

Tribe's bullpen labors late in loss to Royals

By Jordan Bastian MLB.com @MLBastian

CLEVELAND -- Andrew Miller emerged from the bullpen door in center field on Friday night, while flames swirled around his name on the Progressive Field scoreboard. His entrance provided hope that order would finally be restored for the Indians' struggling relief corps.

Reality did not align with hope against the Royals. In a 10-9 loss, the Tribe's bullpen problems persisted in the form of five runs allowed across the sixth and seventh innings. The decisive blow was a go-ahead, two-run home run by Salvador Perez, whose blast welcomed Miller back from the disabled list.

It was a frustrating swing in moment late in a game that featured a rough outing from starter Trevor Bauer, plus a handful of missed plays in the field for an Indians team that prides itself on playing clean baseball. Cleveland remains atop the American League Central, but its 18-19 record is far below expectations.

"Ultimately, I think just as a team we're not really playing winning baseball right now," Bauer said. "We're not making winning pitches. We're not making winning defensive plays. The offense came through big tonight and we still weren't able to win, because we beat ourselves in two other aspects of the game.

"It takes a lot of attention to detail and a very high focus and intensity to win at this level no matter who you're playing. And we're not bringing that on each and every night right now."

Miller, who was activated prior to the series opener after sustaining a left hamstring injury on April 25, opened his outing by issuing a walk to Jon Jay. Trying to protect a 9-8 lead, the lefty bounced back with consecutive strikeouts, bringing Perez to the plate. The All-Star catcher then sent a 1-1 slider out to left field, giving the Royals the lead and marking the first runs allowed by Miller this season.

"We're always trying to lock it in and ride it out as long as possible," Miller said. "Honestly, I felt like outside of those first couple pitches, I made a nice adjustment and was starting to get comfortable and slow the game down. I just did a really poor job with one pitch and paid for it."

Perez's blast came in the wake of a three-run push in the sixth inning for the Royals, who also scored five runs (four earned) on 11 hits against Bauer in his 4 2/3 innings. Following Bauer's exit, Indians reliever Dan Otero allowed run-scoring doubles to Mike Moustakas and Lucas Duda, and Evan Marshall yielded an RBI single to Alcides Escobar.

It was more of the same for the Cleveland bullpen, which posted a 9.50 ERA in the 14 games with Miller on the shelf.

The late collapse by the 'pen effectively canceled out the work of the Tribe offense, which scored nine runs off Royals starter Jason Hammel to chase him after 3 2/3 innings. Jose Ramirez and Yonder Alonso each went deep in the first inning, and Michael Brantley punctuated a six-run fourth with a grand slam.

"If we score nine runs, we should win 100 percent of the time," Bauer said. "So, we're just beating ourselves right now. That's what it is. We're better than this."

MOMENT THAT MATTERED

Lindor's gaffe: Jorge Soler led off the sixth inning by chopping a pitch from Otero to shortstop Francisco Lindor, who gloved the ball cleanly. Lindor's throw sailed wide of the first baseman Alonso's reach, allowing Soler not only to reach, but sprint up to second base. Moustakas followed with an RBI double to ignite a three-run outburst in the inning for the Royals. Lindor has made five errors in his past eight games.

"It seems like we've been in a lot of these crazy games," manager Terry Francona said. "We don't have the margin for error right now. It seems like when we make an error, it costs us. That's the way the game is."

NAQUIN EXITS EARLY

During his two-run double in the fourth inning, Tyler Naquin pulled up after rounding first and limped some as he slowed into second base. Naquin was checked by Francona and a member of the team's medical staff, but the outfielder initially stayed in the game. After the six-run frame spread the score out, Naquin was lifted and replaced in right by Brandon Guyer due to left hamstring tightness, per the Indians.

Naquin was taken for an MRI exam after he left the game, but the club will not have the results until Saturday morning.

"He thought it was a cramp," Francona said. "But then, as the inning progressed, he was getting tighter and tighter. The hope is that it was a cramp. We've all had them and you know how it feels. But, we won't have it read until the morning. We'll see how it goes."

HE SAID IT

"It just seemed like it didn't matter where I threw it or what I threw, how hard I threw it, how soft I threw it. I felt like I had to strike everybody out to get an out. If they put a ball in play, I feel like it was -- whether it was to someone or not to someone or hard hit or soft hit or whatever -- it felt like they ended up on base. It's tough on night's like that." -- Bauer

"I know it was a tough [outing]. He didn't want to give up a home run, but I think that inning here was better for him than pitching in a Triple-A game." -- Francona, on Miller's appearance

SOUND SMART

Brantley's grand slam was his second this month, following the game-tying shot in the ninth inning on May 1 against the Rangers. Brantley is the first Indians batter with two grand slams in the same month since Travis Hafner did it in July 2006.

UP NEXT

Indians right-hander Mike Clevinger (2-0, 2.76 ERA) is scheduled to take the mound at 4:10 p.m. ET on Saturday as the series against the Royals continues at Progressive Field. Clevinger is 3-0 with a 2.12 ERA in six career games against Kansas City. The Royals will counter with right-hander Jakob Junis (4-2, 3.18).

Brantley grand in May with 2nd career slam

By Casey Harrison MLB.com

CLEVELAND -- A grand slam is the exclamation point in a thrilling win on many occasions, and it could have been for the Indians on Friday night.

It turned out to be anything but.

Indians left fielder Michael Brantley hit his second grand slam of the season to cap a six-run fourth inning against the Royals, but a late two-run homer by Salvador Perez off Andrew Miller, who had just come off the disabled list prior to the game, became the deciding factor in the Tribe's 10-9 loss at Progressive Field.

Brantley sent a 2-2 pitch from Royals starter Jason Hammel a projected 374 feet, according to Statcast™, into the stands in left-center field, scoring Tyler Naquin, Roberto Perez and Francisco Lindor. The homer ended Hammel's night after 3 2/3 innings. Hammel allowed nine runs on six hits. He also gave up a pair of homers in the first.

The home run was Brantley's fourth. Brantley also hit a grand slam eight games ago on May 1, against the Rangers, for the only two slams of his career. By doing so, he became the first Indians player to hit two grand slams in the same month since Travis Hafner did it in July 2006.

Tribe manager Terry Francona made a change to the starting lineup for the series opener against the Royals, and it paid immediate dividends.

Jose Ramirez and Yonder Alonso launched home runs off Hammel in a three-run first inning. Ramirez opened the scoring with a two-run shot and Alonso went deep two batters later.

According to Statcast™, Ramirez's homer traveled a projected 397 feet to right-center. Alonso's homer to left-center had a projected distance of 385 feet.

Francona moved Brantley, who singled to right just before Ramirez's jack, to the two-hole in the lineup, while Jason Kipnis dropped down to the No. 6 spot. Brantley finished 2-for-5, while Kipnis went 0-for-3.

Francona admitted before the game that the move may only be temporary.

"Me and Kip were talking in Milwaukee," Francona said. "It's something we kind of came to the conclusion together. That second spot is such an important part of the order, just because it's not just hitting.

"I think Brantley's certainly one guy that, because he hits the ball through the hole so well, would be the logical choice. But, I wanted to talk to him, too. So, I talked to both guys, and me and Kip talked for a while the other day. We kind of did it together. I thought we did a good job, because we want to get him going. And what's the best way? Sometimes it's to maybe drop you down a little bit and let him just focus on hitting -- not so much moving runners and things like that."

Miller gives up go-ahead HR in return from DL

By Jordan Bastian MLB.com @MLBastian

CLEVELAND -- It goes without saying that Andrew Miller is an important part of the Indians' bullpen dynamic. The past two weeks without the services of the left-handed leverage artist have shown just how critical of a piece he is within the club's relief puzzle.

Prior to Friday's game against the Royals, the Indians activated Miller from the 10-day disabled list -- the hope being that some order will be restored with his return. While he was sidelined with a left hamstring issue, the Tribe's bullpen endured a pile a problems and experienced a high level of turnover, contributing to the team's 5-9 record in his absence.

"Last year, I was on the DL and they won 22 in a row," Miller quipped. "I can't take all the credit for this. I'm not some guy that thinks I'm the difference maker. I want to come back and contribute. I want to be part of it. It's tough to watch from the sidelines. I've been a part of bullpens that were struggling. I've been the reason we've been struggling. I know what that feels like. It's not a lot of fun.

"I think, fortunately, we have a group that certainly can get off that wave and get on a good one as quick as we can. It's just sometimes a little bit harder than we'd like it to be."

Miller made his official return in the seventh inning, entering with the Indians clinging to a one-run lead over the Royals. He opened things with a walk to Jon Jay before striking out Jorge Soler and Mike Moustakas. The next batter, Salvador Perez, drilled a 1-1 slider out to left for a two-run go-ahead home run in the Tribe's 10-9 loss.

In order to clear a spot on the active roster, the Tribe placed left-hander Tyler Olson on Major League Baseball's paternity list. Olson is permitted to be away from the club between one to three days before being added back into the fold.

Miller injured his left hamstring two pitches into an outing against the Cubs on April 25 and he landed on the DL the following day. In the 13 games without him, the bullpen posted a collective 9.50 ERA in 36 innings with an 1.100 opponents' OPS. Amid the struggles, the Indians reached down to Triple-A for reinforcements multiple times, acquired righty Oliver Drake from the Brewers to help and cut ties with veteran Matt Belisle.

In Miller's 11 appearances prior to the setback, he did not allow a run in 10 innings, during which he struck out 17 and walked four. During the Tribe's recent trip to Milwaukee, Miller threw a 35-pitch simulated game at Miller Park with no issues. He underwent further strength testing on the team's off-day on Thursday before the Indians activated him for the current weekend set against the Royals.

"We went back and forth a little bit on would it be better off for him to go pitch a game on a [Minor League] rehab," Indians manager Terry Francona said. "He honestly couldn't say that that would help him. I think he feels like facing Major League hitters is really the only way. So, you might see him on a little bit of a schedule the first week back, just to try to get him on a roll where we get him back into that mid-season form where he can be a big weapon.

Worth noting

- Francona noted that right-hander Nick Goody (10-day DL, right elbow) was examined by Dr. Mark Schickendantz following the pitcher's week off from throwing. Goody still has some swelling around the joint, but no structural damage, and he will continue to be shut down from throwing for another week to 10 days.
- Outfielder Lonnie Chisenhall (10-day DL, right calf) has resumed all baseball activities, but he remains limited with his running, per Francona. Chisenhall has advanced to "land-based" jogging, as opposed to running in an AlterG treadmill or in the pool.
- Center fielder Bradley Zimmer is still dealing with a chest bruise -- dating to when he crashed into the wall at Yankee Stadium on Saturday -- and he was out of the starting lineup on Friday. Francona gave Greg Allen the nod in center, buying Zimmer a little more recovery time.

Gomes lends hand to renovate local ballfields

By Casey Harrison MLB.com

CLEVELAND -- The Indians hosted the fourth annual Fields for the Future project at Thurgood Marshall Recreation on the city's east side on Thursday. And it's become a yearly tradition for Tribe backstop Yan Gomes.

The Indians, in collaboration with the city of Cleveland and other corporate partners, helped renovate Johnny Roscoe Field and Fred Drake Field. The renovation marked the fourth year the initiative has helped to restore local baseball fields.

In addition to the renovations, Shelly Co. donated new concrete slabs for the dugouts and Davey Tree Co. donated 10 trees, which will be planted throughout the surrounding park with the help of volunteers from Western Reserve Land Conservancy and Davey Tree.

BVU: The Center for Nonprofit Excellence will also help to coordinate volunteers from the Cleveland Indians, McDonald Hopkins and Pepco to conduct several cleanup and painting projects around the park. Additionally, with support from MLB's Tomorrow Fund, a field-maintenance clinic will also be provided to staff from the city to ensure the renovations will be maintained.

"Our Fields for the Future program is a key piece in our long-term goal to improve the quality of youth baseball in Cleveland," said Indians executive director of community impact Rebecca Kodys. "We work with a number of called partners on the project, which would not happen without their support."

Gomes and his wife, Jenna, were on-site to help with the renovations, and they also made financial donations to support the project. Gomes also caught the first pitch prior to a youth game to break in the new field.

