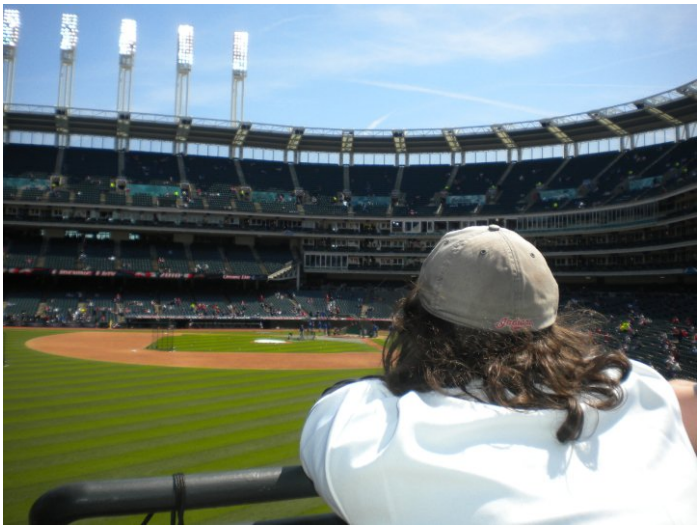

This post is really going to serve as my soapbox for describing the 2011 season through my eyes. Really, this is what I intended my weekly column to be, but it's hard to make something worth reading unless there are talking points and some statistical evidence. After the 2007 season, I wrote a long-winded post on TheClevelandFan's forums where I basically just rambled for 15 minutes about the season and did so through eyes welled with tears.

Since I was just 13 in 1999, my first real sports heartbreak came in the form of that 2007 ALCS collapse. I wasn't the die hard fan in the 90s that I am now. I was more worried about going outside and playing catch than sitting on the couch with a beer watching the Indians game. I also couldn't take myself down to a game like I can now. I won't lie. 2007 still hurts.

The 2011 season had the makings of that magical, improbable 2007 run. The first two months of the season were the most fun I have ever had watching baseball, '07 included. I had finally lessened my expectations and the Kool-Aid I generally drink became a little more watered down. I pegged the Indians for between 77-79 wins. I didn't try to convince myself that they would shock the world and win the Central.

Then, that all changed. By the end of April, I had gotten my tickets for September 23 and 24 thinking that I might have a chance to see them clinch, just like I did in 2007 against Oakland. In the back of my mind, I knew not to get too high about this team. The rug would be pulled out from under me at some point and I would be disappointed and depressed.

That failed too. With the different hero every night and the excitement of big crowds and walk-off

home runs, my head got lost in the grandeur of closing my eyes and seeing playoff baseball. The Cleveland sports fan in me took my desperation for a winner and ran with it.

All the memories became etched in my mind. Carlos Santana's walk-off grand slam against Joaquin Benoit and the Tigers. Asdrubal Cabrera's go-ahead double off Daniel Bard with his exaggerated pop-up slide and clap. Travis Hafner's walk-off two-run HR off Brandon League.

On May 24, it all changed. Instead of riding the momentum of the previous night's thrilling comeback victory, the Indians lost to start a stretch of 15 losses in 20 games. The 5-15 stretch turned their 30-15 into a 35-30. By that point, as they accumulated loss number 30 in a series against the Tigers, they were one game out of first place.

I still wanted to believe. I wanted to believe that Jack Hannahan would somehow return to the .273 hitter he had been in April. I wanted to believe that Josh Tomlin would still have an ERA in the low threes. I wanted to believe that role players would come up in crucial spots and get base hits. I wanted to believe that Travis Hafner would stay healthy.

It took until mid-August for that belief to go away and I finally started to come to terms with the fact that we were staring at a ballclub lucky to go .500. I never once blamed the injuries. I knew that there were deficiencies on this team even if it was healthy. I just wanted the replacements to keep playing over their heads. It didn't play out that way. There were a lot of injuries, and most of them to really key players, but does a healthy Indians roster win this division? Rhetorical, but answer honestly.

Watching something crash and burn that you put a lot of your energy in to is tiring. I've gone to somewhere around 30 games this season without being a season ticket holder. My fiancé has

been by my side the entire time, sitting through rain delays, chilly nights, beautiful, clear evenings and every special moment on the field is trumped by how special it is to share those with the person I love the most.

I saw my first no-hitter this year. Sure, it was against us, but as a baseball fan, that's something that can never be taken away from me. It's right up there with the unassisted triple play I saw from Section 101 back in 2008.

In my mind, what I take away from this season is that the future looks bright. The major components of the bullpen pitched well, and though bullpens are volatile and can be drastically different from year to year, there's talent out there. The young position players got a lot of experience.

One of the problems with the 2007 run is that the pitchers and some position players had post-season hangover that carried in to April of '08. This year, the Indians had several guys play far less games than normal, so the team should be relatively fresh entering next season. Not that it guarantees anything, but the majority of the players who were injured will be better shortly after the season ends and they won't have to spend the offseason rehabbing. Instead, they can work on bettering themselves as players. They won't have to take the downtime to get some R&R. They'll have already done that while rehabbing their injuries. More time for development is never a bad thing. They can get right back to work and get serious about next season.

It's been an interesting year and thanks to all of you for reading what I have to say about it.