

Brantley savors playoff run after beating injuries

By Jordan Bastian MLB.com @MLBastian

CLEVELAND -- Rather than heading home to Texas two winters ago, Indians pitcher Josh Tomlin and his family remained in Cleveland for most of the offseason. One of the driving factors behind that decision was that Michael Brantley was staying back to focus on his rehab from a second right shoulder surgery.

Tomlin knew all too well the mental anguish of rehabbing an injury in solitude. He understood the thoughts that start to infiltrate a player's mind, causing confidence to erode when the finish line is far from view. Tomlin heard Brantley talk about spending his post-playing days at home in Port St. Lucie, Fla., where the outfielder could spend his down time fishing and playing with his kids.

Tomlin knew Brantley needed a close friend nearby to help swat such thoughts away.

"You need someone there pushing you," Tomlin said. "You need someone there telling you, 'Hey, you're full of crap. You're going to play. You're going to play again. You're one of the best players in the league. Keep fighting. Keep going forward.'"

Now, the only part of Brantley's future that is in doubt is which uniform he will don next year. Following three seasons hindered by health setbacks, Cleveland's veteran left fielder turned in a remarkable comeback campaign in 2018. Brantley's swing was as smooth as ever, and his presence in the lineup's No. 2 spot gave the Indians' offense a steady hand between Francisco Lindor and Jose Ramirez.

That is where Brantley batted on Monday, when the Indians were eliminated in Game 3 of the American League Division Series with an 11-3 loss to the Astros, during which Brantley hit a sacrifice fly.

The early exit hastens the questions surrounding Brantley, who will be eligible for free agency after parts of 10 seasons in the big leagues with the Tribe.

Given his comeback, given his inability to impact the past two postseason runs and given his uncertain future, Brantley has been savoring as much as possible this year.

"Every day," Brantley said. "When you go through basically almost a two-year rehab, you don't always know that you're going to come back. Every day that I'm there to be with my teammates, that I'm healthy enough to be in that lineup, where I can joke around and know that I'm going out to left field to play with these guys, I'm very appreciative. I don't take it for granted."

In 143 games this season, Brantley hit .309 with 17 home runs, 36 doubles, 76 RBIs, 89 runs and an .832 OPS for the Indians. He was not the AL Most Valuable Player Award candidate that he was in 2014, but Brantley returned to his status as one of the elite contact-oriented hitters in the game. Brantley led qualified MLB hitters in contact rate (90.9 percent) and swinging-strike rate (4.0 percent), while ranking second in strikeout rate (9.5 percent).

It took countless hours of work behind the scenes for Brantley to become that type of player again.

Late in the 2015 season, an ill-fated dive on the road in Minnesota caused the initial injury to Brantley's right shoulder. He had surgery, but complications limited him to just 11 games in '16. When the Indians clinched the first of three straight AL Central crowns in Detroit that September, Brantley leaned against a wall outside the visitors' clubhouse at Comerica Park, observing the champagne celebration from afar.

Throughout the run to the World Series that October, Brantley stayed with the team, offering hitting advice or any other insight he could for his teammates. If he could not swing a bat, Brantley wanted to find some other way to help his club.

"I really looked at myself as a coach," Brantley said. "I was talking to guys about at-bats. I was talking to them about their approach with certain pitchers. If anyone had a question of me, I made sure I was in the dugout cheering them on and made sure they knew I was there. I accepted the role, even though I didn't want to."

Brantley returned by the start of the 2017 season and made the AL All-Star team, but then a severe right ankle injury that he sustained in August hobbled him for the remainder of the year. The left fielder made the ALDS roster against the Yankees, but he was playing hurt, and following New York's victory to clinch the series, Brantley exited Progressive Field in a walking boot.

"He's a dying breed," Tomlin said.

Brantley had no such setbacks this season. When the Indians clinched their latest division crown, the outfielder was in the thick of the party in the home clubhouse. All those monotonous hours in the training room or batting cage -- where Brantley would swing one-handed if that was all he could handle -- had paid off.

