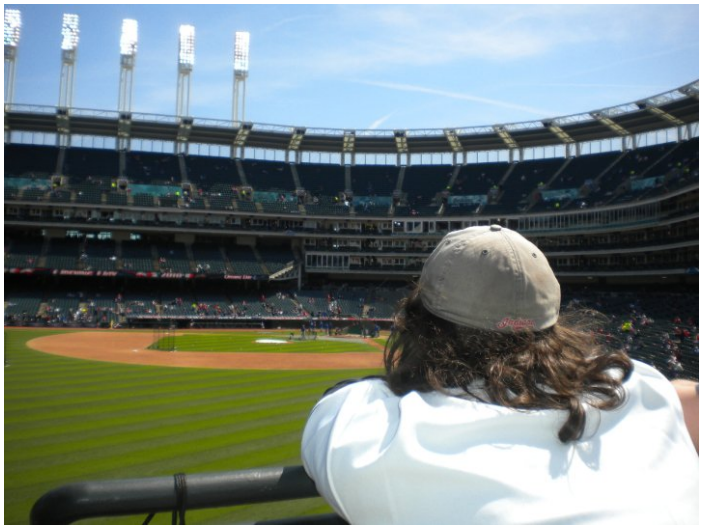


We have officially reached the sprint part of the marathon and we can see the front runner ahead of us. It's a refreshing change from the past few years when we were the guy doubled over next to the medic, too weak to drink from the Dixie cup of water and uncomfortable because we had soiled ourselves around mile twelve.

With that lovely image in mind, there are just over 50 games left to play, 52 to be exact, and the Indians remain one or two really good weeks of baseball away from being atop the division nobody wants to win. They will get a chance to take matters in to their own hands when Detroit comes to town this Tuesday-Thursday. Needless to say, I will blow this series way out of proportion one way or another, but that's the beauty of being a fan.

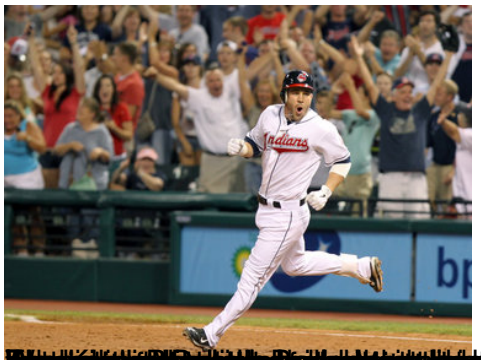
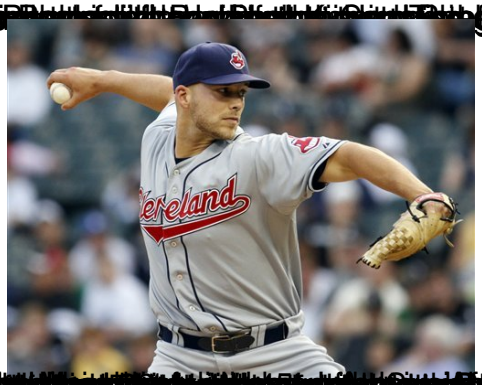
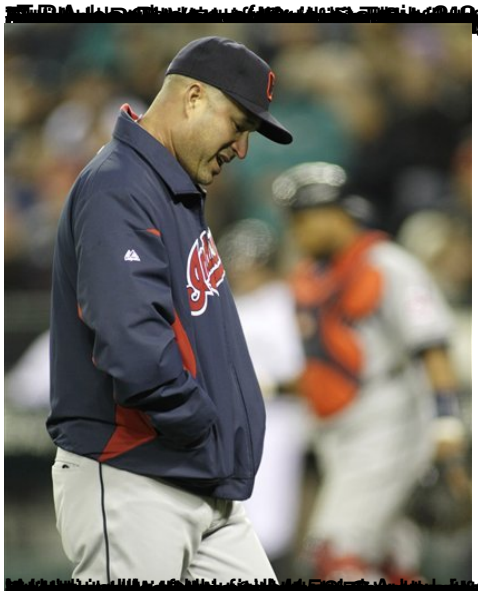
Anyway, we have to be happy with where we are thus far. Would I rather have us start 15-30 and be playing at a 40-25 tear over the last two and a half months? Without a doubt. Playing the cards we're dealt here, we have been the worst team in the AL Central since May 23 (the Royals are one game better over that span) and yet we sit just four games back. With 52 games to play. If you had told me that at the start of the season, I would have been thrilled with such optimism and also told you how much of an idiot you were under my breath.

Consider what a crazy season it has been so far with big hits from nearly everybody who has worn the uniform to the walkoff wins to the injury problems and to the notion that we were a buyer at the trade deadline. Consider what a crazy 52-game stretch we have left. Shin-Soo Choo will return sometime within the next two weeks. Thirty-eight of our remaining 52 games are against the Central (where we have a less-than-spectacular 16-18 record).

If there was ever truth to the old expression of controlling your own destiny, the Indians certainly fit those criteria. The last few seasons, we had to hang our hats on playing spoiler. This year, we can play spoiler by trying to play ourselves into the playoffs.

Crunch time has begun. The Indians go to battle with youngsters and great pitching. The Tigers go to battle with veterans and suspect pitching. I like our situation in comparison to theirs, except for the four game lead they currently hold. Our starting rotation is better and our bullpen is better. Their lineup is more consistent. Good pitching beats good hitting. See the SF Giants over the Texas Rangers last World Series. See the 2007 Indians over the Yankees in the ALDS.

There is a blessing and a curse to having a lot of young players like the Indians do. For the blessing side of things, we have younger bodies that are more eager to go to the ballpark everyday and have to be fresher at this stage of the season. But, we also have kids who have not experienced this much pressure on this big of a stage. I can hope that they do not fully comprehend the pressure of each game situation during a pennant race, but that's just unrealistic. They know.

Think about it. Between the Tigers and the Indians, there are no two more clutch players than Victor Martinez and Miguel Cabrera. Who would you take in a must-win game? Justin Verlander or Justin Masterson? As incredible as Masterson has been this year, and would have as good as or better of a record than Verlander if he got any run support, I just cannot see our offense doing anything against Verlander. I cannot say the same for Masterson against the Tigers. If it got to the bullpens, I would like our chances.

Adversity is clearly in place. The Indians, as a result of rainouts, will have to play 44 games in 44 days to end the season and will have three off days from August 9 to September 28, the end of the season. There are two doubleheaders and a makeup game on the schedule. Add that in with an AL Central-heavy schedule and 10 games in nine days against the AL Central in the final week, capped off with a three-gamer in Detroit, and you have a real grinder of a schedule.