"We've been doing this for four years now, and it's really kind of like the name says -- it's building fields for our future, for our kids," said Gomes, who's been helping with the program since it started in 2015. "The kids are our future, and it's something my wife and I are really passionate for. We hope to keep building them."

The program will also serve as a precursor to Play Ball Weekend, which takes place May 26-27. Play Ball Weekend was launched by Major League Baseball and USA Baseball as the sport's largest effort to encourage widespread participation in formal and informal baseball activities.

The Fields for the Future program began in 2015 at Luke Easter Park on Cleveland's east side. Gunning Park was renovated in '16, and in '17, a field at Halloran Park received a makeover. According to the city of Cleveland, field usage has improved "tremendously" after the renovations, with the number of games played at the field increasing fourfold.

"Growing up, I didn't have the greatest opportunities," Gomes said. "I grew up in Brazil, where baseball isn't really that big. But that's really the biggest thing, just giving kids the opportunities of whatever it is: to get them off the streets, to get out of trouble, get out there and play sports.

"It's really something I'm passionate about. It's a sport that I love, so we're really trying to get kids to see what we see and enjoy the game, and go out there and play."

'We can't keep playing like that': Sloppy play giving Indians no margin for error

By T.J. Zuppe 3h ago

Somewhere between Michael Brantley's second grand slam in the past eight games and Michael Jackson's "Beat It" thumping through the Progressive Field speakers before the seventh inning, a chilly night in Cleveland appeared destined to culminate in a sweet symphony of synchronicity.

Ahh, to peruse the potential headlines from an alternate reality. They almost wrote themselves.

New lineup order sparks offense

Ace reliever returns and slams the door

Local beat writer consumes record number of dollar dogs

But one misplaced pitch to Salvador Perez changed everything.

"Just hung a slider to Salvy," Andrew Miller said. "And he killed it."

Just like that, any references to the lefty's heroic return from the disabled list or Brantley's propensity to terrorize opposing pitchers from a new spot in the Tribe lineup disappeared faster than a cheap hot dog in the bleachers.

The poorly located hanger to the Royals catcher quickly turned a one-run lead into what became a 10-9 loss, as Perez deposited the third offering he saw in the seventh-inning exchange onto the home run porch.

But for every fan quick to shout Obi-Wan Kenobi's words to Anakin Skywalker in Revenge of the Sith in Miller's direction — "You were the chosen one!" — truth is, the Tribe's recent myriad of perplexing and frustrating obstacles extend beyond just one bad pitch by Miller or a rough couple of weeks for the bullpen in his absence. In reality, they're far more egregious.

"We beat ourselves twice in New York," Trevor Bauer said. "We beat ourselves again tonight. If we want to get to where we want to go as a team, and what we're know we're capable of and win the amount of games we know we're capable of, we can't keep playing like that."

The that he's referring to, in his words, isn't about one individual. It's not just one group. It's the entire collection of 25 players within the clubhouse walls, himself included.

No one is immune.

"It's not just the defense or just the offense or just the pitching or the bullpen or one specific guy," Bauer said. "It's just, as a team, as a collective whole. I think we gave them (three) unearned runs tonight. I've got to pitch better. Shoot, on nights when I start, if we score nine runs, we should win 100 percent of the time. So, we're just beating ourselves right now. That's what it is. We're better than this."

That's probably true. But unfortunately, they haven't shown much of that lately.

Some of that is due to Miller's injury. Removing one of the game's best relievers — just as he felt he'd settled into a nice groove — is going to have a ripple effect on the entire bullpen. It's inevitable. Still, it's up to them to weather the storm, with or without their best relief weapon.

During that time, the bullpen ranked near the bottom of the league in almost every important category. The performance during that stretch did nothing to erase any concerns about the group's ability to move forward without the durable Bryan Shaw in 2018.

Miller's return was supposed to help settle that down. And in the long run, it probably will. But after not throwing a competitive pitch in a game situation for just more than two weeks, it didn't take much more than a tiny lack of execution to provide the difference.

A leadoff walk. Two strikeouts. A missed location. A blown lead.

"I felt, outside of those first couple pitches," Miller said, "I made a nice adjustment and was starting to get comfortable and (was able to) slow the game down. Just did a really poor job with one pitch and paid for it."

And that's the way it's been throughout their recent 6-11 stretch since April 24, a bewildering period that has pushed the club below .500 for the second time in the past three games.

But in fairness to Miller, he was only responsible for two of the 10 runs allowed. The Indians used a six-run fourth inning — an explosion punctuated by Brantley's second grand slam within the past two weeks — to build a five-run cushion. The Royals slowly chipped away with one in the fifth and three in the sixth, handing Bauer his worst start of the season (4 2/3 innings, 11 hits, five runs, four earned) and later getting to the bullpen for three more.

While the pitching wasn't sharp, perhaps the most frustrating element of their recent demise has come through sloppy defensive play, surprisingly highlighted by another error charged to Francisco Lindor and an earlier grounder that was ruled a hit — a single up the middle that briefly popped in and out of his glove, later leading to a pair of runs in the second inning.

Those are the types of plays Lindor typically makes — tough, but not impossible — and in the midst of the Indians' continued headaches, they are the borderline plays that are perpetuating a running theme of self-inflicted wounds. His sixth-inning miscue that opened the door for the three-run avalanche was Lindor's eighth error of the season.

The slick-fielding shortstop might be credited with five defensive runs saved this year (the same total he earned throughout the entire 2017 campaign), but he's also just two errors away from matching last year's total. As Lindor said after a tough day at Yankee Stadium this past weekend, "that's unacceptable."

Add a fly ball that youngster Greg Allen impressively chased down but dropped in the third inning, and the three unearned runs allowed Friday night more than make up the difference in the contest.

"We don't have the margin for error right now," Terry Francona said. "It seems like when we make an error, it costs us."

Frankly, the Indians don't deserve much wiggle room. Sure, Miller's absence created an unfortunate road block, but they have yet to consistently earn the benefit of the doubt.

Offense slumps. Pitching experiences hiccups. But for a team that prides itself on playing the game "clean" or "the right way," they certainly aren't doing enough of the little things to help themselves escape the tribulations that plague their every move.

It's not so much about talent. It's about execution.

Knowing that has everyone frustrated.

"Ultimately, I think just as a team we're not really playing winning baseball right now," Bauer said. "We're not making winning pitches. We're not making winning defensive plays. The offense came through big tonight and we still weren't able to win, because we beat ourselves in two other aspects of the game."

"It takes a lot of attention to detail and a very high focus and intensity to win at this level, no matter who you're playing. And we're not bringing that on each and every night right now."

Miller gives up homer as Indians lose to Royals, 10-9

By Steve Herrick, The Associated Press

Andrew Miller, activated from the disabled list before the game, gave up Salvador Perez's two-run homer in the seventh inning and the Kansas City Royals rallied to defeat the Indians, 10-9, on May 11 at Progressive Field.

Miller, making his first appearance since straining his left hamstring April 25, allowed his first runs of the season and the Royals rallied from a 9-4 deficit.

Miller (1-1) entered the game in the seventh with a one-run lead, but walked Jon Jay on a 3-2 pitch. Jorge Soler and Mike Moustakas struck out before Perez hit a 1-1 pitch onto the home run porch in left field. Miller, who had pitched 10 scoreless innings before the injury, was removed following the homer.

The Indians have lost five of six. Cleveland went 5-9 and its bullpen had a 9.50 ERA while Miller was sidelined. Indians manager Terry Francona said consideration was given to have Miller make a couple of minor league rehab assignments, but the decision was made to activate the star left-hander.

Alcides Escobar had four RBI for Kansas City while Lucas Duda doubled three times and drove in a run. Jay had two RBI and Moustakas had three hits.

Brad Keller (1-1) pitched three scoreless innings for his first major league win. Kelvin Herrera retired the side in order in the ninth for his eighth save.

Michael Brantley's grand slam capped a six-run fourth inning that gave Cleveland a 9-4 lead.

Brantley ended an eight-pitch at-bat by hitting a 2-2 delivery from Jason Hammel into the right field seats for his second grand slam this month and of his career. He also hit a game-tying grand slam in the ninth inning against Texas on May 1.

Kansas City scored a run in the fifth and three more in the sixth. Shortstop Francisco Lindor's throwing error to start the sixth made two of the runs unearned. Rookie center fielder Greg Allen dropped a line drive in the third, leading to another unearned run.

Tyler Naquin's two-run double in the fourth gave Cleveland a 5-4 lead. Jose Ramirez and Yonder Alonso homered in the first against Hammel, who hasn't won since Sept. 6, 2017, a stretch of 12 starts.

Indians starter Trevor Bauer allowed five runs — four hits — and a career-high 11 hits in 4 2-3 innings. Hammel gave up nine runs, including three homers in 3 2-3 innings.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Indians>> OF Bradley Zimmer, still dealing with a bruised chest after running into the wall at Yankee Stadium last weekend, didn't play. Allen replaced him in center and dropped a fly ball in the third leading to an unearned run. Naquin was removed in the top of the fifth with left hamstring tightness.

Cleveland Indians: Tyler Naquin's rise, worries elsewhere -- Terry Pluto

By Terry Pluto, The Plain Dealer terrypluto2003@yahoo.com

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- When the Cleveland Indians send veterans to the minors, they often say, "This isn't final. Stay ready. We could need you."

Tyler Naquin can tell you that's true. Naquin deserves credit for continuing to put himself in position to help the Indians.

Here's the story:

1. Naquin was barely mentioned during the spring in Arizona. He batted .286 (.862 OPS) but appeared ticketed for Class AAA.
2. Naquin was the Tribe's starting center fielder in 2016. He took advantage of Michael Brantley being injured and Abe Almonte being suspended to make the Tribe's opening day outfield. Playing center field mostly against right-handed pitching, Naquin batted .296 (.886 OPS) with 14 HR and 43 RBI in 365 plate appearances. His defense was an issue.
3. Naquin spent most of 2017 in the minors. He had lost his starting center field job to Bradley Zimmer last season.
4. Naquin also had some minor injuries in 2017. He played only 19 games in Cleveland. At Class AAA Columbus, he hit .298 (.833 OPS) with 10 HR and 51 RBI.
5. In spring training, Naquin wondered how he'd fit into the team - especially when it was clear Brantley was making a strong comeback. But when Lonnie Chisenhall suffered another calf injury after playing seven games early this season, it opened a spot for Naquin.
6. Naquin took over as a lefty bat when the Indians faced right-handers. Now in Chisenhall's right field spot, Naquin entered the weekend batting .329 (.802 OPS) with 2 HR and 9 RBI in 77 plate appearances.
7. No one is sure when Chisenhall will be back. Since the 2017 All-Star break, Chisenhall has only 75 at bats (hitting .200). The calf injuries are a real problem. He is a free agent at the end of the season. The door is wide open for Naquin to take over in right field against right-handed pitching.
8. Before Friday's game, here's what manager Terry Francona told the media about Naquin: "He's played really well ... He fits for everything. He makes the pitcher fight. He doesn't give in. He might take an awkward swing or two, but he hangs in there long enough get to a pitch he can handle."
9. Naquin played mostly right field at Texas A&M and it's his natural position. Fangraphs rates him the No. 2 defensive right fielder in the American League this season.
10. Naquin left Friday's game with tightness in his hamstring and had an MRI. The Indians will know more about his status Saturday.

ABOUT MELKY CABRERA

The Indians signed the 33-year-old Cabrera and assigned him to Class AAA Columbus.

A lifetime .286 hitter (.753 OPS), Cabrera was one of several veterans who wanted a multi-year deal when free agency opened. None came along. Soon, no offers came along.

In 2017, he was paid \$15 million. He hit .285 (.746 OPS) with 17 HR and 85 RBI in 156 games. So he thought he'd be well-paid. Cabrera is a liability in the outfield. And some players (or their agents) overestimated what the market would pay for their services.

On April 26, the Indians signed Cabrera to a minor league deal. They sent him to the spring training complex in Goodyear to get in shape. Then they sent him to Columbus, where he's 2-for-17 heading into the weekend.