"On a personal level, I'm just so happy for him, that he can be a part of this," Indians manager Terry Francona said. "I saw what he went through. When everybody's getting announced during the World Series and all the excitement, he was back there [in the training room]. He never missed a day."

"You never know when it's going to be your last game or what could happen," Brantley said. "Every day that I came in this season, to be with that group that worked so hard day in and day out by my side, it's an honor."

Indians on looming free agency

By Jordan Bastian MLB.com @MLBastian

CLEVELAND -- In a far corner of the Indians' clubhouse, amid all the hugs and handshakes and the murmur of clichés into microphones about a season ending too soon, three of Cleveland's veterans huddled on Monday night. Josh Tomlin, Michael Brantley and Yan Gomes sat with each other, talking quietly with somber expressions.

They will see each other in the coming days -- during the locker cleanout at Progressive Field and perhaps for some dinners before they go their separate ways for the offseason -- but it is unlikely that they will all wear the same uniform next year. Tomlin and Brantley are among the handful of players facing free agency, which will create a changing of the guard in Cleveland's locker room.

"I've got a lot of thinking to do," Brantley said before sitting with his teammates. "I've got my family to talk to. I've got these guys in this room to still talk to. Then, we'll go from there. You never know what's going to happen in the offseason."

And if Brantley did just play his final game for the Indians?

"This organization is in great hands," Brantley said. "You look around this room. They've got phenomenal leaders still, great players. They're going to be good for a long time. I hope to be a part of it."

In the aftermath of the Indians' three-game sweep at the hands of the Astros, who finished off their American League Division Series victory by dealing the Tribe an 11-3 rout, silver linings were not on the minds of Cleveland's players. For a considerable portion of the Indians' roster, this may have been their last chance to win a World Series together.

Brantley has played in parts of 10 seasons for the Indians, who acquired him as a prospect in 2008 to complete the trade that sent CC Sabathia to the Brewers. Tomlin is Cleveland's longest-tenured player, having been picked in the 19th round of the 2006 Draft. Joining them in free agency will be the Indians' all-time saves leader, Cody Allen, who was selected in the 23rd round of the '11 Draft.

Andrew Miller, Josh Donaldson, Lonnie Chisenhall, Melky Cabrera, Oliver Perez and Rajai Davis are also among the players poised to hit the open market this coming offseason.

Only a few minutes after the loss, that reality was not lost on manager Terry Francona.

"We've got a number of guys that are free agents," Francona said. "You know there's going to be some turnover, and it's a real special group to all of us. So that's a hard one, when you're saying goodbye before you're ready."

Miller and Allen helped a depleted Indians pitching staff reach the World Series in 2016, but they have not been able to rekindle the same October magic over the past two years. Cleveland's bullpen was a trouble area all season and wound up being the weak spot again in Monday's defeat. The Indians held a 2-1 lead through six innings, but then the relief corps was charged with 10 runs the rest of the way.

In an effort to stabilize the bullpen in the postseason, starter Trevor Bauer took on a relief role. Two throwing errors by Bauer in the seventh inning helped swing the game in Houston's favor, but that was not what Allen focused on in the wake of the Tribe's last loss. Allen saw a pitcher willing to help out in any way possible -- a move necessitated by the rest of the relievers' issues.

"For a guy to want to embrace that challenge and face it head on, you've got to root for a guy like that," Allen said. "Watching what he's done, watching what guys like Josey [Ramirez] and Frankie [Lindor] continue to do, just overall, the culture here is unbelievable. We've seen so many guys get better. It's just unfortunate that I wasn't able to help out in the way that I would've liked to."

Allen then echoed Brantley's belief that -- should they leave via free agency this offseason -- the Indians' roster is in good shape going forward. "I really do [believe that]," Allen said. "This organization's done a pretty good job of putting some pretty good teams on the field without making the big free-agent splashes. ... Guys like Jose Ramirez, Frankie Lindor, Trevor Bauer, Corey Kluber, Carlos Carrasco -- the backbones and the core and the centerpieces of this club -- either came up in this organization or they got traded for in the Minor Leagues and were developed.

