You had to see this coming.

Like an overcast sky on one of these muggy afternoons, the Indians had threatened all season to do it, creeping into the fifth, sixth, or seventh inning with no hits, only to finally squib one through the infield.

And don't forget that infamous incident in Detroit last year when Armando Galarraga was Bernie Madoff-ed out of a perfect game at the Indians' expense.

But the Tribe's Swiss Cheese Lineup - so named because it's full of holes and it stinks - finally went and did it on Wednesday afternoon. They went nine full innings without getting a hit and immortalized themselves in baseball's Hall of Shame.

Twelfth time in team history, first in 18 years since Jim Abbott whaled on them with one good

hand in Yankee Stadium.

Interestingly, the first two times the Indians were no-hit came *in the same season* in 1910. And don't think that little achievement is out of reach 101 years later.

Amazingly, just a few hours after the Indians were clipped like a gelding, the Columbus Clippers nearly did the exact same thing, not getting a hit until the eighth inning of their game against Syracuse.

Can you imagine what a kick to the nuts it would have been for a major-league team *and* its Triple-A affiliate to both get no-hit
*in the same day*
? Special thanks to Beau Mills for preventing us from that particular round of infamy.

So if you're keeping score at home, in 18 innings of action on Wednesday, the Indians and Clippers managed one hit in 56 at-bats. Makes the women's World Cup look like arena football, doesn't it?

All in all, it was a fantastic day for somebody to make the 260-mile round trip from Columbus to watch the Indians on a whim. Good call, self.

Two months ago, I watched a replay of Lenny Barker's perfect game on STO and marveled at the electric atmosphere in the Stadium that night, even though there were only 11 people in attendance. I always wondered what it would be like to be at a game where the pitcher had something like that going. Even if it was the other team, I figured it would be exciting to watch.

This just wasn't. It was quiet and sad, like being at a funeral, only nowhere near as fun. And there were nine dead people instead of just one.

As pissed as I was, I stayed to the bitter end, and when the crowd offered Ervin Santana a very

classy ovation after the final out, I couldn't bring myself to join in. Hats off to the dude, but dammit, Tribe...

And yet I'm less embarrassed about the Indians failing to get a hit than I am mortified by their quintet of errors.

Five - use all of your fingers and count 'em - *five* errors. That's one error for each of Shin-Soo Choo's home runs this season. One error for each hour I was in the car driving to and from the game. One error for each of Chris Palmer's victories as head coach of the Browns. One error for each of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, with one horrendous Matt LaPorta throw to spare.

That's the reason why the red-alert sirens should be going off for Tribe fans right now.

As we sort of figured back in March, they're not hitting. But now, unlike earlier in the season, they're also not getting on base and not moving the runners along (what runners? Ha-ha).

They're failing miserably on the rare occasion when a runner does get into scoring position (see LaPorta's lollipop swing with the bases loaded and nobody out in the ninth on Tuesday night), and they look like the Little Rascals on defense.

Bottom line: they're worse now than they were in April.

And in April, this wouldn't have happened.

*That's* what's truly troubling. I think we all expected a team this young to start slow and pick up steam as the season went on, then gradually approach the .500 mark at about this point.

Indeed, they're now gradually approaching the .500 mark, albeit from the wrong direction. And they're sure as hell not picking up steam.

They're getting worse.

There have been ups and downs, but think about it. From April to May to June to July, each month the team has taken one step backward.

You expect road bumps like this with young teams, even when they're loaded with potential. When Abbott no-hit them back in '93, Kenny Lofton, Carlos Baerga, Albert Belle, Manny Ramirez, and Jim Thome were all in the starting lineup.

But this year's team has now been lousy (22-35 in their last 57 games) longer than it was magical (30-15 in their first 45).

Wednesday's no-hitter reflected the lack of focus that has plagued them like psoriasis throughout the summer, both at the plate and in the field.

On each of the Tribe's five errors and Carlos Santana's preposterous passed ball that allowed the winning run to score, it looked like the Indians were pot-bellied slow-pitch softball players trotting around the field nonchalantly trying to make plays without spilling the beer in their throwing hand.

And things were even worse on offense. Ervin Santana - who, remember, entered the game with just a 5-8 record and an ERA a full run higher than Justin Masterson - averaged throwing barely 11 pitches per inning. For the game he threw only 29 balls - that's just over three per inning, or in this case, one per batter.

I'm not saying Santana isn't a good pitcher. Of course he is. But the Indians made him a hell of a lot better by doing a lot of his work for him.

Most of their at-bats were shorter than the time it takes to run a Google search. A couple of times I swear I caught glimpses of guys stepping into the batter's box holding their iPhone, scrolling through text messages. When Travis Buck pinch-hit in the ninth inning, he didn't even have a bat.

There are 60 games to play and this division is still like a Michael Bolton CD - you can't even give it away. But Wednesday needs to serve as a wakeup call for this entire organization.

Forget winning the division. In fact, forget about winning games. Both of those things are incidental. Right now the Indians need to get their spirit back, the focus and verve and attention to detail that carried them through April and May and endeared them so much to a fan base that's grown sadly accustomed to sloppy play and thoughtless mistakes.

Wednesday was a microcosm of the last two months - they're drifting, they're detached, they're completely ineffective and, that day at least, utterly pathetic.

Young as they are, inexperienced as they are, and overwhelmed as they may be, they're better than this.

There's no simple solution to the problem. No players-only meeting or fiery pep talk from Manny Acta can fix it. If it happens, if these guys are as good as they're supposed to be, it'll happen slowly and not at all dramatically.

It may take the rest of the season, and the storybook start to the campaign may have to be sacrificed to the gods of development and the ethereal angels of patience.

Let's start with getting a hit and we'll take it from there.