We are so close that I can taste it, next week is baseball. I know you're excited. Everyone has a chance in April, so turn your head away from your busted bracket, whatever nonsense is going on with the Browns draft (trading nine-million picks to draft RGIII is not the answer guys, you dodged a bullet), and let Kyre Irving go until next season. It's Tribe Time, yup.

[JACK OR CHIZ]

The debate that is sweeping the nation.

While it isn't exactly Team Edward/Team Jacob (I'm not sure what that means really) sides are split. Or are they.

I don't want to bore you with more of the same. Paulie C. did an excellent job breaking down the current state of the situation on Sunday and if you haven't read it yet, you probably should

before continuing on.

But I have to wonder myself. Are we just signing away to status quo because that is what we're used to? Have the Indians brainwashed us that much? Have I been brainwashed that much? Have we learned to accept the situation.

I remember in the past few years, we've had this debate about [insert player here]. Do we go with the young kid and let him sink or swim or protect him until we're "sure". I'm not saying that this is the debate with **Lonnie Chisenhall**, but it kind of is. Last year Chisenhall wasn't ready, so the Indians went with alternatives and were ready to with Jason Donald until he got hurt.

Now we have a **Jack Hannahan** and he is presumably making this decision at third a little more difficult than just saying, okay Lonnie, here ya go.

Eight hits, 39 at-bats. just a walk and 16 strikeouts. If this was a straight up competition as to who was hitting better, Lonnie Chisenhall would have to be against someone doing pretty bad to win.

But Jack Hannahan has played in six games this spring.

Six games... 18 at-bats. He's got four hits, which is half of what Chisenhall has in 20 less chances.

How do you judge a competition based off that?

So here we are. We have a Chisenhall and a Hannahan. Jack hasn't played since the middle of March because of some issues with his upper back. The Indians are taking a 'precaution' with a player in the middle of a competition.

What competition? This says one thing... Jack Hannahan is the third baseman, or else they wouldn't be deterring him from trying to win the job by holding him out if he 'could probably play through the injury.'

Now here is what I want to know. Why is Jack Hannahan being handed the job? I hate to say it, but I've been blindly following along the bandwagon of giving Hannahan the job based off his defense. Chisenhall's offensive performance this spring has done nothing to change or alter my opinion, and that is perhaps why I fell into the trap.

But have we not been here before? Have we not had situations in the past where the Indians have been put in this situation. Do they give this young player that has all the potential in the world a spot?

Chisenhall hasn't earned it based off this spring and he did little at the end of 2011 to earn a spot. But that p word is still there. That potential to hit and hit well is there. The Indians have banked off potential before. They've let players earn a job based off potential. All teams have have let players earn jobs based off potential and sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes it ruins players, sometimes it doesn't.

Andy Marte and Matt LaPorta have issues. They've got holes in their swings and flaws in their game that don't lend them to be successful at the highest level of Major League Baseball. Flaws that were not exposed until they were given that opportunity and flaws that were exposed when they earned their jobs off potential.

Brandon Phillips? The Indians pushed him early, he didn't work out. Then they didn't push him and they just gave up. Carlos Santana? The Indians could have pushed him but decided to play the waiting game (and the arbitration clock game) and push him mid-season. Things are working out.

The question is always there. When is the right time? Chisenhall has his experience. He's played not just in Triple-A but in the major leagues. He has had the reps. But you could argue he has not 'finished' his development at the Triple-A level as he only hit .267 in 66 games with

the Clippers (though he got on bas at a .353 average). He stands to show some improvement, not that he needs to. Not that, an overwhelming performance is needed either.

Maybe it is right that the Indians are handling the situation this way. Maybe Chisenhall needs to go to Columbus to start the season and prove that he has no business being there. For re-assurance for the Indians and confidence building for Chisenhall.

But what if it doesn't matter?

He hit just as many home runs in less at-bats with Cleveland. The average was a little down, the OBP was way down and he continues to inspire very little in the plate-discipline department with all the strikeouts this spring.

Do the numbers matter? Do we ever just say, heck with the numbers, let's go with the youth and the potential?

It doesn't help that a compelling argument can be made for a guy like Jack Hannahan. Not only does he stand to be the best defensive player this team has, he had a hot end to his season in 2011 and there seems to be this idea that maybe just maybe he can grow from there offensively.

Though, it is an idea, so proceed with caution.

I don't know what to tell you... I'm just as much on the fence as you likely are. Or maybe you aren't on the fence. Maybe you are staunchly on one side or another. I know I wouldn't want to make the decision because I can't even hypothetically make it right now.

We've got a week left here. It doesn't seem like there will be any sort of shocking turn of events and I think Chisenhall will end up going to Columbus to start the year. I guess the only thing we can hope for is for him to go down, hit the cover off the ball, Hannahan to play solid defense at

third and provide some sort of production, and for this transition to be smooth and seamless with Chisenhall eventually taking over.

Yeah right....