"This organization's going to be just fine with or without whoever the guys are that are free agents."

Miller agreed with that sentiment.

"Every year you have new guys," Miller said. "This organization is set for a long time. There's guys that are going to make this team a contender certainly in the near future. I'm not worried about that right now. I'm worried about trying to process this and move on from it. It's just not the ending we wanted."

Drama short-lived as Tribe's season ends in G3

By Jordan Bastian MLB.com @MLBastian

CLEVELAND -- As the baseball caromed off the clock beyond Progressive Field's intimidating left-field wall, and as Francisco Lindor jumped in the air, pumped his fist and then tossed his bat away, it felt like the Indians just might be able to complete Step 1 in their improbable comeback bid.

For that moment in the fifth inning on Monday afternoon, while the Cleveland crowd shook the stadium, the past seven decades of baseball in this city were an afterthought. Then the Astros quickly reminded everyone that they are the reigning World Series champions, storming back to deal the Tribe an 11-3 defeat that sealed a three-game sweep of the American League Division Series.

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"We've got to go home now -- before we're ready to. That hurts. It always stings," Indians manager Terry Francona said. "You know there's going to be some turnover, and it's a real special group to all of us. So that's a hard one, when you're saying goodbye before you're ready."

All that energy that was unleashed from the stands -- fueled further by Lindor's celebratory sprint around the bases after a go-ahead home run - will now give way to the frustration of another early-arriving offseason. A 10-run collapse by Cleveland's bullpen across the seventh, eighth and ninth innings paved the way for the final loss of the 2018 campaign.

With no World Series title since 1948, the Indians have the longest drought in the Majors. The defeat carries with it the lingering sting of the past two Octobers, too. Cleveland reached the World Series in 2016, only to lose Game 7 to the Cubs. A year ago, the Tribe had a stacked roster that looked prime for a deep run, but the team was bounced in the ALDS by the Yankees.

"I didn't expect us to lose the way we lost -- 3-0," said Indians slugger Edwin Encarnacion. "With the talent we have in this clubhouse, that's not supposed to happen."

The relief corps was an issue for most of this season, so the Indians devised a different strategy for October. Starter Trevor Bauer would be utilized as a multi-inning leverage weapon to aid the shaky staff. In the finale of this best-of-five series, a pair of throwing errors by Bauer gave Houston the opening it needed to soak another clubhouse with champagne.

"It was my job to get us to the finish line," Bauer said. "I didn't do that."

Following a drama-free sixth, and with the Indians clinging to a 2-1 lead, Bauer remained on the hill for the seventh. The righty promptly allowed a single to the fleet-footed Tony Kemp and then misfired on a pickoff attempt to allow the runner to reach second. Next up was George Springer, who sent a dribbler up the third-base line for an unlikely single.

With runners on the corners, Bauer induced a grounder off the bat of Jose Altuve, but Cleveland was only able to convert the out at second. Kemp scored with ease on the play to pull the game into a 2-2 deadlock. That set things up for Alex Bregman, who chopped a pitch back to the mound, where Bauer gloved the ball.

In an attempt to start an inning-ending double play, Bauer fired the ball wildly to Lindor, pulling the shortstop off the base for the pitcher's second error of the inning.

"There's no way around it. That shoulda been the end of the inning," Bauer said. "It's a 2-2 game in the seventh. We've got a chance. And I didn't execute."

Bauer then walked Yuli Gurriel to load the bases for Marwin Gonzalez, who connected on a 95-mph fastball elevated and out of the zone, sending it into left for a two-run double. The three-run outburst by the 103-win Astros put the Indians in a 4-2 hole that the club was unable to overcome.

