Hopefully you have a chance to sit down Sunday night or Monday morning and read 'The Wrap' during a small part of a three day Memorial Day weekend. Hopefully that weekend included a couple gatherings with family and friends and maybe some time around a fire or at least a grill. Hopefully it also included at least a passing thought about the kids and the parents of those kids who will have an empty place at the table or an empty chair around the fire. It's too easy to forget what Memorial Day is really all about, what with it being hailed as the unofficial start of summer and subsequently a time when people get together and enjoy themselves. That's all well and good and it's what we do. Just as long as we never forget those who have given everything so that the rest of us may enjoy such liberties.

On with the show….

Meeting Expectations

A week and a half ago, on May 20th to be precise, the Indians put Travis Hafner on the 15-day D with a strained oblique. The move was actually retroactive to May 18th when Hafner injured himself during batting practice but it came at a horrible time for the Indians given that Grady Sizemore preceded Hafner on the disabled list by a week or so and the two of them were the Indians offense. That's mostly because they're exceptional hitters but it's also somewhat due to the fact that Carlos Santana and Shin-Soo Choo have been huge disappointments thus far offensively.

With Choo and Santana struggling mightily around the .200 mark and with little power and run production, the Hafner injury looked like it might be a crippling blow to the upstart Indians. If nothing else, it sure seemed like their 5-game lead over Detroit in the division would be tested

and that they might blow through the hottest start in baseball just treading water.

And that's what the Indians have done during Hafner and Sizemore's (who came back Friday night) absence: treaded water. They're 5-5 since Hafner went down. But the good news is that they are actually 6.5 games ahead of the Tigers, their closest pursuer in the division, by virtue of the Tigers going 3-7 over their past ten games.

That's the beauty of not only the Indians excellent start, but also of playing in a flawed division that featured none of the five teams playing any better than the .500 baseball the Indians managed without their two biggest offensive threats. In fact, the Indians were tied with the best record in the division over that ten game period.

With Sizemore back some of the focus on Choo and Santana should subside. Hafner's still another few weeks away if all goes well but the doom and gloomers are likely going to have look elsewhere for that other shoe to fall and hit them in the head. The pitching hasn't slowed down with the exception of Mitch Talbot's implosion last Wednesday against Boston (who lit up Rick Porcello and the Tigers for another 14 runs the next day in Detroit) and that's going to carry this club as far as it ultimately goes.

It's hard to envision Choo hitting .210 over a full year and it's hard to envision Santana being this God-awful when he's hit at every level coming up. But while the pitching and poor division have helped the Indians actually increase their lead while Sizemore and Hafner were out they do need those two guys back and healthy at some point. They're two of the three or four credible offensive threats and a long period without them just adds pressure to hitters who are battling their own demons right now as well as the pitching staff that's more often than not under pressure to preserve the thinnest of leads or under pressure to not make any mistake at all in keeping a deficit at a number where an anemic lineup might catch up.

Still, consider that despite the pasting the Red Sox laid on the Indians last Wednesday that the Tribe still has the biggest positive run differential in baseball at +52. No other club in the Central is even in positive numbers. Add that to the fact that the defense has been playing relatively well and Asdrubal Cabrera is having an MVP-type start (forget just thinking about his All-Star candidacy) and the Indians have done what they need to do to keep a lead in the AL Central. The rest of the division has done little enough for the Indians to actually increase it.

You’re Killing Me Smalls

This isn’t going to be my post popular paragraph. Not if you’re a fan of Ohio State football, Jim Tressel or if you’re the parents of Ray Small.

And I’ll preface it with the usual platitudes and apologies that include telling you how much I love Ohio State football, how I grew up watching it on tape delay every Saturday night on WVIZ because games were rarely shown live and how much overwhelming respect I have for Jim Tressel as a football coach but more so as a person. Tressel is a tremendous coach but is a more giving human being. Regardless of the slip and fall over the last 10 months or so (and I will go to my grave believing it runs deeper than Tressel alone in the football offices at OSU) Tressel is a huge proponent of the Wounded Warrior program and gives of himself not only financially but in time to the charities and programs he’s involved with.

Comparing and contrasting Jim Tressel with a guy like ex-Buckeye Small is a mismatch that would make a David & Goliath fight look like a coin flip. You know what I liked about Ray Small? I liked that I knew exactly where that would-be criminal was every Saturday during football season and I was really sure he wasn’t in my neighborhood. That’s what I liked about Ray Small.

But Jim Tressel did recruit him, no? And if he wasn’t a wannabe gangsta when Tressel recruited him he sure was when he left. So where do we place the blame there? Did Tressel recruit a moron or help create one?

But it’s to the point now that even when human flotsam like Small opens his uneducated mouth and pops off with a phrase or two that someone can actually understand that it makes national news and it puts the media spotlight right back on Columbus and the Buckeyes program.

And that can’t keep happening of the program is going to be strong.

I’ve heard the arguments that the transgressions at OSU were small compared to the sins of other programs. I’ve heard that Ray Small is a failed and disappointing ex-Buckeye player

whose ego was bigger than his contribution to the program and whose life may have already peaked. I've also heard that Small is a disgruntled ex-player who betrayed the program with barely legible tweets and comments that he's since retracted in a much more legible fashion which clearly means someone else told him what to say or wrote it out for him.

All of that is or may be true.

It doesn't matter.

Not from a national perspective and not from a recruiting standpoint. The fact that a dipshit like Ray Small got loose on Twitter and it made the front page of ESPN.com is simply bad for the program. The fact that the ESPN and CNN and every other news outlet detailed the investigation into Buckeyes driving free cars off of lots in Columbus and never spent nearly the type or font size saying nothing came of it doesn't matter.

The issue is that these things keep coming up and there's a really good chance they will continue to keep coming up because the sharks are attracted to blood and the Buckeye athletic program is cut.

Truthfully, it's hard enough for OSU to land a WR recruit out of VA when teams like Florida, USC and Oklahoma are also vying for the kid's attention. And because kids want bowl games and exposure the threat that OSU lives under with front page headlines every week make it tougher.

At some point you have to ask if there's a jumping off point for Tressel and OSU.

I think there is. I think the school gets closer every day to cutting ties so it can say, "We acknowledge our sins and are moving forward".

I think the time is getting close.

Closer with every misguided or errant news story. Closer with every ex-Buckeye's nonsensical, uneducated, bust-out ramblings.

But closer none the less.

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