This past week for the Indians was not good. They lost five out of six to Cincinnati and Pittsburgh in interleague play and yet they fell just one game off the pace in the American League Central Division, currently sitting a game-and-a-half back. They'll get a shot at revenge against the Reds to start the second-to-last week of June with a three-game set beginning Monday night at Progressive Field.

Make no mistake, the Indians are reeling. They've lost seven of ten overall, have struggled to score runs and have seen their starting rotation, with the exception of Justin Masterson, get lit up like a front yard pine tree at Clark Griswold's house in December. After giving up nine runs to the Pirates, Indians pitchers are averaging 4.9 runs allowed per game, while scoring just 4.29. Numbers like that give the Indians the second-worst run differential in the American League, behind just the relegation candidate Minnesota Twins.

It was a rough series against the Pirates for the Indians. In the game they won, Friday night's series opener, the offense managed just two runs. On Saturday, they, again, scored just two runs. On Sunday, they exploded (!!) for five runs off a reliever working as a spot starter for the injury-plagued Pirates rotation. All in all, it was terrible series for the Indians and one that should lead to some soul searching.

Indians pitchers can't be happy to see Brandon Phillips coming back to town. Phillips was 8-for-13 last week with two home runs and seven RBI at Great American Ball Park. The .615 average over those three games elevated his career batting average against his former team to .356. In case you're wondering, and you know you are, Ramon Vazquez is currently on the inactive list for the Bridgeport Bluefish of the Atlantic League of Professional Baseball. I hear the Atlantic League of Professional Baseball has uniforms and everything and that it's really great.

Anyway, instead of crying over spilled milk, let's talk a look at this week's pitching matchups, two of which are repeats of matchups from last week's series in the Battle for the Ohio Cup.

Monday June 18, 7:05 p.m.: Mat Latos (5-2, 4.64) v. Derek Lowe (7-5, 3.78)

If last week's Latos-Lowe game would have been a boxing match, Latos would have won by unanimous decision. While Derek Lowe admirably navigated through six innings, working around six walks and allowing three earned runs, Mat Latos carved the Indians up, striking out seven in seven innings. Latos scattered seven hits and allowed two runs.

Lowe has lost four of his last five starts while Latos has won his last five decisions, although they've come over a span of 10 starts. Lowe has been outstanding at home this season, going 6-1 with a 1.37 ERA. Another good sign for the Indians is that Lowe is 6-2 following an Indians loss this season with a couple of no decisions.

Surprisingly, given how good of a hitter's park "Great American Small Park" is in Cincinnati, Latos's road ERA is 2.3 runs higher than his home ERA. Because he has spent his entire career in the National League, last Wednesday's outing was the first time the Indians had faced Latos. Lowe is 4-4 in nine appearances, eight starts, against the Reds with a 4.29 ERA.

Derek Lowe and Dusty Baker exchanged some heated remarks via the media last week after Lowe insinuated that a call for an inside pitch came from the dugout and from Baker in response to a past incident. Baker, not really known as a people person, fired back that Lowe was “probably drunk” during whatever incident he was referring to. We’ll see if that affects Lowe in any way when he takes the mound in the series opener.

Monday night’s game will feature an Asdrubal Cabrera bobblehead giveaway to the first 15,000 fans.

Tuesday June 19, 7:05 p.m.: Mike Leake (2-5, 5.05) v. Josh Tomlin (3-4, 5.56)

In the battle of two starters who may be better hitters than they are pitchers, both guys struggled in their matchup last Thursday. Leake, who battled a stomach virus during last week’s series against the Indians and had his start pushed back a day, gave up three runs in 4.1 innings. He was yanked with a big lead and did not approve of Reds manager Dusty Baker’s decision, very demonstratively showing his frustration as Baker walked to the mound.

As for Tomlin, the Indians staked him to a 2-0 first inning lead, which he lost three hitters into the game and never could get on track. Tomlin allowed 12 baserunners in his four innings and had a start to forget. About the best thing Tomlin did in that game was week was single to put his average at .400 for the season.

Unlike Lowe, Tomlin has struggled mightily at home. He’s given up 34 hits and 19 runs in 28 innings, giving him a 6.11 ERA and five of his eight home runs allowed have left Progressive

Field. Leake has been better on the road than at home, with a 4.22 ERA.

