, 2.71 ERA, 0.96 WHIP, 7 HR, 14/34 BB/K

Vinnie Pestano - 37 G, 33.1 IP, 1-0, 1 SV, 2.97 ERA, 1.05 WHIP, 3 HR, 13/47 BB/K

Joe Smith - 34 G, 31.2 IP, 2-1, 0.85 ERA, 1.17 WHIP, 0 HR, 11/19 BB/K

Chad Durbin - 34 G, 37.1 IP, 2-1, 6.51 ERA, 1.63 WHIP, 4 HR, 12/32 BB/K

Frank Herrmann - 19 G, 30 IP, 3.90 ERA, 1.40 WHIP, 4 HR, 7/23 BB/K

Everyone brings something to the table and they're simply getting the job done. Chris Perez has blown one save, while having lost a few more in non-save situations, but otherwise hasn't even shown how truly dominant he can be.

Rafael Perez and Tony Sipp are more than just left-handed specialists, being the two guys that Manny Acta goes to the most as his work-horses. Vinnie Pestano is putting together one remarkably surprising rookie season and showing that all you need to get through one inning is a deceptive delivery and a good fastball.

Frank Herrmann has come on really strong lately, having fine-tuned his mechanics and gaining more confidence as more than just a long-man in garbage time. Chad Durbin's numbers don't look pretty, but often when called upon in a close game, he does his job.

And then you have Joe Smith, who hasn't given up an earned run in well over two months.

Any questions? No? Good, because the Bullpen Mafia isn't here to ask questions. They're here to get the job done.

Manny Acta: Leader of a Promising Future

I don't know about anyone else, but I couldn't be more pleased with Manny Acta and the job he's done. He's molded this team into his personality and I really admire what he represents and the attitude he demands from his players. It's upbeat and confident, but not too hyped and cocky.

He commands respect, but doesn't treat his players as if he's superior to them. That's a rare

skill and rare ability to have as a manager. This team gets it and Acta is the one pulling the reigns.

And this year, he just seems to be pushing all the right buttons. Any move he makes works out in his favor and that usually is a good precursor to how things will shake out for a team towards the end of the season.

Manny Acta is the right guy for the job now and into the future. He seems to have what it takes to win a championship and seems committed to doing just that for the city of Cleveland. A down-to-earth human being who loves the game and loves his players is simply what he is.

I'd be remiss if I didn't recount my story of seeing him while in Cincinnati on a Saturday night. Smoking his victory cigar and blending into the background. Simply enjoying the sweet taste of victory.

A Half-Season of Magic

The future is now. Cliché it up all you want with this club. There is no waiting with this squad, they're ready to go for it all right now. And who is to argue? You have to take your chances when you get them, because who knows where you'll be from year to year. Just look at the last half decade for the Tribe where they were in it one year and out the other.

Exceed expectations or simply not meet them. One win away from a World Series to trading Cy Young Award winners in back-to-back seasons.

Own what you have right now. This has simply been a season of magic so far. From the walk-offs by Travis Hafner and Carlos Santana, to the remarkable atmosphere in Progressive Field and the confidence this team has when they play.

The long home win-streak, "What If?", the dive into social media. What hasn't this season had

so far in just a half of action? The "What If" campaign is brilliant and happened simply by accident. But again, you run with something when you have it. That's how most of these things happen.

You can't make stuff up. You can't simply ask What If? And get a walk-off grand slam in response.

What if they did the impossible?

Then it wouldn't be impossible, would it?

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You can follow Nino on Twitter @ TheTribeDaily where he tweets about a not-so-impossible second half after a very-real first half. You can also read his Morning Rundown and other features at his blog, The Tribe Daily .