Despite what the standings may say, Pythagoras does not believe your Cleveland Indians are truly in a pennant race. Stroking his beard and straightening his toga, he tallies up the mathematics of the 2012 Tribe campaign and sees a ballclub far more deficient than even their lackluster .500 record (38-38) would indicate. The Indians, according to the Pythagorean W/L metric, are really a 33-43 team—an imaginary but oddly depressing consequence of giving up 47 more runs than they've scored. We call that... The DIFF.

Now it's probably worth acknowledging that Pythagoras, in this case, is really just Bill James in Greek garb-- serving up more of his trademark, self-fellating saber garbage for the nerd-stream media. James' Pythagorean W/L formula, while kind of amusing, is also extremely narrow in its scope, unable to take into account strength of schedule, or injuries, or Johnny Damon's beard length.

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                (Runs Scored)^1.83
-------------------------------------------------------
(Runs Scored)^1.83 +  (Runs Allowed)^1.83
```

As you can see, it's really just a reflection of runs scored vs. runs allowed, with the idea that good teams ought to plate more than they give up. The concept does generally hold up a little, considering only six teams IN HISTORY have made the postseason with a negative run differential (1981 Royals, 1984 Royals, 1987 Twins, 1997 Giants, 2005 Padres, 2007 Diamondbacks). Still, anomalies happen. If you win 10 straight games by a run, then lose the

next game 12-1, your run differential-- or DIFF-- will be minus-1. Even if you consider that the White Sox (+48) have a DIFF **nearly 100 runs better** than the Indians, it doesn't mean we can't make up a measly 3.5 game gap for the shitty Central Division crown. Right?

Well, unfortunately, Pythagoras is not alone in his skepticism about the Tribe's current playoff hopes. His modern day disciples over at Coolstandings.com devised a little metric of their own called POFF: "the percentage chance of a team making the playoffs." It goes well beyond Bill James' Pythagorean W/L to incorporate a stupid number of variables, including previous season performances, scoring estimates based on matchups, home vs. away, and Johnny Damon's beard AND mohawk length. The formula is constantly evolving, too, based on historical comparisons and adjustments for accuracy. The end result is more crystal ball bullshit that still manages to leave one hopelessly discouraged. Observe…

AL TEAMS: % Chance of Making the Playoffs - June 30, 2012

1. Rangers: 94.8%
2. White Sox: 79.9%
3. Yankees: 77.1%
4. Angels: 68%
5. Red Sox: 52.1%
6. Rays: 27.6%
7. Blue Jays: 24.7%
8. Orioles: 21.2%
9. Tigers: 16%
10. Athletics: 13.8%
11. Royals: 12.4%
12. **Indians: 11.2%**
13. Mariners: 0.8%
14. Twins: 0.4%

Apparently, while Cleveland fans were busy debating the team's left field trade options and Chris Perez's inspirational quotes of the week, the Indians actually dropped completely out of contention in the American League—lapped by the sorry likes of the colossally disappointing Tigers, offensively putrid Athletics, and the KC Royals; a team on which Luke Hochevar is not only in the rotation, but the effing ace.

Considering the Indians were still in FIRST PLACE just a WEEK AGO and remain within a stone's throw of the Sox with 80+ games to play, their long-shot playoff odds seem more than a little... extreme. But, as with the Pythagorean W/L formula, these dark POFF projections can mainly be traced back to the long shadow cast by the dreaded DIFF.

Even during their better stretches, the Indians have had some serious recurring flaws this year, including the fan favorites: "sucking against left-handers" and "Tony Sipp being on the team." Consequently, Cleveland's minus-47 run-differential ranks them 13th out of 14 AL teams, matched only by the Twins' disgusting minus-96 gap. Meanwhile, the White Sox are the only team in the Central Division with a positive DIFF (+48), the Orioles are the only team in the East Division with a *negative* DIFF (-16), and the Rangers top all of MLB with a shiny +97 mark.

AL TEAMS: Run DIFF – June 30, 2012

1. Rangers: +97
2. Red Sox: +57
3. Yankees: +55
4. Angels: +49
5. White Sox: +48
6. Blue Jays: +24

7. Rays: +5
8. Athletics: +1
9. Tigers: -13
10. Orioles: -16
11. Royals: -26
12. Mariners: -30
13. **Indians: -47**
14. Twins: -96

In Cleveland, we have typically associated “The DIFF” with that convenient part of the Quicken Loans Arena scoreboard that shows us how many points the Cavs are trailing by at any given time (because mental math is hard as hell with all those squeaky shoes making a racket!). No such feature is currently provided at Progressive Field, but when it comes to the Indians’ statistical hopes of turning the corner in 2012, “The DIFF” is likely to remain a focal point of those geniuses in the business of predicting such things. So, if they want to help their future standing, the Tribe can either start stringing some wins together, or… score 47 runs off Luke Hochevar some time in the near future. Whatever works.