I've been slacking a little bit, but with our (Akron's) Spring Break last week, that means I have no break in that my job drains time and energy. But here we go, the stretch run of Spring Training. Ready for Opening Day? It's close.

[BATTLE TIME]

It's looking really like **Jeanmar Gomez** is the man for that final rotation spot. He's not doing anything to say otherwise as he's not given up an earned run in four games (11 innings) this spring. He's struck out seven hitters and walked just three while holding opponents to just four hits. He's certainly stating his case right now.

"He knew coming in that he was in a battle for a job and he's been sharp from Day 1," manager Manny Acta said. "That's the difference between him and a couple of the guys. They've been off on their secondary pitches or not throwing enough strikes. This is the time of year they should be ahead of the hitters. And he clearly proved that he came into camp ready to go."

Gomez made even more of statement with four shutout innings on Tuesday against the Dodgers, going toe-to-toe with Cy Young winner Clayton Kershaw.

As for his competition? David Huff has struggled, giving up seven rights in 11 frames. Kevin Slowey has given up five earned in eight innings, and Zach McAllister has pitched just six innings of spring ball that's counted and given up three runs.

Jeanmar has done nothing to not deserve the spot. If he keeps it up, can you really deny him? I think everyone will get their shot (injuries are bound to happen) so really, this is a battle for who should get the first shot.

That also all being said, Slowey and Huff have had no luck in having to face the Angels. Yikes.

As for the bullpen?

Nick Hagadone and Frank Herrmann seem to be getting some decent time and both are doing okay. Hagadone is doing well with just one earned run over seven innings and five strikeouts to no walks. Chris Ray is really struggling as is Dan Wheeler. I would really pay attention to Jeremy Accardo at this point if you had to look at a NRI.

Wheeler did have a successful outing, striking out a pair on Monday, but he gave up two hits.

No real ground on the other spots, as Shelley Duncan continues to hold serve and hit the crap out of the ball. One guy really making his move is Jose Lopez, who producing hits at a coin-flip rate. At this rate, he's hitting too well to not be on the team in some capacity.

Russ Canzler's hitting has also put him in the mix for that left field job . The bat is really intriguing as he hits seeing as how, he's got that right-handed ability and well, Shelley Duncan isn't the most graceful in the field. So really, if we're willingly looking at Duncan's possibilities in left, then I'm sure Canzler can be looked at too.

"I think it's a position I can handle pretty well, given the opportunity," said Canzler, of left field. "I played a lot of games out there last year and was real successful. I don't think I made an error out there in 30 some games."

Here's the thing though good old Crusty... It isn't about not making errors, especially out in the outfield. It's about getting to most of the balls and not letting hits drop in. It's also about having the run game respect you.

Terry Pluto says Jack Hannahan is likely to be the third baseman . He also says you may seen a platoon according to pitcher in left field. Shelley Duncan can play when the groundballers go, but if Josh Tomlin is starting, a more fleet-footed outfielder (whoever wins the fourth spot) could start.

Please don't bring up Johnny Damon ... Thanks..

[GAMES GAMES GAMES]

Carlos Santana belted his second home run of the spring against the Dodgers as the Indians won on Monday. Lonnie Chisenhall knocked in a pair as well.

There was also a B-Game against the Cubs yesterday and Matt LaPorta woke up, he has only collected four hits and struck out nine times this spring. But guess what? LaPorta homered and drove in three runs. Still, he's struggling and it isn't looking like he'll be on the roster come April.

The Indians struggled on Sunday against the Royals. Tomlin got hit hard and let me tell you, this Royals squad is quite the offensive team. They can hit and if they get any sort of pitching this year or in the near future, they'll do something good.

Not worried at all about the rockets being hit off Josh Tomlin. He isn't out there trying to get hit, but I don't think he's out there doing what he'll do come April. Spring is all about getting adjusted for some starters and remember the past few times out in Spring, Tomlin has been competing for his spot, not fine-tuning his mechanics and getting himself ready for the regular season.

[INJURY UPDATES]

Casey Kotchman returned to action the other day , which is a good sign as he gets himself on track for Opening Day. With two starts under his belt, it looks like he'll be ready to go after a back injury. Now **Michael Brantley** is struggling with some hamstring tightness , the last thing this club needs right now with Grady Sizemore out.

