Sometimes you just have tip your cap to the other guy. Even if you hate the other guy because he's an unlikeable ass.

Such is the case with the Indians and the Tigers as the Tribe heads into their biggest series in their last four seasons Monday when Detroit comes to town Monday through Wednesday. Despite winning their last two series and going 5-2 over the last week the Indians haven't been able to make up any ground over Detroit during that time because the Tigers are living right and running rough shod over the AL Central too.

If degree of difficulty was part of the equation that determined the standings the Indians would be running away with the division. They played Sunday against the Royals in Kansas City without Michael Brantley (out for the year), Shin Soo Choo (15-day DL), Travis Hafner (15-day DL), Grady Sizemore (apparently 15-month DL) and Jason Kipnis (15-day DL). Jeanmar Gomez started Sunday for the Tribe because both Carlos Carrasco and Josh Tomlin, 2/5 of the rotation that kept the Indians viable for most of the summer, are also on the disabled list and Asdrubal Cabrera returned to the lineup a day after sitting a game with a nasty knee contusion suffered when he fouled a ball of his knee Friday (a pitch or two before homering in that at-bat).

Just to make things more interesting Sunday, hot hitting Jack Hannahan left the game early on with a leg issue and moments later Carlos Santana rolled an ankle on a stand-up double. At this point, with injuries oozing out of the Indians dugout, I wouldn't be surprised to see Head Athletic Trainer Lonnie Soloff stumble coming out of the dugout on one of his many trips out to tend to another fallen Indian and injure himself.

And yet they persevere and keep on doing what they can to remain in the hunt for the AL Central, however much on the fringe of the race they may be.

Right now they're being led by committee. Every win seems like it brings a new hero whether it be Jason Donald or Shelley Duncan. The bullpen remains extremely solid and the starters are throwing up decent outing pretty much four out of every five nights.

Guys like Cabbie, Hannahan, Kosuke Fukodome, Donald and Santana are taking turns getting hot and providing the offense that's been just healthy enough to get the wins needed to hang around the top of the division. With the Tigers hitting on all cylinders it's going to take an extraordinary effort to endure the rest of the way.

But the fact we can still say even that much is a testament to Manny Acta and the guys he pencils into the lineup each night. The Indians are playing meaningful games on Labor Day and beyond. That in itself is cause for celebration and optimism. Not for just this year but also for the foreseeable future.

Takeaways from Preseason Game #4

There was really only one thing that truly stood out in regard to Thursday's final preseason game with the Bears and that was the fact that probably 75,000 people paid for 35,000 or so people to watch what amounts to barely an organized scrimmage. And that's simply an embarrassment for the NFL.

Paying full ticket prices to watch guys on the roster bubble battle it out is ridiculous and NFL owners should basically be wearing bank robber masks when they're counting that cash. Neither the Browns nor Bears ran their full first teams out there and, simply put, it was horrific football to watch from the opening kickoff to the final gun.

As to the final roster, take note of the fact there are currently 11 rookies on the 'final' 53-man roster. For those who bemoaned the fact the Browns were not a player in free agency you can probably see the philosophy of the front office was to use this season to find out whether Colt McCoy is the long term answer at QB and whether a lot of these young, cheaper kids are the answer at any number of positions.

It becomes more clear that the Browns weren't interested in spending money on stop gaps for even a 1-year deal because they want these draft picks and undrafted free agents to step up and identify themselves as either players or impersonators going forward.

That's not going to help in the won-loss column in 2011 but the Browns front office probably took a more realistic approach to competing this season. They probably (and likely correctly) assume they wouldn't be competitive enough to win this season in the AFC North and that going young will help more than free agents in 2012.

If McCoy is the guy then the Browns will likely win 6-7 games and remove themselves from the Andrew Luck sweepstakes. Which is fine because if McCoy is the guy you don't need Andrew Luck. If McCoy falls short the Browns might well end up in the Luck Derby regardless of whether they went young or with some short term free agents.

That won't make the season ticket holders or fan base happy. But reality doesn't always equate to happiness.

What was disappointing was seeing RB Brandon Jackson put on injured reserve Saturday meaning he'll miss the entire season. A lot of fans didn't think Jackson showed much in the time he was active but he was miscast when he was forced to work as a traditional running back in the preseason. Jackson is regarded as one of the best blitz-pickup backs in football as well as a tremendous receiving running back. That would have given McCoy yet another security blanket not just in having another capable receiver on the field but in knowing that Jackson was there to dispose of blitzing LBs and DBs looking to take his head off.

Also surprising was the Browns retaining Armon Smith on the 53-man roster (and, again, that roster is fluid and is subject to change if the Browns can upgrade with players cut from other rosters). Smith had his moments, specifically his 80+ yard TD run against Detroit, but he also showed a horrible tendency to cough up the football regularly.

Rookie RBs from Union College usually don't get the benefit of the doubt when they are fumble-prone but the Browns must really like Smith's raw speed.

A Minute Changes Everything

Last week after I posted this column my wife Lisa got a call that her brother Vince was missing on Lake Erie. As one who's on the lake dozens of times each year that's a call that scared me to death because there is simply no margin for error on Lake Erie if something goes awry. Vince had left from E. 208th Street in Euclid for a quick trip in his kayak with the family dog and only the dog, wearing a canine life jacket, returned home.

Vince's kayak washed ashore Saturday at E. 204th Street and Vince's body was found Monday morning near 140th Street in Cleveland.

Vince was just 43-years old. He was a guy who I've known for 25 years and who always showed far more concern for others than he did for himself. It's cliché to say there are people who live every day to the fullest but if it's possible Vince Germano was high on the list. He could grow anything, catch anything, hunt anything and there is not a person who truly knew him who ever heard him say a disparaging word about anyone. Instead of judging Vince was helping. Whether it be swimming out 50 yards in the lake to help a woman who's kayak had turned over and bring her and her kayak safely back to shore or whether it was helping an elderly woman in the neighborhood plant her flowers every spring, Vince was there for his family, friends and complete strangers.

Telling my three daughters that their uncle had lost his life on Monday was the hardest thing I've ever done. They were understandably heartbroken as is the rest of the family. His nieces adored him and now bestow all of their love on an old turtle that Vince caught and gave them and who still flourishes in an honored spot in our home. Never mind that Vince also gave them two snapping turtles and called any number of times hoping to deliver them ducks, ferrets, snakes and even a chinchilla. We deferred on all of those things.

My girls have the turtle and memories of Vince helping to teach them to fish, garden, swim and pretty much anything else you can do outside. They also fondly remember Vince hurling himself into a swimming hole in Hiram when everyone else was screaming and scrambling out. Vince jumped in, wrestled around under a couple of tree roots on the side of the river and pulled out a 6-foot longer water snake that he brought out and showed all the kids. Those kids and their horrified mothers were entertained for 20 minutes learning about and touching something that

had scared them all just minutes before. Vince transported that snake and a couple more of its friends 50 yards downstream so that the kids and families could continue to swim.

What's also devastating to me is the fact that the dog was wearing a life jacket while Vince was not. And though best guesses are that the event that put Vince in the water occurred close to shore and in relatively shallow water that Vince flourished in all the time, it doesn't take but a second for even the most accomplished kayakers, swimmers and outdoorsmen to be in a situation they can't escape.

I don't know if it was an accident or a sudden health emergency that cast Vince out of his kayak and into the waters he loved. I don't know if a life jacket would have ultimately made any difference at the end of the day.

I just wish we'd had the opportunity to find out.

Rest in peace, Vince. You're forever in our hearts and your loss will forever leave a void in the lives of those you touched and who remain here without you.

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