The switch-hitting Cabrera received no promises from the Indians about coming to the majors. He has an opt-out clause on June 1. The Indians plan to let him play several more games to see if his bat comes around.

With Brantley healthy and hitting .324 (.880 OPS) in left field and Naquin performing in right field, there is no need to rush Cabrera, unless Naquin's injury is serious.

The extra outfield spot that could open depends upon the performance of Rajai Davis. He entered the weekend batting .220 (.526 OPS). He was 13-for-59 with only two extra base hits (both doubles) and one RBI.

Analytics rates Bradley Zimmer as one of the top defensive center fielders.

ABOUT BRADLEY ZIMMER

Bradley Zimmer entered the weekend batting .224 (.620 OPS) with 2 HR and 9 RBI. A real area of concern is 39 strikeouts in 106 plate appearances.

In his last 15 games, Zimmer is batting .196 with 1 HR and 20 strikeouts in 46 at bats.

He took over for Naquin in center field last season because Zimmer is the superior fielder.

Minnesota's Byron Buxton is considered the best defensive center fielder in the American League. He has been hurt this season, so he lacks enough innings to qualify for the Fangraphs defensive ratings in center field.

With Buxton not included, Zimmer is ranked as the American League's best defensive center fielder by the analytics website Fangraphs. That's part of the reason the Indians will be patient with him at the plate.

Zimmer batted .285 (.790 OPS) with 5 HR and 25 RBI in 151 at bats before the 2017 All-Star break.

Since then, he is a .207 hitter (.604 OPS) with 5 HR and 23 RBI in 246 at bats. So there are some problems with his swing.

ABOUT THE INDIANS

1. The Indians starting rotation has a 3.49 ERA, second best in the American League. That's with Josh Tomlin (8.06 ERA). Taking away Tomlin, it's 2.93.

2. The rotation is why I remain relatively upbeat about the Indians. It's easier to find bullpen arms than starters. Excellent starting pitching is why teams can go on long winning streaks. The Indians have done that in each of the last two seasons -- 16 games in 2016 and 22 games in 2017.

3. It's possible the Tribe could put Tomlin in the bullpen and promote Adam Plutko to the rotation. Plutko made a spot start last week for the Tribe, allowing three runs in 7-1/3 and beating Toronto. He went back to Class AAA Columbus and allowed two runs in 7-1/3 innings. With a 2.37 ERA in six Class AAA starts, Plutko is knocking on the Tribe's door.

4. Ryan Merritt made his first rehabilitation start at Columbus, allowing four runs (3 HR) in 4-1/3 innings. Merritt is coming back from a knee injury. Patience is needed.

5. The Indians were 18-18 overall headed into the weekend. But in the Central Division, they were 7-2 before facing Kansas City Friday night.

6. Another sign of the Tribe's bullpen problems? They are 0-4 in extra inning games. They were 4-2 a year ago.

7. Yonder Alonso batted .188 vs. lefties in 2017. This season, it's .179. The Indians should consider platooning him more often - the numbers show that is needed.

SPORTS Bullpen, defense stumble as Indians blow five-run lead, fall to Royals

Chris Assenheimer | **Chris Assenheimer | The Chronicle-Telegram** Published on May 11, 2018 | Updated 3:09 a. m.

CLEVELAND — It started out as a pretty good night for the Indians.

Left-hander Andrew Miller was activated from the disabled list prior to the series opener against Kansas City on Friday night at Progressive Field.

The Indians came out swinging, taking a big lead after a six-run fourth inning that was capped by Michael Brantley's second grand slam in less than two weeks.

Then it all fell apart.

Right-hander Trevor Bauer couldn't make it out of the fifth inning and the bullpen continued to sputter — even Miller, who allowed a game-winning home run to Salvador Perez — as the Indians dropped the series opener 10-9.

Miller made his first appearance since April 26, entering to start the seventh inning. He walked the first batter he faced, then struck out the next two before Perez connected on 1-1 pitch and sent it over the wall and onto the home run porch in left field.

"Obviously, I was a little quick in the beginning, a little rusty to (the first batter John) Jay, but other than that I felt pretty good," Miller said. "I felt like I made some good adjustments after that. I just hung a slider to Salvy and he killed it. I just did a poor job on one pitch and paid for it."

Miller certainly didn't hold all the blame.

Bauer, who entered the night with a 2.53 ERA over eight starts, offered up easily his worst outing of the season, allowing five runs on a season-high 11 hits.

The Indians scored three times in the opening inning on home runs from Jose Ramirez and Yonder Alonso, but Bauer gave them right back in the second.

He surrendered an unearned run in the third before allowing three of the first five hitters he faced in the fifth to reach on hits, as the Royals closed to within 9-5.

"His stuff was so good. It was coming out of his hand so well," manager Terry Francona said of Bauer. "It looked like he got in throw-mode, as opposed to pitching. I think he felt so good. He just lost his command. There was just a lot of hits, a couple errors, a couple walks and a ton of baserunners."

Bauer agreed.

"I think I had really good stuff," he said. "It just seemed like it didn't matter where I threw it or what I threw, how hard I threw it, how soft I threw it. I felt like I had to strike everybody out to get an out. If they put the ball in play, I felt like whether it was to someone or not to someone, they ended up on base.

"I probably could have made some better pitches. I gotta pitch better. On nights that I start, if we score nine runs, we should win 100 percent of the time."

With Cleveland's beleaguered bullpen in the game, Kansas City kept coming, scoring three times in the sixth off right-hander Dan Otero, who allowed only one earned run after a throwing error from shortstop Francisco Lindor to start the inning.

It was the eighth error in 37 games for Lindor, who won the Gold Glove two seasons ago.

"We beat ourselves twice in New York. We beat ourselves again tonight," Bauer said. "If we want to get where we want to go as a team and what we know we're capable of, we can't keep playing like that.

"It's on all sides of the ball. It's not just the defense or just the offense or just the pitching or the bullpen. I think we gave them five unearned runs tonight. We're just beating ourselves right now, that's what it is. We're better than this."

The Indians may have suffered a potential blow in the injury department as right fielder Tyler Naquin left the game with tightness in his left hamstring.

Naquin, who entered the night as Cleveland's leading hitter (.329), appeared to sustain the injury while legging out a double in the fourth inning. He stayed in the game but was replaced by Brandon Guyer in the fifth.

Clippers 8, Indians 6 | Barnes, Cabrera lift Clippers to road win

Brandon Barnes' had a bases-clearing double in a five-run fifth inning that sent the Clippers to an 8-6 victory over the Indianapolis Indians on Friday night at Victory Field.

Barnes finished with four RBI and Melky Cabrera went 3 for 5 for the Clippers.

Yandy Diaz started the Clippers' five-run fifth with a single and moved to second on a base hit by Cabrera. Diaz scored when catcher Jacob Stallings threw the ball away for an error on Eric Haase's bunt. After Yu Chang struck out, Adam Rosales singled in Cabrera to make it 5-3.

Damien Magnifico relieved Clay Holmes and struck out Nellie Rodriguez, but Mike Papi walked to load the bases and Barnes lined a three-run double to left to make it 8-3.

Ben Taylor pitched a scoreless ninth for his fourth save.

The Indians scored twice in the first and once in the third for a 3-0 lead against Clippers starter Stephen Fife (2-3).

The Clippers scored three runs in the fourth to tie it. Diaz scored on Haase's groundout to second, Chang singled in a run and Barnes drew a bases-loaded walk.

INDIANS EXTRA Indians Commentary: Reliable reliever Bryan Shaw was easy to rip, now he's easy to miss Jim Ingraham | The Chronicle-Telegram Published on May 10, 2018 | Updated 6:31 a. m.

Call it the Shaw Scram Regression.

Bryan Shaw leaves the Indians' bullpen, and the Indians' bullpen turns into a cauldron of bubbling gruesome.

From the best bullpen in the American League to the worst.

With Shaw: aces. Without Shaw: feces.

Let's go to the video tape.

Last year (with Shaw), the Indians' bullpen ranked first in the American League in ERA, first in WHIP, first in fewest walks, first in fewest home runs allowed, first in on-base percentage allowed, second in slugging percentage allowed and second in OPS.

This year (without Shaw), the Indians' bullpen has plummeted to 14th in ERA, 10th in WHIP, 10th in on-base percentage, 14th in slugging percentage and 14th in OPS.

Oh, the irony.

Over the last five years, while the Indians were winning more games (454) than any team in the American League, Shaw bashing inexplicably became a cottage industry in Cleveland.

Yes, he gave up some home runs. Yes, he blew the occasional save. But he was also the most durable, dependable workhorse in the majors.

Over the last five years Shaw was the biggest bull in any bullpen anywhere. From 2013-17, he appeared in more games than any pitcher in the majors — and it wasn't even close. Shaw pitched in 378 games. The next-closest pitcher appeared in 363.

That kind of historic dependability and production — Shaw owns four of the top nine spots on the Indians' all-time list for most games pitched in a season, including the top two: 80 in 2014 and 79 in 2017 — are what helped make the Indians' bullpens in recent years the envy of other American League teams.

Because manager Terry Francona always — not sometimes, but ALWAYS — could count on Shaw to pitch the seventh or eighth, or even both innings, it allowed Francona to keep all the other relievers in their proper roles.

Well, Shaw is now gone, and it's chaos in the bullpen.

That chaos is reflected by the list of relievers who have spun in, through and out of the bullpen revolving door over the last 10 days. It's a who's who of who's he?

The list includes names such as Ben Taylor, Matt Belisle, Jeff Beliveau, Evan Marshall, Oliver Drake and Alexi Ogando.

Closer Cody Allen has been forced to come into games in the eighth inning, and his pitch counts are soaring. He threw 41 pitches in an appearance vs. Texas on April 30. Over his last four appearances, Allen has averaged 29 pitches, which is 13 more than the average number of pitches he threw in his 69 appearances last year.

The loss of Shaw was magnified even more by that clownish makeup doubleheader with Toronto last week, and when Andrew Miller went on the disabled list April 26. So the Indians have played their last 14 games without two of their top three relievers from last year: Miller and Shaw.

The good news is that Miller is still on the team.

The bad news is that Shaw is not.

As a free agent in the winter, Shaw signed a three-year, \$27 million contract with the Colorado Rockies, who play their home games in the pitchers' graveyard known as Coors Field.

In the greatest home run era in the history of the sport, Shaw is pitching half his games in the thin air a mile above sea level — and his statistics show it.

Here are Shaw's home and away splits for selected categories, his numbers at Coors Field first, with his numbers on the road in parentheses: ERA 12.79 (1.80), opponents' batting average .393 (.222), on-base percentage .438 (.320), slugging percentage .643 (.361), OPS 1.080 (.687), WHIP 2.211 (1.400).

So you can ignore Shaw's overall numbers this year, because they are hopelessly infected with the Coors Field virus. A better indication of how he's pitching are his road numbers, which say that he is pitching like Bryan Shaw normally pitches — but for a team that's not the Indians.

It's difficult to criticize them for not ponying up the money to re-sign a valuable reliever. The nature of relief pitching is that performance curves fluctuate so wildly from year to year, it's buyer beware. There are only a couple of handfuls of relievers who produce consistently year in, year out.

Shaw is one, but Indians officials thought \$27 million was too much to pay for three more years of him. They thought they could find somebody else who could do what he did and, to be fair, Indians officials have historically been excellent at building bullpens.

But so far, the decision to allow Shaw to walk may force the front office to run to the phone to explore the trade market for relievers.

Because if the bullpen is a cauldron of bubbling gruesome now, what's it going to be after this season, when Allen and Miller leave as free agents?

Covering the Bases: Game 37

by Jordan Bastian

FIRST: Trevor Bauer fielded a general question about his outing on Friday—one in which his velocity was impressive, but the results were not—and the Indians pitcher began to offer an answer.

"Yeah, I think I had really good stuff," Bauer said. "Umm..."

Bauer stopped mid-answer as strain appeared to overtake his thoughts. He scrunched his face, gritted his teeth and rubbed a hand across his forehead for a moment before continuing.

"I don't know," Bauer said.

