Endearing.

That's the word I keep falling back on to describe the 2011 Cleveland Indians. And while they can also be frustrating, maddening, confounding and astounding I can't get past the fact that despite the myriad of stomach-punching injuries to an already thin roster this team simply refuses to stay down on the canvas.

The knockout punch might be coming (because even in the time I was writing this Michael Brantley was announced as done for the year) but the Indians have taken a Rocky-like beating all season in terms of injury and kept getting up.

They refuse to be counted out and they refuse to go quietly into that good night. I'll let those who work almost exclusively in negatives tell you how the Thome trade was a ticket-selling sham and a way to cover up for another collapse. There are simply people are simply not happy unless they and everyone else are miserable. Some have been waiting (hoping?) for the other shoe to drop since April so that they could be vindicated in their negativity. It happens. Listen to talk shows or read the PD if you have any doubts.

I'm telling you this team embodies a lot of what you like to see in your sports teams. Not to mention the fact they're pretty well set up for a nice little run next season if and when they take that huge punch that permanently puts them down this year.

And it appears that even those of us who comment on Tribe games and occasionally inhabit the press box or step into the clubhouse are exposed to the injury bug. Spending the last week in a knee immobilizer (after hurting it doing God knows what) and writing this column from it has been a bit uncomfortable. So this week's format may be a bit different than others. Blame the pain and the Percocet.

Quick Fire

The Thome trade has been talked about ad nausea for a few days but I'm really rather apathetic about it. I love the emotions it stirred up in long-time Tribe fans and I love the fact that an Indian legend will likely play out his final days here. I also like the fact that Thome is probably a more productive player even at this stage of his career than the man he replaced, Travis Hafner. Argue if you like but look at the numbers first. I already have and it's close. Hell, Thome, even as he turned 41 years old Saturday and even as he continues to deal with a balky back, has been more productive and more durable than Hafner has.

But I was never one to harbor resentment with Thome for leaving in the first place. Players will take the largest pile of money every time in free agency. Jared Weaver in Anaheim is being lauded for stance and words regarding his recent extension with the Angels but Weaver never reached free agency and he also signed for $85million over the next five years. Nice gesture to stay with the team he wants to be with but hardly a sacrifice at $17m per year. Thome's mistake was in being affable, available and emotional prior to taking the Phillies offer.

Whatever.

And hell yes the Indians did the right thing in terms of the timing of the deal. They run a business down there. With guys dropping like flies and the feel good summer threatening to fizzle they made a move to generate interest and ticket sales while also improving the lineup. They owe Thome $600,000 for the rest of the season meaning they need to sell about 15,000 tickets to cover that nut. They got that this weekend in walk-up and put additional money in the drawer with the additional beer, food and merchandise sales. So what?

Think about those additional funds when the Tribe looks to improve their lineup next season in what will most likely be a year they legitimately contend for a playoff spot. No one will begrudge the Indians that it came from the Thome deal. The same people calling this deal a play on emotion would be bitching up a blue storm if the funds weren't available.

On the field the Thome trade helps but only negligibly so. He's just not what he was a decade ago though he still has a pitcher's full attention when he's at the dish. The leadership Thome provides (and maybe Manny Acta should attach a chain to Thome and Matt LaPorta) is a benefit as was arrival in the clubhouse Friday night.

It was a good move on the part of the front office. If you can improve yourself on the field, in the clubhouse and in the cash register then how can anyone be upset unless they're looking to be

upset?

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When Zeke Carrera was brought up a few months ago we were told he was the best defensive outfielder in the Indians minor league system. I'm currently praying that's not really true because if it is the system is in trouble. Carrera has been downright scary in the time he's spent in the OF at the major league level. Not only does take odd routes to balls at times but the next cutoff guy he hits might be the first. Maybe he's getting used to the difference between balls coming off major league bats as opposed to minor league bats but he's scary out there. And his work on the base paths is on about the same level.There is a lot of work to do if Zeke is going to be a fourth outfielder for this team going forward.

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An interesting thought was proposed on the message boards regarding the Indians next year. With the bullpen strength the Indians have exhibited this season is it possible the Tribe might consider dangling closer Chris Perez for a much needed bat?

Before you dismiss the idea out of hand consider that the Indians might have a couple of potential replacements for Perez should he be moved. Vinnie Pestano displays closer's stuff and the personality to do the job and lefty Nick Hagadone might also project to the spot down the road.With

Perez's save numbers climbing (although most other metrics have regressed) and with him being arbitration eligible in 2012, the Indians might be willing to part with the right hander if they could get an impact bat in exchange. Changing roles in a successful bullpen is always dicey and you hate to mess with what works but just keep it in mind.

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If and when the end formally comes for the Tribe in terms of contention in 2011 the Indians have got to force feed Lonnie Chisenhall all the playing time they can. They're currently (and rightly) riding a Jack Hannahan offensive wave right now but clearly Chisenhall is being groomed for a bigger role in 2012.

Chisenhall can hit a fastball. Chisenhall can hit pretty much anyone's best fastball. But like many young players he has a much tougher time recognizing and handling off speed stuff. The issue isn't necessarily Chisenhall's ability to hit those pitches, that's still in question. But he needs to see as many as possible so he can build that recognition and comfort level heading into 2012.