Tuesday night's game is Fill The House for the USO of Northeast Ohio where a portion of every ticket will go to support that organization.

Wednesday June 20, 7:05 p.m.: Bronson Arroyo (3-4, 3.84) v. Justin Masterson (3-6, 4.38)

Arroyo is one of the few NL pitchers that the Indians have a bit of a track record against. The Indians have faced Arroyo nine times, eight as a starter, and have had varying levels of success. Last season, Arroyo surrendered 46 home runs. This season, Arroyo has pitched pretty well, giving up three or fewer runs in eight of his 13 starts.

After a horrible start to the season, Masterson seems to have turned it around for the Indians, throwing three gems in his last three outings. After posting a 5.40 ERA in April and a 4.93 in May, Masterson has been excellent in June, giving up just four runs in 20 innings (1.80 ERA). Unfortunately for Masterson, he has not gotten a whole lot run support and is just 1-3 in June. The biggest difference has been command. Masterson walked 34 batters over his first 68.1 innings, but has walked just six over his last 20. Masterson is 1-2 against the Reds in his career with a 4.58 ERA.

It's interesting to note that, of Arroyo's seven decisions, six have come on the road. He's 3-3 in seven road starts and 0-1 in six home starts. Despite the hitter-friendly conditions in Cincinnati, Arroyo has pitched slightly worse on the road, with a 3.91 ERA. Arroyo will make you hit your way on, as he's walked just 13 batters in 82 innings this year.

Masterson, like Lowe, has been much better at home with a drastic home/road ERA split of 3.13 to 7.07. Both pitchers are coming off wins in their previous starts. Masterson shut down the Pirates in the Indians only win last week, going seven scoreless innings. Arroyo won the series opener at Citi Field in New York, going six innings and allowing three runs, all via the home run.

Wednesday night is Ohio Lottery T-shirt giveaway night to the first 20,000 fans.

Keys to the Series:

1. It Starts With the Starters – When the Indians get good starting pitching, they tend to win. When they get bad starting pitching, it tends to be really bad and buries them early in games. When the Indians give up three runs or less, they're 24-3. When they give up four runs or more, they're 9-29. The Indians haven't played well of late because the starters haven't given them a chance to win. They'll need to do that in this series.

2. Veteran Presents – It may be a clever play on words, but the Indians acquired Derek Lowe thinking he would be a strong presence in the clubhouse. He's been a pleasant surprise in bouncing back from the worst season of his career in 2011. As mentioned above, Lowe is 6-2 after an Indians loss this season and Monday's game fits that criteria. The Indians desperately need a good start and Lowe's just the guy to do that.

3. Red Hot – The Reds enter this series having won six straight and 10 of 15 in June, with the help of 5.6 runs scored per game. Slowing down the Reds offense and getting to the starters is the way to beat the Reds. The Indians have to do both in order to win the series.

Player to Watch:

The players to watch for this series are Johnny Damon, Casey Kotchman, Jose Lopez and Jack Hannahan/Lonnie Chisenhall. The top of the Indians lineup with Kipnis and Cabrera has set the table and the bottom of the order has yanked the tablecloth out and cracked all the dishes on the floor. With runners in scoring position, Damon, Kotchman, Lopez Hannahan, and Chisenhall are a combined 33-for-147 (.224) with runners in scoring position. Both Lopez and Hannahan

are over .300 with RISP, but the other three are 12-for-85 (.141) in that situation. The Indians have to start getting production from somebody in the bottom of the order.

Wishful Thinking:

Wouldn't it be great to get Vinnie Pestano and Chris Perez some work in this series? After the two combined for 46 appearances in April and May, we've seen Pestano and/or Perez just nine times in June.

Central Focus:

The White Sox, losers of two out of three against the Dodgers, will head back to Chicago and host their lowly cross-town rivals, the Chicago Cubs. The Tigers will have an off day on Monday and then host the St. Louis Cardinals. Kansas City will travel to Houston and take on the Indians next opponent, the Houston Astros. Minnesota will be sent to Triple-A to take on the Columbus Clippers (in all seriousness, Minnesota has Monday off and then plays in Pittsburgh).

One Last Thing...:

From the unimaginable department, Lou Marson is currently third on the team in on-base percentage at .371.

Please go to the ballpark so we're not outnumbered by Reds fans like we seemingly were for most of the Pirates series.