Brantley left the game on Monday with the tightness and while his removal was a precautionary move, this is concerning. Those hamstrings are things that can slow people down and if they don't let it not be an issue, it can nag.

Rafael Perez and Robinson Tejeda, sort of on the same timetable, tossed innings in a minor league game Monday. Both allowed Runs against the Reds AAA squad.

Meanwhile, **Chris Perez** had his second bullpen session on Sunday and will be throwing to live hitters soon. Things look good for Perez to get some innings in before the season starts, which is great news.

[RANDOM RUNDOWN]

The Indians acquired Davis Stoneburner from the Rangers that completed their Kelvin De La Cruz trade. But yeah **Kelvin De La Cruz** was re-acquired by the Indians recently after the Rangers decided they wanted to trade him back. So, yeah tell me you haven't seen that before, because you probably haven't.

Stoneburner is an infielder of many talents but primarily plays short and second. Likely depth at Double or Triple-A. De La Cruz will probably start at Akron, or in Columbus' bullpen. Who knows at this point. De La Cruz is back on the 40-man roster, which was made possibly by placing Carlos Carrasco on the 60-Day DL.

Rumor has floated around, from the Baltimore Sun, that the Indians were interested in **Mike Gonzalez**, former Oriole, Ranger, Pirate, Brave. They say it has to do with the injuries to Chris and Rafael Perez. I think it may have to do with the lack of competition for the bullpen spots, but that seems to be turning around. Unless it's a minor league deal, don't see it happening personally.

Nick Weglarz, Corey Kluber, Juan Diaz, Thomas Neal, Danny Salazar, Ezequiel Carrera, and Scott Barnes are all back in minor league camp. All are 40-man occupants, so it is starting to narrow down the active roster. The important cuts will be coming soon. Hector Ambriz and Michel Hernandez have also been re-assigned to the minors.

One guy who has not yet been sent to minor league camp is **CC Lee**. He is impressing the Indians with what he's doing this spring. Does he have a chance to win a bullpen spot? If he keeps pitching well and the rest of the bullpen contenders struggle? Why not. Lee has a chance to make an impact this season at some point, why not in April? He's close as close can be. It doesn't sound like he's an option though.

"We're taking an extensive look at him," said manager Manny Acta. "We feel he's going to contribute at the big-league level. We want to make sure he gets as much exposure to the big leagues as we can. As soon as we feel he's not getting enough innings here, then we'll send him down."

I'm on the CC Lee bandwagon. He's a strikeout machine and sooner or later he'll be in Cleveland and he is someone who can make an impact. I say, if he's showing it now, why waste time with Jeremy Accardo? Give us CC Lee.

We now know the story behind Vinnie Pestano and Jason Kipnis dressing up like sophisticated

gentleman and playing a round of mini-mini golf. As they justifiably said. Just two normal dudes having a good time. Nothing wrong with that, of course.

I picked Missouri in one of my money brackets (the one with the most riding on it), so naturally when a smart guy from Harvard like Frank Herrmann is going with them, I feel pretty good. But Herrmann's bracket, much like mine, went up in smoke after they got upset. It's cool Frank. I do have another one that has Kansas and is faring pretty well after picking both Ohio and NC State to the Sweet 16.

"I've been taking some heat in the clubhouse for that," Herrmann said. "I took a shot with Mizzou. I felt like they could make a run and you want to differentiate yourself in these things a little bit. They were coming off a good Big 12 win. I just thought they were the team to go with. I leaned on some people who I thought were in the know, and it just didn't work out."

Win some, lose some Tank.

If you want to try and win and make me lose, you can. For the first time, I'm creating a Tribe Daily Invitational Fantasy Baseball League. Four spots remain out of the ten as I've already got six filled via Twitter and Facebook. If you are interested in partaking, get at me on Twitter or Facebook
. Or if you have neither,
nino@thetribedaily.com
">shoot me an e-mail. Looking forward to interacting with some readers and seeing if you can beat me (I don't think you can, but you probably will.

Finally, give a vote to fellow Cleveland Fan scribe River Burns as he attempts to win a Dream Job opportunity covering the Arizona Diamondbacks. He appreciates it. Also check out some of his work.

-

Nino has a blog and it's so entertaining it should be nominated for most entertaining blog competitions. Give it a vist at The Tribe Daily .

Follow @TheTribeDaily