Bauer didn't have an answer for why he struggled to contain Kansas City's lineup. The right-hander said it felt like no matter what he threw—fastballs, offspeed, in the zone, out of the zone—the Royals put it play and found a hole. Even with Bauer maxing out at 98 mph, he allowed 11 hits in 4.2 innings.

"He got in throw mode as opposed to pitch [mode]," Indians manager Terry Francona said. "He just lost his command, because the ball was coming out of his hand so well. Lot of hits, couple errors. Couple walks. Ton of baserunners."

Within Francona's answer lies the bigger problem right now for Cleveland.

During the Tito Era, the Tribe has played a particular brand of baseball. The club has taken pride on playing the game clean—not giving away extra outs to the opposition. Good pitching and good defense have been the backbone of the Indians teams of the past few seasons.

Recently, that has been an issue. The offense has been pouring out runs and it hasn't been enough. Over the past 11 games, for example, Cleveland's lineup has averaged 7.1 runs and the team has posted a 4–7 record. The defense has made 11 errors in that span and the bullpen, well, you know how that's been going.

Bauer may have been at a loss for explaining his own outing, but the pitcher didn't hold back when describing the team's play as a whole.

"Ultimately, I think just as a team we're not really playing winning baseball right now," Bauer said. "We're not making winning pitches. We're not making winning defensive plays. The offense came through big tonight and we still weren't able to win, because we beat ourselves in two other aspects of the game. It takes a lot of attention to detail and a very high focus and intensity to win at this level no matter who you're playing. And we're not bringing that on each and every night right now."

And that has only added to what has been a frustrating start to the season for the Tribe.

"Yeah, tons," Bauer said. "We beat ourselves twice in New York. We beat ourselves again tonight. If we want to get to where we want to go as a team and what we're know we're capable of, and win the amount of games we know we're capable of, we can't keep playing like that. And it's on all sides of the ball. It's not just the defense or just the offense or just the pitching or the bullpen or one specific guy. It's just, as a team, as a collective whole.

"I think we gave them [three] unearned runs tonight. I've got to pitch better. Shoot, on nights when I start, if we score nine runs, we should win 100 percent of the time. So, we're just beating ourselves right now. That's what it is. We're better than this."

SECOND: This is a good time to remind you that Francisco Lindor remains one of baseball's best defensive shortstops. He even showed that off in the fifth inning, making a great play in the hole to rob Jon Jay of a hit and saving a run:

<https://medium.com/media/28268c22ae442efe0ac37406b24a4d31/href>

Heading into Friday's game, Lindor led qualified American League shortstops in both Defensive Runs Saved (five) and UZR/150 (19.3). So, he remains good and is having a better defensive season than 2017 in many regards.

But, man, Lindor is having a bad week in the field.

In his past eight games, Lindor has been charged with five errors. Three game within a two-day span in New York—two on one costly play—and played a large role in the three-game sweep at the hands of the Yankees. Two more blunders—one an error, one not—hurt the Tribe on Friday night.

In the second, former Tribesman Abe Almonte sent a pitch up the middle with two outs and a runner on first. Lindor ranged to his left and got a glove on it, but the ball trickled into center for a single. One wild pitch and a double later, and the Royals had knotted the score, 3–3.

In the sixth, Jorge Soler chopped a pitch to Lindor, who gloved the ball cleanly, but then threw wildly to first baseman Yonder Alonso. Soler moved up to second on the play and Mike Moustakas brought him in with a double to ignite a three-run inning that cut Cleveland's lead to 9–8 at the time.

"We don't have the margin for error right now," Francona said. "It seems like when we make an error, it costs us."

THIRD: Much has been made of the fact that the Indians' bullpen has experienced its recent woes while Andrew Miller was on the disabled list. Well, Miller Time finally returned on Friday night.

"Last year, I was on the DL and they won 22 in a row," Miller joked before the game. "I can't take all the credit for this. I'm not some guy that thinks I'm the difference maker. I want to come back and contribute. I want to be part of it."

Well, as Miller predicted, his activation did not magically solve all of the Tribe's pitching woes.

Bauer's early exit—combined with Cleveland's tough day in the field—put the bullpen in a difficult position against the Royals. Lindor's error did no favors for Dan Otero or Evan Marshall, who combined to allow three runs (one earned) in the sixth.

In the seventh, Miller entered with a 9–8 lead, walked the leadoff hitter and later allowed a go-ahead, two-run homer to Salvador Perez. It was a hung slider on a 1–1 count and the Kansas City catcher capitalized:

Miller did strike out two batters and felt stronger as the outing wore on. The silver lining here is that he's back and he got some work in against MLB hitters rather than a Minor League rehab assignment. The hope is that, while the Tribe lost this one, this approach to Miller's return will be better in the long run.

"It felt good," Miller said of his first outing off the DL. "I felt, obviously, a little quick in the beginning, a little rusty to [Jon] Jay. But other than that, I felt pretty good. I felt like I made some good adjustments after that. Just hung a slider to Salvy, and he killed it."

HOME: For most of the night, it looked like Francona's lineup changes were going to be the story of the game on Friday.

When the batting order was posted prior to the game, Jason Kipnis was dropped to sixth from second, and Michael Brantley took over as the No. 2 hitter. In the first inning, the new alignment paid off, too. Brantley singled and then Jose Ramirez drilled a two-run homer.

In the fourth, Kipnis was unable to successfully put down a sacrifice bunt—he chopped into a 1–5 fielder's choice—but the Indians still found a way to put up a six spot. Tyler Naquin followed with a two-run double and then—four batters later—Brantley launched a grand slam.

Brantley went 3,930 plate appearances before his first career grand slam on May 1. Then, he belted two in a span of 37 plate appearances. In fact, his last two homers are slams. And, because of course, the Indians have lost both times he cleared a wall to clear the bases.

Baseball is funny... and cruel.

EXTRAS: Naquin pulled up while legging out his double due to left hamstring tightness. After the six-run fourth, the outfielder left the game and was taken for an MRI exam. Francona said the results of the tests will be available on Saturday.

"The hope is that it was a cramp," Francona said. "We've all had them and you know how it feels. But, we won't have it read until the morning. We'll see how it goes."

Tito's pregame minutiae: May 11

by Jordan Bastian

Q: How good does sit feel to have Andrew Miller available again?

TF: "Yeah. That is good. We went back and forth a little bit on would it be better off for him to go pitch a game on a rehab. He honestly couldn't say that that would help him. I think he feels like facing Major League hitters is really the only way. So, you might see him on a little bit of a schedule the first week back, just to try to get him on a roll where we get him back into that mid-season form where he can be a big weapon. It sure is nice to have him back, though. He's healthy. He's demonstrated that he can move around and he doesn't have a deficit. So now, it'll just be letting him get some repetition pitching wise."

Q: Miller faced some hitters (Rajai Davis and Greg Allen) in Milwaukee?

TF: "Well, they stood in. Yeah. And that's hard for him, because they're our guys. He doesn't want to hit anybody. So, it helps. It's not the best, but it helps."

Q: How's Bradley Zimmer doing?

TF: "He's been bruised all over. We actually got him checked out today, because his chest, he's got a bruise kind of in his chest. It showed he can play through it, but since Greg's here, I figured we'd let Greg start tonight. Olson's out with the baby [on MLB's paternity list], so most likely he comes back tomorrow, but it just buys us another day with Zim, where he can hopefully come back and feel better."

Q: Can you walk us through the decision to drop Jason Kipnis out of the No. 2 spot of the lineup?

TF: "Me and Kip were talking in Milwaukee. It's something we kind of came to the conclusion together. That second spot is such an important part of the order, just because it's not just hitting. It's getting the bunt down. And he does that so well. In fact, he's one of the best I've ever seen at doing that, like playing the game when the game determines, do I lay a bunt down here or do I swing away? So, it's not just putting a hitter there, because you can undo somebody else that's doing really well and then give them different responsibilities and they start to struggle. I think Brantley's certainly one guy that, because he hits the ball through the hole so well, would be the logical choice. But, I wanted to talk to him, too. So, I talked to both guys and me and Kip talked for a while the other day. We kind of did it together. I thought we did a good job, because we want to get him going. And, what's the best way? Sometimes it's to maybe drop you down a little bit and let him just focus on hitting—not so much moving runners and things like that."

Q: What have you thought of Tyler Naquin's play this season?

TF: "He's played really well. Since the second time we sent him down—I think he went for a day—but he seems to be more comfortable since he's been back in his own skin. He fights for everything. He makes the pitcher fight. He doesn't give in. He might take an awkward swing or two, but he hangs in there long enough to get a pitch he can handle. The other day he got a split or change-up and hit the three-run home run. So, we'll take any offense we can get."

Q: Is there anything new with Lonnie Chisenhall?

TF: "He's graduated to land-based running without the assistance of the AlterG or water and he's doing all of the baseball activities. Now the running is still just jogging, but he has graduated to that."

Q: Did Nick Goody get re-checked?

TF: "Nick was examined and had a good examination. He still has some swelling, so they're going to just continue the strengthening, non-throwing for another seven to 10 days. But, structurally, again he might not be pitching in a week, but structurally, he's OK. And by his own account, he feels like light year's better than he did last week."

Q: What do you think of Lindor's haircut?

TF: "I like it, man. I always like that look. He's in fashion now."

Q: What has helped Lindor get on a roll offensively of late?

TF: "Last year for whatever reason he started out a little slow. Same thing this year. He gets a little big, he gets a little long and then he kind of tells himself, 'OK, here's how I need to hit,' and then he starts to turn it on. He's such a good player. It kind of surprises you sometimes when he doesn't hit. But, once he starts using that whole field, man, he gets really dangerous."

Q: How nice is it to have a hitter like Michael Brantley, who you can move around in the lineup and not worry about it impacting their approach?

TF: "I agree with that, and there's not many guys I would do that with, because that's one of the things I was talking about with Kip. Because he understands there is more to ask out of a two-hitter, whether it's, what's the word—implicitly—Kip knows how to play the game. He'll just glance at me sometimes when he goes up to the plate. I don't even have to give him a sign, because we've been doing it now for six years and he's so good at that. And ultimately I'd like to get him back into that slot, because I think we're a better team. I just think we both feel like for right now, it's the right thing to do."

Royals 10, Indians 9: 12 Walk-Off Thoughts on 'not really playing winning baseball right now,' the same mistakes doing the haunting and Andrew Miller's return gone wrong

by Ryan Lewis

Here are 12 Walk-Off Thoughts after the Indians' 10-9 loss to the Kansas City Royals Friday night.

1. The Indians, right now, aren't playing anywhere close to the level where they want to be and, on paper, probably should be at this point. Now, it will always be imperative—and more importantly, fair—to note that mid-May leaves four and a half months of baseball to be played, and the Indians happen to be in a position where they could cruise to the division title.

2. But this isn't how they envisioned the first month and a half of the season would go. They have lost five of the last six. They have been blowing leads late in games. They have been kicking the ball around, which has cost them dearly. The lineup has started to pick things up, but a time has yet to come this season in which they were clicking on all cylinders.

3. Perhaps from a particular angle, that's almost good news—the Indians have remained around a .500 team without hitting their stride, meaning they've played through much of their issues and still managed to stay afloat, which is sometimes all teams need to do in April or even

May anyway. But it won't help any frustration in the clubhouse. The Yankees and the Red Sox are surging. The Houston Astros have remained a solid unit. The Indians were meant to be in that grouping of four among the AL's top contenders, but have yet to show it.

4. Said Trevor Bauer after Friday night's game: "Ultimately, I think just as a team we're not really playing winning baseball right now. We're not making winning pitches. We're not making winning defensive plays. The offense came through big tonight and we still weren't able to win, because we beat ourselves in two other aspects of the game. It takes a lot of attention to detail and a very high focus and intensity to win at this level no matter who you're playing. And we're not bringing that on each and every night right now."

5. It has also been in the way the Indians have lost games. Francisco Lindor has rated well (albeit in a small sample size) with 5 defensive runs saved thus far, but he also won't be pleased with his eight errors this season. He committed two on one play in New York that ended up costing the Indians. He made another Friday night that helped lead to a three-run inning. Greg Allen couldn't haul in a ball in center field that led to Bauer walking in the go-ahead run in the third. The bullpen has been a revolving door of issues the last two weeks. Andrew Miller returned on Friday to a standing ovation but mislocated a slider to Salvador Perez, and that was it. The Indians couldn't hold onto a 9-4 lead. Michael Brantley has two grand slams this month, and the Indians have lost both games.

