Though the banners may be up reminding all alumni and while asterisks may be on High School football schedules around Northeast Ohio denoting the game that welcomes back all beloved graduates, the biggest Homecoming of the season arrives with its own name – a Thomecoming.

As Jim Thome waived his no-trade clause (and by now you know the speculation that he would exercise it to force his way to re-join ol' Cholly), it paved the way for his return to the corner of Carnegie and Ontario to a team badly in need of any players, much less Hall-of-Fame players who built the beginning of their career to the adulation of the North Coast. His return is sure to be painted in flowery tones by the Indians' broadcast teams as Thome's standing within the organization was never in question, just the perception among fans regarding his departure…which amazingly came nine years ago.

While there is an inescapable feeling that the addition of Thome may represent a little of "too little, too late" in terms of divisional impact, the fact that the Indians continue to augment their depleted roster represents a pro-active philosophy that is both welcome and decidedly necessary in light of the injuries that have felled Tribesman. Regardless of the fact that the Indians are staring up at the Tigers as we approach the final week in August, the addition of Thome provides some middle-of-the-order thump (even if he's not playing everyday) that's been missing since Hafner's foot issue sapped his power and production.

Certainly, the #25 jerseys will be in full effect this weekend at the corner of Carnegie and Ontario (and I think I still have a batting helmet that was a giveaway that says “T25” and may say “The Thomenator” somewhere in the mess of boxes that I just moved) as the nostalgia of “The Era of Champions” (the one that never produced an actual World Series Championship) will be bubbling up this weekend. The fans who ache for those halcyon days of nearly a decade-and-a-half ago have Thome “back where he belongs” as he will get to make whatever amends he needs to with the city, cementing his legacy as one of “our own” and ironing out any wrinkles that may have existed in terms of his standing as an all-time great in Cleveland.

As for the actual baseball side of the addition, Thome unquestionably improves the Tribe’s offense (though you or I might at this point) as the Indians attempt to muster enough offense to stay in the AL Central race. Presumably, Thome replaces Hafner in the lineup (and this is probably the sign that Hafner’s done for the year) and if you’ll remember the numbers that Hafner’s posted from July 8th until his placement on the DL, as he posted a .206 BA / .288 OBP / .313 SLG / .601 OPS.

While that timeframe is fairly arbitrary, it is worth noting that Thome himself re-emerged from an earlier stint on the DL and has posted a .254 BA / .347 OBP / .508 SLG / .855 OPS since the end of June and Thome has actually added 70 points to his OPS over the last month. Though Thome may not be able to play every day due to his age and the precautions that remain with his health, the alternative of LaPorta or Chisenhall spending time at DH certainly put into perspective what an upgrade adding Thome to the lineup really is.

Of course, news that Thome has re-emerged arrives with the idea that Mike Brantley may still be DL-bound and that The BLC is experiencing some soreness in his side, meaning that the Duncan-Carrera-Fukudome outfield that we all envisioned in Spring Training may actually come to pass…and not just for a short time. Truthfully, the prospect of that OF alignment brings into focus how decimated the Tribe is right now and the presence of Thome in the middle of the lineup may dull the pain of watching what currently occupies the Indians’ batting order right now, but he’s certainly not going to solve all of the problems.

That said, it’s possible that Choo and Kipnis get fully healthy and the most optimistic out there still put Sizemore’s return (this year) on the schedule, which starts to flesh out a lineup that looks more potent with Jim Thome playing the role previously held by Hafner – that of the thumping LH DH. For Thome, it’s a role that he’s played to some critical acclaim in the last few years for various teams in the Central and he now gets to play it on the stage that he made his

name on.

Thome's return certainly has all of the elements of the "feel-good", "Prodigal's son" stories that are out there now and I'm certainly going to enjoy watching Thome stride to home plate on Friday night – socks high, donning the script "Indians", sheepishly grinning and saying all the right things to the adoring media before acknowledging the adoring masses, who will be happy to have their hero back.

Whether Thome can play the role of hero for the Indians (once again) remains to be seen, but his return to The Reservation is the latest in a long line of exciting and compelling developments during the 2011 season. If Thome can inject some life into a team, limping to the finish, and a town hungry to stay in this playoff hunt as long as possible, his return will be on par with his accomplishments prior to his departure.

Against all odds, Jim Thome is an Indian once more for a team that still has a chance to go to the playoffs…let the Thomecoming celebration commence.