[CAW]

What is a little more complex than a simple, this or that, is the left field/final bench spot/fourth outfield mish-mosh of players for positions.

Look, **Shelley Duncan** is going to win off this "you hit, you're in" principle that Manny Acta has set . You might as well memorize this quote because I'll refer to it several times.

"You hit, we find a place for you. You need to hit. … We need to see some stuff here, some offense, some production. … You need to do some other things to win a job, if you're competing for a job. It's totally different if it is your job and you come over here and you don't hit. It is your job. But if you're trying to get a job, you need to get out here and do some stuff for us."

Now, off of that, Duncan has to show defense because we know he can hit (at least long home runs, maybe not consistently for a high average). But when the other candidates are the ones that need to show offense, and they are not showing offense, Hawkman's bomb shots are what is going to win out.

I'm a little smitten with Shelley Duncan to be honest with you. I think he's a nice story. Maybe I'm being suckered into this story and falling for what will eventually be just a regression to the norm. Or maybe the norm has changed? I would like to believe the latter but again, I know just as much as you. I'm just a man with an educated guess.

Duncan led this offense last year in September. He hit seven home runs (three more than he

did all season) and knocked in 23 runs (one less than he did all season) in 26 games (half of the games he played in all season).

I've come into spring not wanting to buy into that. But it is becoming hard to do watching him this spring. Shelley Duncan would not be the first person to be someone who figured it out and found everything that clicked at this point in their career and he wouldn't be the last.

The nice thing is there really are no other options right now, unless of course the Indians make a move. So this won't hurt anyone. If the Indians stumble into something, then that's great. If it doesn't work out, they can go in search of another option.

But Duncan's inclusion brings us to this. What do the Indians do with their fourth outfield spot? If Chisenhall ends up not making the team, Hannahan has third base to himself, and there is an extra bench spot for someone that is not part of the 40-man roster. With Jason Donald locked in, the Indians have some room to work with.

That makes this interesting because we go back to that quote. If you hit, you get a place. No one is hitting but as Jordan Bastian astutely points out, **Russ Canzler** is.

Good old Crusty Rusty. But he doesn't play center. He can be stuck out in left field if the Indians need be, or play first. But the Indians already have enough players who can man first, they need a backup center fielder, especially with Brantley hamstrung.

But if you include Canzler and then use that other roster spot for something, you can be onto something. Does Jason Donald playing A LOT of center field lately figure into this at all? I have to wonder myself if the Indians are going to go with what may not be conventional based off spring performances.

Aaron Cunningham is not hitting, neither is Ryan Spilborghs. Fred Lewis has been inactive with an injury for the most part, but Crusty? He's hitting and he has a nice minor league track record of hitting to back that up too.

You include Jose Lopez or Andy LaRoche (who can both man third, second, first), then Donald is backing up at center and short and you have your bases covered.

But do you really want to do that to include someone like Canzler for his offense?

Do you really want to give Shelley Duncan the left field job for his offense? The answer to that question is yes.

Now you see how this situation is complex and a complete mess? I'm not sure another week and a half can sort it all out. But more on this in the next section.

[WHAT ABOUT ME, WHAT ABOUT CROWE?]

The Indians did make some major league roster cuts, including Trevor Crowe, Zach McAllister, CC Lee, and Cord Phelps. Crowe and Lee were re-assigned while Z-Mac and Cord were optioned to Triple-A Columbus.

Lee made an impression and I fully believe he'll see some time in that bullpen this year. He's got some good stuff. McAllister will probably get a shot in the rotation at some point, hopefully he goes back to Columbus and just does his job.

But I really want to talk about **Trevor Crowe**. This is what Manny Acta had to say on Crowe after he was re-assigned.

"It's the best I've seen him in the three years I've been here. I told him that. Unfortunately, it's a different situation. He fell behind a little bit, because of his injuries and performance over the last two years, but this is the best I've seen him. he worked very hard during the offseason. He really swung the bat well and looked under control and more mature. It was just unfortunate that

we had so many guys in camp and he's had his opportunity before."

We just talked about the situation the Indians are in with their fourth outfield spot. Not only did Acta just dump a bunch of praise on the kid, he had five hits in 13 at-bats in big league camp, stole a few bases as well.

And then it was noted by Bastian that he made a great diving catch for Chris Perez in a minor league game.

So I guess I have to ask...

Spliborghs and Cunningham are not cutting it offensively, Fred Lewis has been hurt. The only guy hitting has been Canzler and then we've got Trevor Crowe. Someone who can play center and play center well.

Why not Crowe? I would have at least kept him around for a little while longer. I know Acta says it is a different situation, but the situation present right now is that no one is breaking through for that fourth outfield spot. Crowe seems to be standing out a little more.

A little more mature, maybe this first round pick is a late bloomer who needed to go through a little bit of adversity and a few rough patches before it all clicked.

Just saying, it's a possibility. I can see him going to Columbus and starting off on fire and it wouldn't surprise me if he did just that.