6. Said Bauer on the frustration in not playing clean baseball: "Yeah, tons. We beat ourselves twice in New York. We beat ourselves again tonight. If we want to get to where we want to go as a team, and what we're know we're capable of and win the amount of games we know we're capable of, we can't keep playing like that. And it's on all sides of the ball. It's not just the defense or just the offense or just the pitching or the bullpen or one specific guy. It's just, as a team, as a collective whole. I think we gave them [three] unearned runs tonight. I've got to pitch better. Shoot, on nights when I start, if we score nine runs, we should win 100 percent of the time. So, we're just beating ourselves right now. That's what it is. We're better than this."

7. This has been a different case than what the Indians' offense went through in April. There, they were denied the expected results but knew they were collectively making solid contact. That leads to a turnaround, and the knowledge that they're doing something right even if the scoreboard isn't showing it. This recent stretch has simply been brutal. Errors and blown leads and miscues are as much the Indians beating themselves as anything.

8. Said Indians manager Terry Francona: "Seems like we've been in a lot of these crazy games. We don't have the margin for error right now. It seems like when we make an error, it costs us. That's the way the game is."

9. The first step to getting back on track was getting Miller back from the DL, though his return didn't go as planned. Miller walked the first batter he faced and settled down, striking out the next two hitters. He said he was feeling good about the adjustment he made. Then he left a slider over the middle part of the plate to Perez.

10. Said Miller, speaking of the two-week layoff: "I think it takes you out of it. We're always trying to lock it in and ride it out as long as possible. Honestly I felt like outside of those first couple pitches I made a nice adjustment and was starting to get comfortable and slow the game down. Just did a really poor job with one pitch and paid for it."

11. This wasn't an ideal outing, but having Miller back is a Godsend for this unit, which hit a rough patch at the wrong time. Though, it also did its part to expose how rough life might be A.M. (After Miller) if he leaves via free agency this winter. For now, it also showed how the Indians' standing among the best bullpens in the game might be built on a house of cards.

12. To add to the Indians not being able to find their rhythm, Tyler Naquin—who is now hitting .417 in his eight-game hit streak—left the game with left hamstring tightness. According to Francona, Naquin underwent an MRI but the team won't have the answer to his diagnosis until tomorrow. And lately, this team has been searching for plenty of answers—they'd love to have those by tomorrow as well.

Royals 10, Indians 9: Andrew Miller's return provides no relief in loss to Royals

By Ryan Lewis

CLEVELAND: Even the return of the Indians' lefty weapon in the bullpen couldn't stop that unit's struggles.

The Indians welcomed back Andrew Miller from the disabled list on Friday, and Salvador Perez welcomed him back with a loss in the Indians' 10-9 setback against the Kansas City Royals at Progressive Field.

Miller returned to a bullpen that had been thrashed in his absence, but he too joined the ranks of Indians relievers being hit hard recently. Miller entered in the seventh inning with the Indians clinging to a 9-8 lead. He walked the first batter he faced before striking out the next two and seemed on his way to escaping the inning unscathed.

His 1-1 pitch to Perez was a slider left over the middle of the plate, though, and it was hammered for a two-run, go-ahead home run, marking the Royals' fifth and sixth unanswered runs. Before Friday, Miller hadn't yet allowed an earned run this season.

An inning earlier, another Francisco Lindor error — already his eighth this season, four away from his career high for a single year — with Dan Otero on the mound opened the door for RBI doubles by Mike Moustakas and Lucas Duda.

After Evan Marshall entered the game, Alcides Escobar singled home a run to make it a one-run game.

The Royals chipped away at an Indians lead that at one point was 9-4, highlighted by Michael Brantley's grand slam in the fourth inning off Royals starter Jason Hammel. It was Brantley's second career grand slam and second this month, and came in his first game in the No. 2 spot in the order this season with Jason Kipnis moved back to the No. 6 spot.

In the first four innings alone, Brantley totaled two hits, four RBI and two runs scored.

The Indians (18-19) also led 3-0 after the first inning. Brantley singled and was followed by Jose Ramirez, who belted a two-run home run, his team-leading 11th of the season. Yonder Alonso later added a solo home run — his ninth homer of the season — to the opposite field.

The Royals (13-25) erased that lead in the next half inning against Indians starting pitcher Trevor Bauer. Escobar singled home a run and, with two outs, Jon Jay doubled home two more on a ball down the left-field line.

An inning later, an error by Greg Allen, a double and a walk loaded the bases. Bauer, with two outs, lost the strike zone and walked in a run, giving the Royals their first lead of the night.

That led to the Indians' six-run fourth inning, which was capped by Brantley's grand slam and included a two-run double by Tyler Naquin. Naquin came up a hobbling a bit, though, and was later taken out of the game with left hamstring tightness.

Bauer allowed 11 hits and five runs — four earned — in an inefficient 4⅔-inning outing.

Akron Beacon Journal LOADED: 05.12.2018

Indians notebook: Andrew Miller returns to the bullpen; Indians shake up lineup

By Ryan Lewis

CLEVELAND: A bullpen badly needing a boost received one on Friday when Andrew Miller was activated off the 10-day disabled list.

Miller was placed on the DL on April 26 with a strained left hamstring. Since then, the exposed Indians bullpen struggled to cover his innings along with running into a few disasters and walk-off losses. All Miller could do was watch, knowing how a bullpen unit can hit a collective slide.

"It's tough," Miller said. "I feel like they've thrown the ball pretty well and the results haven't been there. It seems like it's kind of been contagious. I know we feed off each other. When things go well, we all seem to go well. Right now, it hasn't really gone our way."

Collectively, the bullpen posted a 9.50 ERA during Miller's absence, and the Indians lost five games in which they were tied or leading in the eighth inning or later. They used 11 different pitchers during that time, designated two (Matt Belisle and Jeff Beliveau) for assignment, traded for one (Oliver Drake) and watched as another (Nick Goody) joined Miller on the DL.

It was a rough stretch that only seemed to become worse each day while Miller was on the mend.

"We're going to be an important part of this team, especially if we're going to do anything that we're trying to accomplish," Miller said. "The bullpen is going to be part of that. When things aren't going well and guys are getting hurt or guys are getting sent out, that's the tough part of the game.

"The best thing we can do is try to move on. You don't want to be cold, but it's just the reality of it. We have to find a way to get the job done."

Miller reached the point of needing to face hitters and felt he could do it at the major-league level. The Indians agreed he could be activated, though he'll be monitored in the early going.

"You might see him on a little bit of a schedule the first week back, just to try to get him on a roll where we get him back into that midseason form where he can be a big weapon," Indians manager Terry Francona said. "It sure is nice to have him back, though. He's healthy. He's demonstrated that he can move around and he doesn't have a deficit. So now, it'll just be letting him get some repetition pitching-wise."

To make room on the 25-man roster, Tyler Olson was placed on the paternity list, where he can remain for 1-3 days.

Lineup switch

The Indians had a lineup shake-up on Friday night.

Jason Kipnis has struggled this season — .181 average, .520 OPS, 41 wRC+ — even though he also has the highest hard-hit percentage (38.5 percent) of his career and a better line-drive percentage (21.5 percent) than a year ago, according to FanGraphs. Still, he hasn't had the desired production, and the time for a change had come with more than a month of the season in the books.

Michael Brantley, a high-contact hitter who was hitting .324 entering Friday night's game, was moved up to the No. 2 spot ahead of Jose Ramirez. Kipnis was dropped down to sixth, behind Yonder Alonso.

"Me and Kip were talking in Milwaukee. It's something we kind of came to the conclusion together," Francona said. "I thought we did a good job, because we want to get him going. And, what's the best way? Sometimes it's to maybe drop you down a little bit and let him just focus on hitting — not so much moving runners and things like that."

Akron Beacon Journal LOADED: 05.12.2018

Cleveland Indians can't hold big lead as Andrew Miller serves up go-ahead HR to Kansas City in 10-9 loss

By Joe Noga,

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Andrew Miller's much-anticipated return did not go as planned for Cleveland Indians manager Terry Francona on Friday as the Kansas City Royals rallied from a five-run deficit to defeat the Tribe, 10-9, at Progressive Field.

Miller (1-1, 1.69 ERA), who was activated from the disabled list before the game, served up a go-ahead two-run home run to Salvador Perez in the seventh after walking leadoff man Jon Jay.

The two earned runs were the first Miller has allowed this season in 11 2/3 innings. Miller said he felt good about his appearance despite the negative result.

"I felt obviously a little quick in the beginning, a little rusty to Jay," Miller said. "I made some good adjustments after that. Just hung a slider to Salvy, and he killed it."

Francona said outside of the walk to Jay, he felt Miller threw the ball well in his first outing back without a minor league rehab appearance.

"I know it was a tough (outing)," Francona said. "He didn't want to give up a home run, but I think that inning here was better than him pitching in a triple-A game."

For the Indians, who were coming off a 1-4 road trip to New York and Milwaukee, the bullpen struggles that plagued the club before Miller's DL stint continued.

Tyler Naquin put Cleveland in front 5-4 with a two-run double in the bottom of the fourth. Naquin extended his hitting streak to a career-best eight games, batting .416 (10-for-24) during that stretch. Michael Brantley pushed the lead to 9-4 later in the frame when he deposited his second career grand slam into the seats in right center to chase Royals starter Jason Hammel.

Brantley became the first Indians hitter since Ben Broussard in 2004 to have grand slams on consecutive home runs. He is the first Cleveland batter to hit two grand slams in the same month since Travis Hafner accomplished the feat in both May and July of 2006.

He's also the first Indian since Hafner and Shin-Soo Choo to have at least two grand slams in the same season (2006).

A two-run home run by Jose Ramirez, his 11th, and a solo shot by Yonder Alonso, his ninth, gave Cleveland a 3-0 lead in the bottom of the first. Alonso's home run gave the Indians four players with at least nine home runs through the team's first 37 games for the first time since 1995 (Eddie Murray, Jim Thome, Paul Sorrento, Manny Ramirez).

Friday also marked just the fourth time in the last 15 meetings between the two clubs that Cleveland has allowed more than two runs against Kansas City. The Indians have gone 11-4 in that span.

Despite being spotted a three-run lead by the second inning, Indians starter Trevor Bauer struggled with his command and was unable to get through five innings. Bauer surrendered four earned runs on 11 hits with a pair of walks and three strikeouts in 4 2/3 innings.

"It just seemed like it didn't matter where I threw it or what I threw, how hard I threw it, how soft I threw it," Bauer said. "I felt like I had to strike everybody out to get an out."

Bauer left in the fifth inning after giving up a run-scoring fielder's choice to Alcides Escobar and a base hit to ex-Indians outfielder Abraham Almonte.

"On nights when I start, if we score nine runs, we should win 100 percent of the time," Bauer said. "We're just beating ourselves right now. That's what it is. We're better than this."

Tribe shortstop Francisco Lindor had another poor defensive game behind Bauer. After committing a costly error in Bauer's last start in New York, Lindor was not able to handle Almonte's grounder up the middle in the second. The play was scored a base hit for Almonte after the ball deflected off Lindor's glove into center field. Jay followed with a two-run double that tied the score at 3-3.

Lindor committed his eighth error of the season on a throw in the dirt that allowed Jorge Soler to reach base in the sixth. Soler later scored on an RBI double by Mike Moustakas. Lucas Duda added three doubles, including an RBI shot off the wall in left against Dan Otero that scored Moustakas.

Brad Keller (1-1, 2.20) pitched three scoreless innings in relief of Hammel to earn his first major-league victory. Kelvin Herrera pitched a 1-2-3 ninth for his eighth save.

Naquin exits with injury

Naquin was removed in the top of the fifth with left hamstring tightness. He appeared to slow up as he rounded first base on his RBI double in the fourth. Naquin remained in the game, eventually scoring on Brantley's grand slam, but was replaced by Brandon Guyer in right field to start the fifth.