That rendered an outstanding effort by Tribe starter Mike Clevinger moot. Over five innings, Clevinger piled up nine strikeouts and allowed only a solo home run to Springer in the fifth. The right-hander generated 18 swinging strikes against Houston, which had 16 swinging strikes combined in Games 1 and 2 against starters Corey Kluber and Carlos Carrasco.

"It doesn't mean anything," Clevinger said of his performance.

Springer, who holds the Astros' club record for playoff home runs with 10 in his career, also launched a solo shot in a six-run eighth that transformed the game into a blowout.

After being overpowered by Houston righties Justin Verlander and Gerrit Cole in the first two games, Cleveland had to contend with the left-handed Dallas Keuchel, who takes the sting out of bats more than he blows batters away. For much of his five frames, Keuchel succeeded in that regard, limiting the Tribe to a sacrifice fly from Michael Brantley until Lindor's game-changing shot.

With two outs in the fifth, Lindor crushed a first-pitch fastball over the middle to left field, where it rocketed out at 109.6 mph, per Statcast™. The 446-foot shot was Lindor's longest of the season and the farthest home run of his career from the right side of the plate. The shortstop jumped out of the batter's box, pumped his fist around second, howled to the heavens and clapped his hands hard upon reaching the dugout. Overall, in the series, the Indians' lineup scored six runs and hit .144 as a team. Lindor launched two home runs, but he downplayed his personal performance.

"I wish I could have helped my team a little better," said the shortstop.

Lindor did not want the Tribe's 2018 journey to end. Neither did his audience. Now, Cleveland's long wait for a World Series triumph continues.

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Allen's last outing? With the bases loaded and Houston holding a 4-2 lead in the seventh, the Tribe handed longtime closer Cody Allen the ball for what may have been his final game in a Cleveland uniform. Allen -- eligible for free agency this offseason -- then struck out Tyler White to end the threat.

Allen returned in the eighth, but he allowed Springer's second home run, gave up a double to Altuve, threw a wild pitch and issued two intentional walks. After Allen's exit, lefty Brad Hand gave up a three-run blast to Carlos Correa.

"I was not good," Allen said. "I was not good, and I feel bad for the guys who were extremely good this year and carried us to this point, because I did not help in getting us past a very, very good team in Houston. We knew we were going to have to play our best baseball, and we didn't, and I didn't."

20 Walk-Off Thoughts on an early October exit, several key players reflecting on their time in Cleveland as they enter...

By Ryan Lewis

1. Josh Tomlin walked over to Michael Brantley's locker and sat down to quietly chat in a meeting of two of the longest-tenured players with the Indians who, once the postseason ends, will both be free agents with uncertain futures. Tomlin has been walking around that Progressive Field home clubhouse since 2010, when he broke in as a rookie. Brantley has been roaming that room, in parts, since 2009. Nobody knows if they'll be back. Nobody knows if it's the last time they'll wear that Indians uniform. Nobody knows if it's the final time they'll pack up their stuff after a home game in Cleveland.

2. Yonder Alonso slowly joined them, slumping down in the corner and sitting on the floor. A few moments later, Yan Gomes pulled up a chair, forming a mini-circle. The four veterans talked amongst themselves, having already fulfilled their media responsibility. They were free of the rush of media members criss-crossing the clubhouse and out of the way of the clubhouse attendants zipping around. Now, it was just them and the end of a season. But they didn't want to leave the clubhouse and season behind. Not yet.

3. Brantley took several moments to look out over the clubhouse, viewing all the activity. His locker is the last one leading to the hallway that snakes back to the showers and dining area, one that in a way overlooks the entire clubhouse if turned that direction. He might not be returning to it. And if he's not?

4. "This has been an honor," Brantley said when asked for his takeaway if this was his final Indians game. "It's been an honor to wear that uniform, it's been an honor, every player I've played with in this organization, for all the help everybody gave me, it was always appreciated. It will never be forgotten."