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20 trips to the DL for Tribe players and counting thus far in 2011. That's death to a thin roster. And that doesn't count games missed while the Indians determined if a trip to the DL was necessary. The case for that last point is Shin Soo Choo who came back two weeks ago only to

hurt his left side, miss a few more games, come back and then hurt it again Saturday night on a throw. Choo wasn't in the lineup on Sunday against the Royals which meant Choo, Hafner, Brantley and Sizemore were not available to play. Thome didn't start either. Teams coming down the stretch and still within shouting distance of a playoff berth can't recover from such injuries. Add to that the fact that Carlos Carrasco is still feeling shoulder discomfort and Josh Tomlin just the DL last week with elbow tenderness and you just can't help but wait for the final curtain to fall on this team.

The fact it hasn't is what elicited the first couple paragraphs.

The Browns

Thursday's Browns-Eagles score didn't really concern me as much as a few other things I watched during the game. I noted elsewhere that the Browns playing the Eagles was kind of like watching a little brother play his big brother in a game of one-on-one. And the Browns are the little brother here.

The Browns hope to one day be the Eagles, at least in terms of the West Coast Offense. In every single down and distance the Browns were in Thursday night the Eagles had a really good where the Browns were looking to go with the football. They've played against the same sets, formations and routes since the first day of training camp and were jumping throws and setting their defense accordingly.

Little brother didn't have much of a chance; especially given they are light years away from running their offense as efficiently and effectively as the Eagles do. That's not even mentioning that the Eagles acquired players this offseason (excellent players, by the way) specifically to help them defend against teams like Green Bay who also run an efficient WCO.

The deck was stacked all night and the Browns seemingly used the opportunity to get in and out of those sets without regard to the fact that the Eagles were sitting and waiting for them.

If the game had counted I think you would have seen a steady diet of Peyton Hillis and Montario

Hardesty. But Pat Shurmur properly sat Hillis down halfway through the game and rightly preserved the health of his starters.

* I liked the fact that the Browns got into the Eagles backfield all night. Phil Taylor wreaked havoc and Jabaal Sheard and Jayme Mitchell did a nice job on getting pressure. Ahtyba Rubin continued to be disruptive next to Taylor and D'Qwell Jackson continued to build on his first healthy and happy training camp in some time.

I also thought Colt McCoy displayed touch and accuracy on a few throws he made to Brian Robiskie, Hillis and Evan Moore downfield. Hardesty and Hillis got out of the game healthy as did pretty much everyone other than LB Titus Brown who suffered the dreaded high ankle sprain.

Joe Haden looked much better Thursday night than he has in the two previous games. Haden's now a veteran and he's the least of our worries but it was still nice to see him on his game. I'm also fine with Usama Young and TJ Ward sitting Thursday out. Those guys are going to be throwing themselves around with reckless abandon during the season and there's no need to get them dinged up in a meaningless exhibition game. Greg Little also continued his strong preseason and you have to be pleased with the work and results the rookie WR has put in this summer.

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On the flip side I thought McCoy and Seneca Wallace both at times looked too harried and hurried. McCoy forced some throws and is still clearly trying to get comfortable in the office while Wallace just seems to want the pocket as soon as possible.

The offensive line is in some trouble. Not only is Shaun Lauvao starting at right tackle but Tony Pashos at right tackle looked jumpy and slow all night long. Being slow can make you look jumpy as you look for every edge you can find. So not only is the right side of the OL a concern but now word comes that left guard Eric Steinbach is out 'indefinitely' with a disc problem in his lower back. That means raw rookie Jason Pinkston may need to be a really quick learner or that the Browns might be buyers when rosters are further cut down.

While I liked what I saw from Mitchell and Sheard on the pass rush their efforts in the running game is a big issue. The Eagles abused them Thursday. Not sure if they're just inexperienced or if they're missing on their run/pass keys on each play but either way it's a problem. More so when you consider missing those keys is inexcusable given the Browns face a version of Philly's offense every day in practice.

Penalties and turnovers will destroy this team given their relative inability at this point to overcome them with fire power. If you throw away the Robiskie questionable pass interference play and the ridiculous D'Qwell roughing the passer penalty that negated an interception and return into Philly territory the score is a lot different. I'm not making excuses. The Browns are young and inexperienced and they lack talent and depth in too many spots to be a good football team, but it's clearly a different game if those calls aren't made. Likewise with a fluke fumble on a punt in the first half that gave the Eagles a really short field.

Don’t expect much at all Thursday in Chicago. The Browns’ starters may play a series or two but Thursday will be dedicated to watching the young players on the roster battle make their final pitches. Meanwhile, game planning for Cincinnati has already begun in earnest.

It’s really hard to judge what you’ll see when real bullets fly but keep in mind that the Browns’ first four games will be against the Bengals, the Manning-less Colts, the Titans who are rebuilding and the screwed up Dolphins. Getting off to a good start while continuing to get comfortable with two new systems might be a possibility if for no other reason that the opponents are similar, if not worse, states.

Lastly

Composite

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