Francona said afterward that Naquin initially thought he was suffering from a cramp, but that the injury worsened as he stayed out on the bases. He left the ballpark and received an MRI exam Friday night. The results of the MRI will not be available until Saturday.

What it means

The Indians dropped to 14-9 against the Royals since the start of 2017, and 57-42 since Francona took over as manager in 2013. Cleveland lost for just the third time in 11 games against an American League Central Division opponent, including a 6-2 mark at Progressive Field. Both losses have come against Kansas City.

The pitches

Bauer threw 109 pitches, 67 (61 percent) for strikes. Hammel threw 89 pitches, 54 (60 percent) for strikes.

Thanks for coming

The Indians and Royals drew 24,408 to Progressive Field on Friday. First pitch was at 7:10 p.m. with a temperature of 55 degrees.

Next

The Indians and Royals continue their series Saturday afternoon at 4:10 p.m. at Progressive Field. Mike Clevinger (2-0, 2.76 ERA) is set to face right-hander Jakob Junis (4-2, 3.18). SportsTime Ohio, WTAM and WMMS will carry the game.

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 05.12.2018

Jason Kipnis drops to sixth and 4 other things we learned Friday about the Cleveland Indians

By Joe Noga,

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Jason Kipnis and Cleveland Indians manager Terry Francona reached an understanding in Milwaukee this week and the result was Kipnis dropping to the sixth spot in Francona's batting order Friday against Kansas City.

"It's something we kind of came to the conclusion together," Francona said prior to the game. "That second spot is such an important part of the order, it's not just hitting."

Kipnis has started 34 of the Tribe's 36 games in the No. 2 hole and entered Friday's game mired in a 1-for-20 slump. He's hit .266 in 357 starts batting second, the most of any spot in the order in his career. Friday was his 23rd career start in the No. 6 slot.

"We want to get him going," Francona said. "What's the best way? Sometimes it's to maybe drop you down a little bit and let him just focus on hitting -- not so much moving runners and things like that."

Francona inserted Michael Brantley into the No. 2 spot because of his ability to take a pitch and go the other way with it, and, he said, because Brantley is the least likely hitter on the team to be affected by the change.

"You can undo somebody else that's doing really well and then give them different responsibilities and they start to struggle," Francona said. "Brantley's certainly one guy that, because he hits the ball through the hole so well, would be the logical choice."

Prior to Friday, Brantley had started 17 big-league games in the No. 2 hole, most recently in 2013. His career .203/.233/.246 slash line is the lowest across the board of any position for his career.

As a No. 3 hitter, by comparison, Brantley is slashing .315/.376/.481, all career-highs.

Ideally, Francona would like to see Kipnis start hitting again and move back up.

"Kip knows how to play the game," Francona said. "He'll just glance at me sometimes when he goes up to the plate. I don't even have to give him a sign, because we've been doing it now for six years and he's so good at that. I just think we both feel like for right now, it's the right thing to do."

Black and blue and Bradley

Bradley Zimmer was out of the Tribe's starting lineup on Friday as Francona said the 6-foot-5 center fielder is still dealing with the aftereffects of crashing into the center field wall at Yankee Stadium last Saturday.

"He's been bruised all over," Francona said. "We actually got him checked out today, because he's got a bruise kind of in his chest."

Zimmer missed Cleveland's last game in New York and the series opener in Milwaukee before playing in Wednesday's road trip finale.

"He showed he can play through it, but since Greg (Allen) is here, I figured we'd let Greg start. It just buys us another day with Zim where he can hopefully come back and feel better."

Injury report

Francona said Lonnie Chisenhall is making progress in his rehabilitation from a calf injury that has sidelined him since April 8.

"He's graduated to land-based running without the assistance of the AlterG (treadmill) or water and he's doing all of the baseball activities," Francona said. "The running is still just jogging, but he has graduated to that."

Francona also provided an update on injured reliever Nick Goody, saying the 26-year-old righty had a positive examination on his injured elbow.

"He still has some swelling, so they're going to just continue the strengthening, non-throwing for another seven to 10 days," Francona said. "But structurally, again he might not be pitching in a week, but structurally, he's OK. And by his own account, he feels like light years better than he did last week."

Barber shop

Francona says he is a fan of Francisco Lindor's new crew cut-style hairdo, and of the way his All-Star shortstop is approaching things at the plate.

On Thursday, Lindor paid off a bet he made with his former high school team at Montverde Academy in Lake County, Fla. by letting players shave his signature golden curls.

"I like it, man," Francona said of Lindor's freshly-shorn dome. "I always like that look. He's in fashion now."

Lindor, who was named American League Player of the Week for games April 30-May 6, has been impressive in the last two weeks. He entered Friday's contest on an 11-game hitting streak that included nine straight games with an extra-base hit.

He's also tied with Washington's Matt Adams for the most home runs in the majors since April 25 (15 games) with eight. Lindor entered play Friday tied for fifth in the American League with 21 extra-base hits and ninth in batting average with runners in scoring position (.387).

"Last year for whatever reason he started out a little slow," Francona said. "Same thing this year. He gets a little big, he gets a little long (with his swing) and then he kinda tells himself, 'OK, here's how I need to hit,' and then he starts to turn it on. Once he starts using that whole field, man, he gets really dangerous."

Lindor's teammate, Jose Ramirez, says it will probably be a while before Lindor's hair is back to normal.

"That's going to take about six months," Ramirez said.

Cleveland Indians' Francisco Lindor goes through with bet and shaves his head

Infinite earths

Tribe starter Mike Clevinger couldn't help himself Wednesday when he noticed a Tweet from Indians pitching prospect Brady Aiken about space-time theory.

Aiken, who is in extended spring training at the Tribe's Goodyear, Ariz. training facility along with prospects Triston McKenzie and R.C. Orlan, posted a question after pondering the existence of multiple Earths in an ever-expanding universe.

While in the training room/clubhouse we came up with a great question for debate. If the universe is ever expanding, how many earths are out there? @T_eazy24 @RcRcorlan11

-- Brady Aiken (@bradyaiken10) May 9, 2018

Clevinger jumped into the discussion, saying he researched several different theories when he was growing up, whether it was space-time theories or just other people's perspectives on the idea.

"I couldn't help it," Clevinger admitted. "I was like 'I can't believe they're talking about this right now.' It's awesome to see, though."

Clevinger said he enjoys listening to astrophysicists such as Neil deGrasse Tyson from the Hayden Planetarium in New York.

"He's probably one of the smartest men alive when it comes to doing research on the galaxy," Clevinger said of Tyson. "I go straight to his Twitter whenever I'm curious."

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Mike Clevinger's colorful cleats cause controversy, draw warning from MLB

By Joe Noga,

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Major League Baseball's uniform police are trying to take a little bit of the sunshine out of Cleveland Indians starting pitcher Mike Clevinger's game, but the right-hander says he is not going to let it stop him from expressing himself.

Clevinger, whose nickname is "Sunshine," was issued a warning letter on Friday, threatening a fine if he continues to wear his custom tie-dyed cleats that feature a bright sunflower and lotus flower on the outside.

The 27-year-old Jacksonville, Fla. native said he is going to work on getting another customized pair of cleats that fit MLB's standards.

"I'm still going to be me," Clevinger said. "I'm not going to change what I'm doing because someone's not getting their share of the cut, or whatever the case may be."

Specifically, MLB's warning cites league rules prohibiting "alterations, writing or illustrations other than as authorized" being made to any part of a player's uniform. The notice cites Clevinger's May 1 outing at Progressive Field against Texas -- a start that saw Clevinger take the loss after allowing three runs on seven hits in 6 2/3 innings.

Clevinger said he completely understands why he had to change the color of his gray glove last season after umpires asked him to remove it during a game against the Los Angeles Angels. He said with the glove being right in the hitters' line of vision, it's a no-brainer. But he doesn't understand how the color of his cleats give him an advantage over a hitter.

"There's no hitter that makes it to the big leagues that a cleat is going to distract him," Clevinger said. "If the hitter's looking at my cleat while I'm pitching, he's not hitting."

Clevinger, whose long hair and sleeve of tattoos on his left arm make him one of Cleveland's more outwardly expressive players, said it's a matter of give-and-take with Major League Baseball.

"I just feel the more you give, the more they're going to take," he said. "Now it's the cleats. But then is it going to be tattoos next year? I have flower tattoos that are colorful, and I'm using my arms to throw. So is it going to be that pitchers who have tattoos either can't have tattoos or have to cover them up? Where does it go from here?"

Clevinger said he still plans to wear a Jimi Hendrix-inspired custom pink pair of cleats for Mother's Day on Sunday that bear the names of his mother and daughters on the sides and backs and "Love" on the tongues.

"MLB's going to be pretty cool when it comes to holidays and stuff," he said. "It's sort of a tribute to the women and why you're here."

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Cleveland Indians activate Andrew Miller from DL, move Tyler Olson to paternity list

By Joe Noga,

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Andrew Miller has been activated from the 10-day disabled list, the Cleveland Indians announced Friday. In a corresponding move, left-handed reliever Tyler Olson was placed on the paternity list.

Miller suffered a strained left hamstring and removed himself from the game after throwing two pitches April 25 against the Chicago Cubs. He underwent a strength test with the Indians training staff on Thursday prior to being activated before Friday's game against Kansas City.

"You want to show back up, you want to be crisp and I want to help these guys," Miller said prior to Friday's game. "The last thing I want to do is come in and not be ready. I think the best way to contribute is by being on the field."

Before to his stint on the DL, Miller had been dominant at the back end of Cleveland's bullpen. He was 1-0 and had not allowed an earned run in 10 innings across 11 appearances with 17 strikeouts and one walk.

When Miller went to the DL, the Tribe's bullpen suffered mightily. According to ESPN Stats & Info, Cleveland's relievers collectively ranked in the MLB top 10 in bullpen ERA, opponent OPS, opponent batting average and WHIP before April 25. Since then, Indians relievers have plummeted to dead last in each of those categories, with a revolving cast of arms that includes Jeff Beliveau, Alexi Ogando, Ben Taylor, Evan Marshall and Oliver Drake.

Miller said it was hard sitting on the sidelines while his teammates struggled with increased pitch counts and high-leverage appearances.

"It's tough," he said. "Last year I was on the DL and they won 22 in a row. I can't take all the credit for this. I'm not some guy that thinks I'm the difference maker. I want to come back and contribute."

Manager Terry Francona said there was discussion as to whether or not Miller would go out and pitch on a rehab assignment before being activated.

"He honestly couldn't say that would help him," Francona said. "I think he feels like facing major-league hitters is really the only way."

Therefore, Miller could pitch on somewhat of a scheduled basis for his first few outings.

"Just to try to get him on a roll where we get him back into that mid-season form where he can be a big weapon," Francona said. "It sure is nice to have him back, though."

Olson, who along with his wife, Shayna, is awaiting the birth of his first child, was moved to the MLB paternity list. He must miss at least Friday's game, but can be away from the team for no more than three games.

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Columbus Clippers can provide bullpen help: Cleveland Indians Minors

By Branson Wright,

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- The Cleveland Indians have had issues with the bullpen this spring, but possible help is not that far away when it comes to Class AAA affiliate Columbus Clippers.

Since a 17-run debacle vs. Indianapolis on April 27, the Clippers pitching staff has a 2.78 ERA (97 innings, 30 earned runs). The team has dropped its ERA from 5.62 to 4.57.

Despite allowing at least one earned run in six of the last eight games, the bullpen has turned in a 2.16 ERA (33.1 innings, 8 earned runs) since allowing 10 earned runs to Indianapolis. The Clippers have allowed more than nine hits just twice since April 27.

Alexi Ogando, Ben Taylor and Jeff Beliveau are veterans picked up in the off-season who have already made a tour with the Indians and continue to be available. Beliveau was designated for assignment by the Indians last week and re-signed with the Clippers after clearing waivers, so he would need to be added back to the 40-man roster in order to return.

Here are some other pitchers, including some starters, among those the Indians may consider for help:

Righty Shane Bieber (0-1, 2.13). He has nine strikeouts in 12.2 innings.

Righty Jordan Milbrath (1-1, 2.35 ERA).

Righty Cole Sulser (1-0, 2.84 ERA). He has 17 strikeouts in 12.2 innings.