5. Tomlin is one of the nicest human beings you'll ever meet, but one who struggled on the mound in 2018. His future is entirely up in the air. There's no doubt manager Terry Francona would love to retain Tomlin, but it would have to be a very team friendly deal. Tomlin is the longest-tenured player in the organization, one who has gritted his way through nine major-league seasons and who played a role in the Indians clawing and scratching their way to the World Series with a depleted pitching staff. For Tomlin, it was all about the personal relationships that were built. The daily Cribbage matches with Terry Francona. On and on. It's part of the reason he sat down near Brantley's locker. He wasn't ready to walk out of that room just yet.

6. "The family aspect of it," Tomlin said when asked what has stood out during his time in Cleveland, if this is indeed the end. I played with a bunch of these guys for 7-8 years now. Knowing all of our time might be coming to an end here regardless of what happens next year, there's a pretty good chance not all of us are coming back. So, you take a minute and enjoy the time you have with them, think back not he times you had with them and relish them as much as you can. But the family aspect of it, the way everybody has treated me, the fans, the people, the city. It's meant everything to me. Absolutely everything."

7. Brantley and Tomlin aren't alone. Andrew Miller and Cody Allen, the backbone fo that 2016 bullpen that blazed its way through October, are both eligible for free agency. Allen this season broke the Indians all-time record for saves. Miller will always be remembered for his electric performance in the 2016 postseason, when he briefly became baseball's biggest military-grade weapon. The reliever market this past winter was the one that seemed to spike. Both could find new homes this winter, part of the reason why the Indians gave up their No. 1 prospect for Brad Hand, a move that bolstered the bullpen this year but also gave the club some insurance in 2019 and beyond.

8. "It'll take a few days probably," Cody Allen said when asked about his time in Cleveland possibly coming to a close. "Right now, I'm just kind of numb to it all. This city [seven-second pause] means a lot to my family and I. But, it's part of [the business of baseball]. Guys move on. Carlos Santana was here forever. You saw him move on. But, I mean, these places, they become home. My son was born here. So, we'll see."

9. Miller was still reeling from the sweep at the hands of the Astros. Said Miller: "I haven't thought about it from that angle. I know that this sucks right now. This isn't the way we drew it up. This is 25, 40 guys that have plans of winning the World Series. It obviously didn't go our way. That's kind of where my mind is right now. It's unfortunate. As far as that, every year you have new guys. This organization is set for a long time. There's guys that are going to make this team a contender certainly in the near future. Not worried about that right now. Worried about trying to process this and move on from it. It's just not the ending we wanted."

10. For 12 months, the Indians waited for their chance to redeem a disappointing, crushing ALDS loss to the New York Yankees, one in which they blew a 2-0 lead in the series. For six months, they cruised through the American League Central, again always having one eye trained on October. They knew they'd get back to the postseason. What happened there is all that mattered.

11. The improbable 2016 run to the World Series ended with a feeling of pride and accomplishment, with a splash of disappointment. Last season's ALDS loss to the Yankees was all bitterness and frustration. The 2018 campaign simply never got off the ground. The Indians were chased out of the postseason before even digging in. They were steamrolled like a marathon runner being tackled just as the starting gun went off.

12. Now come a flood of questions. After 2016 and 2017, the Indians were keeping much of their nucleus together. That isn't the case anymore. The Indians are running into their financial ceiling.

13. It is the case that the trio of Miller, Brantley and Allen leaving will free up around \$31.575 million from the Indians' payroll next season. Tomlin's free agency will add another \$3 million of space. If Lonnie Chisenhall isn't brought back, that'd be another \$5,587,5000 off the books from their 2018 total.

14. Here's the rub. Star shortstop Francisco Lindor will be eligible for arbitration and will certainly command a strong first-year salary. Trevor Bauer, off his breakout 2018 season, will see a significant increase in arbitration as well. Those two cases will take out a large chunk of the aforementioned savings rather than allow the Indians to either re-sign a player or replace him in free agency. Beyond that, several players with current, long-term contracts will see salary increases in 2019. That list includes Corey Kluber, Carlos Carrasco, Edwin Encarnacion, Jason Kipnis, Jose Ramirez, Yan Gomes, Brad Hand, Yonder Alonso and Roberto Perez. Those increases in base salary will total roughly \$14.8 million.