[MINOR LEAGUE RUNDOWN]

The Indians made some actual cuts to their organizational roster this past week. Kirk

Wetmore, Kevin Fontanez, Joey Mahalic, Ramon Cespedes, Matt Curtis, Moisses Ramirez, and Doug Pickens were all released. For many players released at this point, it could be the end of the road in terms of baseball. A guy like Kevin Fontanez has been in the system for a few years now, but hasn't sniffed anything above A-Ball, repeating at Mahoning Valley on several occasions.

Other guys like Doug Pickens and Joey Mahalic are guys who once had a sliver of potential, but ended up just being guys that Kinston could count on to be there as a warm body and do whatever is asked. No one said this game was easy. Good luck to all of them in whatever they do.

From TCF's own Al Ciammaichella, it looks like **Eric Berger** and Paulo Espino will be starters this season .
Espino has been a swing guy, usually starting or relieving based off need in Akron and Columbus and he's done both roles very well. Berger on the other hand has always been someone with potential that moved to the bullpen last year after being a starter for his few seasons with the Tribe. It will be interesting to see him re-transition to starter.

He also lost the mustache , but says he is working on getting it back. Sad face.

[GAME RUNDOWN]

Derek Lowe turned in six strong innings of work against one of his former teams in the Dodgers , giving up an earned run off seven hits and no walks. He'll have at least one more tune-up game, but it's looking like D-Lowe is getting on track.

Jose Lopez added a few more hits and Andy LaRoche was 1-2 with a RBI and a walk against his former team. The two are fighting for that final roster spot and since both can play third, they pretty much have an equal opportunity. Lord help me if Andy LaRoche wins, but can't deny wh at he's doing under the radar
.

"A lot has been made of the two guys that are competing there," Acta said of Donald and Lopez. "But [LaRoche] is getting his opportunity to play and every time he goes out there he gets it done. He's done a nice job for us."

LaRoche is still good to go despite leaving Saturday's game. He collided with Mark Ellis's knee but says it him in the jaw.

Meanwhile, Travis Hafner continues to rip it this spring. He's hitting .353 after going 2-3 with a double and a RBI against the Cubs on Sunday . Pronky is quietly waiting to pounce.

Dan Wheeler keeps lowering his ERA, tossing a shutout frame, maybe there is hope for him yet. But Nick Hagadone looks to have an insiders edge as he pitched a scoreless inning as well.

[RANDOM RUNDOWN]

The starting spot looks like it is between Jeanmar Gomez and Kevin Slowey. Gomez pitched five innings against the Cubs, giving up three runs off seven hits and three walks. That won't help him, but he'll have to do a lot more damage to his case to hurt his chances. Slowey didn't do much to combat
but it was a decent outing with no walks, solid line of six innings, three runs and some punchouts.

It seems as if though **David Huff** has fallen behind and out of the race, but that doesn't mean he is out of the roster picture
. The Indians could figure him into the bullpen configuration.

"We're still not set on that," Acta said on Saturday. "We have to evaluate that, run it through our pitching coaches to see whether he can adjust or not to that type of [relief] role. He hasn't done it here. But, he's a viable candidate for it."

Yeah that will end well. This is a product of the lack-luster competition for the final bullpen spots. I don't see it holding.

On the injury front: **Chris Perez** could make his Cactus League debut on Wednesday if all goes well in his second minor league game. He pitched to minor league hitters on Saturday and was rather efficient. Delvi Cid swung at the first pitch right off the bat to give him a test.

"That first guy," Perez said with a laugh. "First-pitch swinging. He was trying to make the team or something."

Permission to call Delvi Cid, "That First Guy" from now on? Yup, thanks, will do.

Anyway, Perez looks to be in good shape. Asdrubal Cabrera has been taking some time off with a sore shoulder, but he played on Saturday as the Designated Hitter. Shouldn't be much of an issue.

Michael Brantley is still dealing with his hamstring but is said to be on track to get to playing this week after participating in the last workout.

Cristian Guzman has pulled up with a hamstring injury, pretty much taking him out of any sort of competition for a roster spot.

[NONSENSE RUNDOWN]

The Indians have someone on the roster named **Henricus van den Hurk**..... Um, yeah.

No, Rick VandenHurk didn't get arrested by the Netherlands for using a false name, he just

decided he wanted to be called by his real name, which is Henricus. I kind of just want to call him Hernicus the Copernicus.

Now I have to go back and change the Rick VandenHurk label to Henricus. Man what are you doing Hernicus?! He recorded two outs (strikeouts) against the Dodgers the other day, also giving up two runs off a hit.

In case you missed it, I had some fun on Friday with legos . I often have fun with legos, but this is the first time I had fun with Indians themed legos.

I will be a guest on Ohio Baseball Weekly on Ultimate Sports Talk Monday night. Ill be going on at 9:30ish and the show is re-streamed. Of course, we're discussing Indians baseball.

It's also my birthday and the set of Indians legos is all I'm asking for...

Not really, it's more stuff I don't need.

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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 .

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