Righty Neil Ramirez (2-0, 2.93 ERA). He has 25 strikeouts in 15.1 innings.

Righty Luke Eubank (1-0, 3.00 ERA).

Power surge: Yu Chang has hit .333 over his last 18 games, bumping his average from .133 to .267. He connected for his first home run of the season on April 28. That snapped a streak of 62 at bats without a homer. He followed that with a walk-off shot on May 3. Of his nine extra base hits on the year, seven have come in his last 14 games.

B&B: Brandon Barnes extended his on-base streak to 14 games. In 11 of the 14 games he has six multi-hit games. Barnes has 11 RBIs over his last 14. He currently ranks tied for 8th with 17 RBIs on the year. He is among the IL leaders in doubles (3rd, 11), batting (7th, .316) and SLG (5th, .526).

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 05.12.2018

Lake County Captains prospects heating up: Cleveland Indians Minors 2018

By Elton Alexander, The Plain Dealer

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- The Lake County Captains (15-17) have struggled this season. But the Cleveland Indians' Class A affiliate still has five of the top 30 prospects in the organization according to Baseball America and a couple have given strong hints of promising futures.

No. 4, infielder Nolan Jones: The very bad early weather was a nagging issue for Jones with a minor knee injury. But the corner infielder, taken in the second round of the 2016 draft, is now starting to show what the Indians liked about him.

Over his last 10 games, Jones is hitting .306 with 11 hits and five RBI. He enters the weekend with a six-game hitting streak. Inside that 10-game stretch and six-game streak was a run of three straight multi-hit games. It was his first such stretch since early in the season.

No. 10, outfielder Will Benson: If you are looking for power, Benson (first round, 2016) has plenty with seven homers to help account for his 16 RBI. Benson, 19, has struggled overall, hitting .196 in 29 games. Once his batting eye comes around, his power numbers could improve even more, considering seven of his 19 hits have left the yard and nearly half of his hits (9) have been for extra bases.

No. 24, infielder Ernie Clement: For those looking for a table-setter in the organization, Clement seems to be the man. Simply put, he finds a way to get on base. Clement (fourth round, 2017) goes into the weekend with a streak of 22 straight games getting on base either by hit or walk.

Clement will be looking to start a new hitting streak after having his 12-game streak snapped Thursday night. While some of this success could be attributed to his advanced age, 22, it is still a positive sign for the shortstop. Clement is hitting .319 with only 12 strikeouts in 28 games vs. 15 walks.

He has yet to homer, but does have nine doubles with eight stolen bases.

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Willie Castro shines defensively for Akron RubberDucks: Cleveland Indians Minors 2018

By Elton Alexander, The Plain Dealer

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- While shortstop is not an immediate major league concern, Willie Castro of the Akron RubberDucks looks to be a real keeper in the Cleveland Indians organization.

He is the No. 1 defensive shortstop in the Eastern League for the first-place RubberDucks (20-13) with just four errors in 117 total chances going into Thursday's game.

Castro, who is on the Indians 40-man roster and considered the No. 7 prospect in the organization, was an All-Star last season at Class A Lynchburg and looks to be tracking the same with the RubberDucks.

Still young at 21, the big challenge for Castro is getting his bat to catch up with his glove. The undrafted free agent (2013 Rio Piers, Puerto Rico) is hitting just .215 this season. Still slight at 6-1, 165, he does generate a bit of pop with two homers this season and 23 throughout his minor league career.

And while Castro is a career .263 hitter over five minor league seasons, in 2017 during a second tour at Lynchburg he topped out with an impressive .290 season with 11 homers and 58 RBI in 123 games.

Boiling to the top: No question Bobby Bradley had a cold start to the season equal to the weather throughout April. But the Big Bopper at first base is starting to bubble up his production. Bradley has hit .297 over his last 10 games with 11 hits, three homers and 10 RBI. He's had four multi-hit games in that stretch.

But to understand how cold his start was to the season, that 10-game stretch out of 28 played so far this season only lifted Bradley's season average to .171. Bradley was hitting .103 on April 27. After the first 10 games of the season, Bradley was hitting .081.

Familiar ground: Recently recalled infielder Todd Hankins, 27, has settled back in with the RubberDucks following his season-opening stint in AAA Columbus. He was a .300 hitter with the Clippers and is hitting .316 with the Ducks. He spent time last season between Columbus and Akron as well, hitting a combined .223.

The new Ace: With Shane Bieber promoted to Columbus, perhaps Shao-Ching Chiang (3-0, 1.64 ERA) inherits the role of Team Ace. At 6-0, 175 the native of Taiwan does not have the imposing stature many covet. And he is not overpowering, with 27 strikeouts in 33 innings pitched, the most of any pitcher currently on the team.

But in his seventh year in the Indians minor league organization, Chiang, 24, is now finding his groove, allowing just six earned runs so far this season.

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Indians notes: It's Miller time again as left-hander returns from the disabled list

Chris Assenheimer | **Chris Assenheimer | The Chronicle-Telegram** Published on May 11, 2018

CLEVELAND -- Thankfully for the Indians, it's Miller time again.

Left-hander Andrew Miller was activated from the disabled list prior to the series opener against Kansas City on Friday. The hope is that he can settle a bullpen that has struggled mightily in his absence.

"Yeah, that is good," manager Terry Francona said of the addition of Miller, who has been sidelined since April 27 with a left hamstring strain. "We went back and forth a little bit on would it be better off for him to go pitch a game on a (minor league) rehab (assignment). He honestly couldn't say that that would help him. I think he feels like facing major league hitters is really the only way. So, you might see him on a little bit of a schedule the first week back, just to try to get him on a roll where we get him back into that mid-season form where he can be a big weapon.

"It sure is nice to have him back, though. He's healthy. He's demonstrated that he can move around and he doesn't have a deficit (in leg strength). So now, it'll just be letting him get some repetition pitching-wise."

Miller was eligible to leave the DL last Sunday, but the Indians were understandably cautious with one of the game's top relievers.

"I'd like to think that if this happened in Game 1 of a seven-game series, I don't think I would have missed the whole series, I can tell you that," Miller said. "I think it was identical to something I had in 2014 (with Baltimore) that just so happened in the middle of a playoff run and I missed seven days. It's not fun. Fortunately we made sure to do things the right way and take care of it."

Through the first 23 games of the season, Cleveland's bullpen ranked third in the American League with a 2.97 ERA. With Miller on the injured list, Indians relievers posted a 10.09 ERA in 13 games through Thursday.

"We're going to be fine as a unit," said Miller, who hasn't allowed a run in 11 appearances. "We're going to be an important part of this team -- especially if we're going to do anything that we're trying to accomplish. The bullpen is going to be part of that. When things aren't going well and guys are getting hurt or guys are getting sent out, that's the tough part of the game. The best thing we can do is try to move on. You don't want to be cold, but it's just the reality of it. We have to find a way to get the job done."

Left-hander Tyler Olson was placed on the paternity list to clear room on the roster for Miller. He is expected to re-join the team today.

Medical moments

After missing two games with a left shoulder contusion he sustained Saturday at Yankee Stadium, outfielder Bradley Zimmer was out of the lineup again Friday with a bruised chest.

"He's been bruised all over," Francona said of Zimmer, who was replaced by Greg Allen in center field. "We actually got him checked out (Friday). It showed he can play through it, but since Greg's here, I figured we'd let Greg start tonight. Olson's out with the baby, so most likely he comes back (today), but it just buys us another day with Zim, where he can hopefully come back and feel better."

-- Right fielder Lonnie Chisenhall (right calf strain) took batting practice Friday at Progressive Field. According to Francona, Chisenhall, who has been sidelined since April 8, has begun jogging.

-- Right-hander Nick Goody (right elbow inflammation) was examined Friday and is expected to be shut down for another 7-10 days.

"He might not be pitching in a week, but structurally, he's OK," Francona said. "And by his own account, he feels like light year's better than he did last week."

Dropping down

With his batting average at .181 through Thursday, Jason Kipnis was replaced by Michael Brantley in the second spot in the order, with the second baseman moving down to the sixth spot.

Francona said it was a mutual decision.

"I thought we did a good job, because we want to get him going," he said. "And, what's the best way? Sometimes it's to maybe drop you down a little bit and let him just focus on hitting -- not so much moving runners and things like that.

"He understands there is more to ask out of a two hitter. And ultimately I'd like to get him back into that slot because I think we're a better team. I just think we both feel like for right now, it's the right thing to do."

Frankie frenzy

Shortstop Francisco Lindor had his batting average up to .292, entering Friday riding an 11-game hitting streak. Lindor, who was recently named AL player of the week for the first time in his career, was also riding a nine-game extra-base hit streak -- one shy of the club record.

"Last year for whatever reason he started out a little slow. Same thing this year," Francona said of Lindor, who was hitting .215 on April 26. "He gets a little big. He gets a little long and then he kinda tells himself, 'OK, here's how I need to hit,' and then he starts to turn it on. He's such a good player. It kind of surprises you sometimes when he doesn't hit. But once he starts using that whole field, man, he gets really dangerous."

That's a no, no

Right-hander Mike Clevinger received a written warning from the league office for violating uniform regulations by wearing various illustrations on his cleats during an outing against the Rangers at Progressive Field on May 1.

Clevinger posted a picture of the letter on Twitter, commenting, "Make baseball fun again, they said, it would be fun, they said...."

Roundin' third

The Indians entered Friday owning a 38-10 record against Central Division opponents since July 1, 2017. ... Tyler Naquin led Cleveland with a .329 batting average through Thursday, which ranked 10th in the AL (minimum 75 plate appearances). ... Former Indians outfielder Abe Almonte was in the lineup for Kansas City, batting ninth and playing center field. He entered the night batting .207 with three homers and eight RBIs in 19 games. ... Today, 4:10, STO; WEOL 930-AM, WTAM 1100-AM, WMMS 100.7-FM. Clevinger (2-0, 2.76) vs. Junis (4-2, 3.18).

Andrew Miller returns from D.L. to rescue Indians' drowning bullpen

By Jeff Schudel, The News-Herald & The Morning Journal

The future does not look bright for the Indians if the last two weeks are a preview of what the future could be like if Andrew Miller uses free agency to get rich with another team next season.

The left-handed relief pitcher was activated from the disabled list hours before the Indians hosted the Royals on May 11. The Indians were 5-8 while he mended from a hamstring injury since going on the D.L. on April 26, but the really ugly number is this:

In the 23 games before Miller's injury, the Indians' bullpen posted a 2.97 ERA — third-best in the American League. The bullpen was rocked for 37 earned runs in 33 innings (10.09 ERA) while he was out.

"Those guys are good," Miller said in the Tribe's clubhouse before the series opener with Kansas City, referring to his peers in the bullpen. "I feel like they've thrown the ball pretty well. The results haven't been there. It seems like it's kind of been contagious.

"I know we feed off each other. When things go well, we all seem to do well. Right now, it hasn't gone our way. I think the talent's there. These guys have all done it the past few years. It's just a matter of us going out and executing."

The most excruciating defeat while Miller was out was a 7-4 loss to the Yankees on May 6. Starting pitcher Mike Clevinger pitched seven shutout innings, got one out in the eighth and walked two batters.

Normally, Miller would have pitched the eighth, but Manager Terry Francona asked closer Cody Allen to get five outs. Allen failed and so did Dan Otero, who gave up a three-run walkoff home run to Yankees rookie sensation Gleyber Torres in the ninth.

"It's nice to have Andrew Miller back," Indians catcher Roberto Perez said. "He's one of our top relievers, one of the best in the game. We missed him throughout that funk."

"He's a leader. He's always in the bullpen talking to the young guys. He's always trying to get better and watching videos. I'm sure the guys in the bullpen missed him. We're all happy he's back."

Miller appeared in 11 games and pitched 10 scoreless innings with 17 strikeouts before his injury. The only other pitcher to have pitched at least 10 innings without allowing a run is Brian Duensing of the Cubs (11 2/3 innings over 16 games).

"I'm excited to be back," Miller said. "I want to take part in these games and help these guys win. It hasn't been fun being on the D.L. I've been pulling for them harder than anybody in the stands."