15. And there goes much of the salary relief gained. Barring a trade, the Indians likely won't have a ton of room with which to operate but a clear need to try to improve on the 2018 roster. The Indians should remain contenders through at least 2020, with the potential to extend that window to 2021. But, those windows often close much faster than they open, and it's possible when this run of Indians teams is looked back on, that 2018 was the best and healthiest of the bunch.

16. The Astros boat-raced the Indians in several facets of the game, overpowered the best in the their lineup and knocked around Kluber, Miller, Allen, Hand and Bauer. The Indians led in two of the three games but were overtaken both times. Monday's Game 3 beatdown was the emphatic exclamation point. Alex Bregman and George Springer couldn't be stopped. Every Indians miscue proved costly. The lineup never got going. Ramirez was silent at the plate again. The Indians own their division for the time being, and three games in a five-game series does not a significant sample size make. But they're left playing catchup looking ahead to 2019.

17. "About ourselves?" Francisco Lindor said when asked about what the Indians might have learned from the series. "We've got to continue to get better. We worked as hard as we could. But they outplayed us. They out-pitched us. They out-hit us. They ran the bases better than us. Hats off to Houston. They've got a great ball club. You've got to respect that."

18. "I wouldn't use the word surprised, just because it happened last year, I'm not surprised by anything that happens now, I guess, because I know what an unknown October can be," Jason Kipnis said. "It's surprising just with how veteran and talented guys we had in our lineup, to see them go cold at the wrong time. Give credit where credit is due with [Justin] Verlander, [Gerrit] Cole and [Dallas] Keuchel, three experienced pitchers and three damned good ones, and they pitched like it."

19. "Yeah, they beat us in every area of the game," Trevor Bauer said. "Started off in Game 1 and they hit a homer and got something going at home. Game 2, we had a chance, today we had a chance. They're tough, man. They keep coming. We didn't play our best. I'm not sure if they played their best either, but they played much better than we did. And so, the better team won."

20. For three years in a row, another team has celebrated on the Progressive Field infield while the Indians returned to a quiet, dismayed clubhouse. They have some time within this contention window, but the sense urgency can only grow each October. The Indians' offseason begins now, and there's plenty of construction up ahead.

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Indians react to ALDS sweep by Astros

By Ryan Lewis

CLEVELAND — The Indians waited all season for the chance to play in the postseason.

Then they met the Houston Astros in the American League Division Series, and the entire blueprint was torn to pieces.

The Astros starting pitchers overpowered the Indians. Corey Kluber struggled in Game 1 as the top of the Astros lineup proved why it's one of the best in baseball, and Alex Bregman and George Springer couldn't be stopped the rest of the series. Andrew Miller, Cody Allen and Brad Hand all struggled out of the bullpen.

Trevor Bauer committed two errors in one inning that played a key role in their Game 3 loss.

On and on, nothing worked, and the Astros jumped on every miscue. After the Game 3 loss, and with the Astros celebrating on the field, the Indians were left with little more to say than the fact they were flat-out beat.

"Yeah, they beat us in every area of the game," Bauer said. "Started off in Game 1 and they hit a homer and got something going at home. Game 2, we had a chance, today we had a chance. They're tough, man. They keep coming. We didn't play our best. I'm not sure if they played their best either, but they played much better than we did. And so, the better team won."

Six months of regular-season games gearing up for October, and very little went right for a team that never had a serious need to step on the gas while it crushed a below-average division.

Three games. Three losses. And Progressive Field is being packed up for another winter. It's the first time the Indians have been swept in a postseason series since the 1954 World Series, when Willie Mays made his famous over-the-shoulder catch in center field.

"This is a veteran team. We knew what we had to do going into this series," Michael Brantley said. "We knew we were facing a good team. You give credit where credit is due. They came out there and pitched the ball well, hit well, and you tip your hat. They beat us."