Reliever Nick Goody has been on the disabled list with inflammation in his right elbow since May 3. The news on him isn't great, but it isn't horrible, either.

"Nick was examined and had a good examination," Francona said. "He still has some swelling, so they're going to just continue the strengthening, non-throwing for another seven to 10 days. But structurally, he's OK. And by his own account, he feels like light years better than he did last week."

Francona won't be greedy just because Miller is healthy again. With 125 games still to play in the regular season, Francona will ease Miller back into a heavy workload.

"You might see him on a little bit of a schedule the first week back, just to try to get him on a roll where we get him back into that midseason form where he can be a big weapon," Francona said. "It sure is nice to have him back, though. He's healthy. He's demonstrated that he can move around and he doesn't have a deficit. So now, it'll just be letting him get some repetition pitching-wise."

Miller tried to downplay the seriousness of his injury. He said if it had been late in the season he might have been sidelined seven days, but he would not have gone on the disabled list.

SeaWolves 8, RubberDucks 2: Beau Burrows pitches SeaWolves past Ducks Ohio.com by ABJ/Ohio.com correspondent

Sometimes the difference in baseball is one pitcher having it and another not having it.

That's exactly what happened Friday in the RubberDucks' 8-2 loss to Erie at Canal Park in front of 5,159.

Beau Burrows was on point for the SeaWolves (13-20), while Sean Brady struggled in the third inning and never regained his trademark consistency.

Burrows (4-2) came in hot and left even hotter to pick up his third consecutive win.

"It looked like his fastball was beating us a little bit tonight," Ducks manager Tony Mansolino said. "I don't feel like he was overpowering. We had an off night offensively."

On May 5, the first-round pick in the 2015 Major League Draft tossed a two-hitter over six innings against Altoona in a 2-0 victory.

Against the Ducks, Burrows was even sharper.

The right-hander was perfect through four innings before yielding a leadoff walk to Bobby Bradley to start the fifth.

Burrows' no-hit bid finally went by the wayside with one out later in the inning when Connor Marabell sent a grounder off a diving Josh Lester at third.

It was the only hit Burrows allowed in five-plus innings of work. He allowed one unearned run, walked three and struck out three.

During his three-game winning streak, he has allowed 10 hits in 17 innings with two earned runs. Burrows has struck out 14, walked six and has a 1.06 ERA.

"He had some good stuff tonight, I give him credit," said Marabell, who accounted for both of the Ducks hits. "He was pounding the strike zone, keeping us off-balance the whole night. His tempo was tough to get down to time him. He pitched well tonight."

Despite the fine pitching performance by Burrows, the RubberDucks (20-14) still had chances to make things interesting.

Burrows got out of a bases-loaded jam in his final full inning by coaxing Todd Hankins into a double play. In the sixth, the Ducks put runners on first and second and scored on an error, but couldn't muster anything more.

"It's hard when you're chasing five runs," Mansolino said. "I think we just didn't swing the bats good overall. ... We're looking at a three-game stretch where it just quite hasn't been there."

On the flip side, Brady (1-3) didn't have it.

He gave up a season-high five earned runs, walked four and struck out four. The left-hander was coming off his first win with the Ducks in which he didn't allow an earned run and gave up three hits against Bowie on Sunday.

Against Erie, Brady went five innings and gave up five hits as walks were his worst enemy.

Of the four he gave up, two came around to score. Then he threw a wild pitch in the third with one out that allowed Will Maddox to go to third.

Josh Lester followed with sacrifice fly to center field to complete a three-run inning.

"He didn't have his best stuff and walked the wrong guys," Mansolino said of Brady. "He led off a couple innings with walks and these guys can run. They're a lot better than their record is. We've seen them play well for a couple nights, but you can't walk guys with the way they run the bases with as aggressive as they are. Walks really did him in tonight."

The series continues at Canal Park at 6:35 p.m. Saturday, when right-hander Shao-Ching Chiang (3-0, 1.64) faces Erie righty Sandy Baez (0-2, 4.85).

Salvador Perez homers off Andrew Miller, rookie Brad Keller has a 'dream' night in Royals' 10-9 comeback win

By Rustin Dodd 2h ago

CLEVELAND — The traditional beer shower came at just past 10:45 p.m. here on Friday, after the Royals had crafted a 10-9 victory over the Cleveland Indians, after Salvador Perez had authored the finishing strike with a two-run homer against Indians reliever Andrew Miller in the seventh inning.

In a back corner of a clubhouse bathroom at Progressive Field, in a raucous scene, the Royals christened the first career victory of a rookie reliever. Brad Keller, 22 and a Rule 5 selection, was in the middle of the maelstrom.

"It's crazy," Keller said. "You kind of dream of that as a little kid."

Keller was speaking of his first career win, which came after he dominated the Indians for three scoreless innings, passing the baton to closer Kelvin Herrera in the ninth. He wasn't talking about the beer shower, an old custom for career firsts. But hey, that felt good, too, he said.

"He was awesome," Perez said.

One night after wasting a 4-0 lead against the Baltimore Orioles, the club with the worst record in the American League, the Royals erased 9-4 deficit on Friday night against the best team in their division. The performance provided the best victory of the year.

First baseman Lucas Duda finished 3 for 5 with three doubles and an RBI. Mike Moustakas piled up another three hits, pushing his average to .301. The offense nullified an ugly performance from starter Jason Hammel, who became the second straight Royals starting pitcher to allow nine runs in a game after Ian Kennedy's clunker on Thursday.

"Steak dinner on me," Hammel said.

Hammel, whose ERA reached 6.13 after the no-decision, could not get out of the bottom of the fourth. He yielded nine runs, six hits and issued three walks. He served up a two-out grand slam to Cleveland's Michael Brantley, which left the Royals in a 9-4 hole.

And yet, the offense was not done, scratching across one run in the fifth and three in the sixth before Cleveland manager Terry Francona called upon Miller in the seventh.

Miller, the bearded, side-winding face of the Indians bullpen, had just returned from the disabled list. He had allowed just one run to AL Central opponents since joining the Indians at the trade deadline in 2016. He issued a leadoff walk to Jon Jay before striking out Jorge Soler on a slider and Moustakas on a 94 mph fastball.

So as Perez dug into the box, the Royals trailed by one with two outs and a baserunner on. He watched a 94 mph fastball for strike one before Miller spun two straight sliders.

"I was looking for his fastball," Perez said. "The first pitch was down and away, great pitch, 94 mph.

"Everybody in the league knows he's going to throw you a slider — in any count. So I was looking for fastball."

But then Miller hung the second slider, and Perez pounced on the offering, clubbing it into the concourse beyond the left-field wall.

"He's a great pitcher ... one of the best relievers in the league," Perez said. "But I got a bat, too."

In the moments after Perez's home run, the Royals sent Keller out for a second inning. When he breezed through the frame, dialing his fastball up to 96 mph, Yost opted for a third inning from the former minor league starter.

Keller was acquired in the offseason in the Rule 5 draft. He spent the 2017 season as a starter at Double-A for the Arizona Diamondbacks. On Friday, he closed out the longest outing of his career with another scoreless inning, finishing with two strikeouts while throwing 43 pitches across three innings.

"I felt like I had command of all it," Keller said. "Changeup was good. Slider was good. I just tried to attack them with my fastball."

The performance could inspire thoughts of Keller returning to the starting rotation at some point. But as Keller spoke on late Friday night, a collection of veterans sat within earshot, listening to the rookie pitcher. From across the room, starter Danny Duffy started interrupting with his own answers, speaking in a voice that ranged somewhere between Ray Romano and Kermit the Frog.

"I just carried the load for the team and we won," Duffy said. "It was awesome."

Keller paused for a moment and smiled. The interview stopped. Duffy kept going. The Royals, 13-25, could enjoy a victory after a brutal loss on Thursday night.

"We battled back," Yost said. "We fought hard, against a good team, a team in our division. It doesn't mean a whole lot right now. But you pick up a game. There's a lot of positives."

The Athletic LOADED: 05.12.2018

Salvador Perez's homer off Indians' Andrew Miller lifts Royals to a win

BY MARIA TORRES

In the moments after the Royals lost a series finale in Baltimore to the Orioles on Thursday night, Royals catcher Salvador Perez sat at his locker in Camden Yards and struggled to muster a smile.

He'd hit a grand slam on his 28th birthday. It was cool, he said. But it would have been better with a win.

Given another chance to provide a lift against the Indians on Friday in Cleveland, Perez delivered again. This time with a 10-9 victory over the Indians.

Perez hit a two-run homer in the seventh inning off All-Star setup man Andrew Miller, who was making his first appearance for the Indians since missing 13 games because of a hamstring strain. The ball cut through the chilled air at Progressive Field and landed in the left-field home-run porch 4.7 seconds after the barrel of Perez's bat connected with Miller's 83 mph slider.

Since 2014, Miller has terrorized opponents in the American League and beyond with a cross-body delivery that helps hide his pitches. He'd posted a 1.33 ERA in 94 games for the Indians. Perez had 1 hit in 8 previous at-bats against the left-hander.

But on Friday, when even Indians starting pitcher Trevor Bauer labored in his 4 2/3 innings, Miller proved fallible.

"That's baseball," Perez said. "He's nasty. I think he's one of the best lefties in the American League right now."

Perez's homer and a stingy bullpen helped deaden the blow starting pitcher Jason Hammel dealt the Royals. After obliterating a 4-3 lead and surrendering nine runs on six hits in 3 2/3 innings, Royals relievers allowed just six baserunners through 5 1/3 innings.

Rule-5 acquisition Brad Keller threw three of those innings. The rookie hadn't pitched beyond a second inning in a single outing this season, yet the Royals were forced to play his card. Burch Smith, another Rule-5 acquisition, was supposed to bridge the gap between Hammel and the backside of the bullpen. But Smith labored through the fifth inning, loading the bases on three walks and throwing 34 pitches.

The elevated pitch count forced Royals manager Ned Yost to call another pitcher out of the game sooner than planned. If Keller didn't pull through, the Royals bullpen, which had already labored trying to pick up after Ian Kennedy's nine-run, four-inning start on Thursday, might have been decimated for the remainder of this Cleveland series.

But Keller never crumpled. Of the 11 batters he faced, only three reached base. Keller saw his ERA shrink to 2.20 and picked up his first career win.

And when the Royals pulled him into the visiting clubhouse for a postgame celebration, he earned his first big-league beer shower, too.

"It's crazy," Keller said. "I kinda dreamed of (the win) as a little kid."

For a little while, Hammel had recovered. He retired seven consecutive batters after Yonder Alonso had capped the Indians' three-run first with a solo home run. Hammel finished the third inning with a manageable 43 pitches under his belt.

But for the second game in a row, a Royals starting pitcher couldn't maintain control. Hammel tried to compensate for leaving pitches up in the zone, and wound up throwing 46 of them in the fourth inning alone. He allowed seven of eight batters to reach base; he issued three walks, gave up a grand slam to Michael Brantley and surrendered six runs.

Yet the Royals let neither the 9-4 disadvantage nor the daunting prospect of facing Miller — who hadn't given up a homer to an American League Central opponent since the Twins' Joe Mauer hit one in Miller's first game with the Indians on Aug. 1, 2016 — faze them.

They chipped away instead. Mike Moustakas roped an RBI double in the sixth. Two batters later, Lucas Duda hit his third double of the night to shrink the Indians' lead to 9-7. Alcides Escobar, who drove in four runs in a game for the first time since June 17, 2015, hit an RBI single to pull the Royals within one run.

In the next inning, Perez strode to the plate with Jon Jay waiting at first base.

When Perez trotted home moments later, Hammel's disastrous outing had suddenly evaporated from the foreground.

"I'm proud of the guys for coming back," Hammel said. "Steak dinner on me for that one. That's a huge comeback. That's a big win to build momentum with. You can't be disappointed there."

"The team wins and loses together. I put them behind pretty deep. They battled back, and they put up a W."

The Royals improved to 13-25 and gained one game on the AL Central-leading Indians. The Royals are now 5 1/2 games out of first place.

"It doesn't mean a lot right now but you pick up a game," manager Ned Yost said. "There's a lot of positives for this win for us today."

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