The Indians' hopes for redemption after losing a 2-0 lead in last year's American League Division Series to the New York Yankees never really got off to the ground. The Astros, the defending world champions with one of the more well-rounded rosters in recent memory, blew right through the Indians on their way to the next round.

"About ourselves?" Francisco Lindor said when asked about what the Indians might have learned from the series. "We've got to continue to get better. We worked as hard as we could. But they outplayed us. They outpitched us. They outhit us. They ran the bases better than us. Hats off to Houston. They've got a great ball club. You've got to respect that."

The Indians have seen how a postseason can be turned on its head. In 2016, they weren't supposed to beat the Boston Red Sox in the ALDS. Then they weren't supposed to beat the Toronto Blue Jays in the ALCS, as injuries had ravaged their pitching staff — complete with Bauer's pinkie dripping blood on the mound. Then they certainly weren't supposed to challenge the Chicago Cubs all the way to extra innings in Game 7.

And they saw last year how a series can be swung severely in the opposite direction by the Yankees. This time, their October campaign never took off.

"I wouldn't use the word surprised, just because it happened last year. I'm not surprised by anything that happens now, I guess, because I know what an unknown October can be," Jason Kipnis said. "It's surprising just with how veteran and talented guys we had in our lineup, to see them go cold at the wrong time.

"Give credit where credit is due with [Justin] Verlander, [Gerrit] Cole and [Dallas] Keuchel — three experienced pitchers and three damned good ones, and they pitched like it."

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Indians' offense sputters as 2018 season comes to an end with playoff loss to Astros

By Michael Beaven

CLEVELAND — Baseball can get complicated with an assortment of numbers for pitchers, hitters and fielders.

Let's keep it simple — one number stands above the rest, and that is runs.

Indians hitters struggled once again on Monday against Houston Astros pitchers in an elimination game in the American League Division Series and lost 11-3 in front of a crowd of 37,252 at Progressive Field.

George Springer hit two home runs Monday and Carlos Correa also homered for the Astros, the defending World Series champs, who advance to play in the AL Championship Series against either the Boston Red Sox or the New York Yankees.

"They outplayed us, they outpitched us, they outhit us and they ran the bases better than us," said Indians shortstop Francisco Lindor, who went 4-for-11 in the three-game series with two solo home runs. "Hats off to Houston. They are a great ballclub and you have got to respect that. ... They played way better than us."

The Astros held a 21-6 edge over the Indians in runs in the series. The Astros posted a .327 batting average with 34 hits in 104 at bats. The Indians hit .144 (13-for-90).

"It's not a good day when you had higher hopes, higher expectations always and around here we do," said Indians center fielder Jason Kipnis, who went 1-for-9 in the series.

"When you play with a bunch of guys that love playing the game as much as we do, the last day is never a fun day. ... Give credit where credit is due with [Justin] Verlander, [Gerrit] Cole and [Dallas] Keuchel, that is three experienced pitchers and three damn good ones and they pitched like it.

"We were just outplayed. I wish it weren't that simple. It just seems from top to bottom we were outscouted, outhit, outpitched and outcoached a little bit. They really did just a fantastic job over there of being ready and prepared before the series."

Lindor was the Indians' top hitter in this series, but others struggled — including Michael Brantley (2-for-10), Jose Ramirez (0-for-11), Edwin Encarnacion (1-for-10), Josh Donaldson (1-for-11), Yan Gomes (2-for-8), Melky Cabrera (1-for-8) and Yonder Alonso (0-for-6).

"We didn't play our best baseball and they did," Brantley said. "This happened at a bad time for us. We are not proud of this in this locker room, but at the same time we accomplished a lot this year."

It was the second consecutive subpar postseason for Ramirez.

"We want to be successful, but I fell off," Ramirez said. "That's all I can say. I didn't perform to how I wanted to, but these are things that happen in baseball. These are just things that happen in baseball. All I can do is look forward to the offseason, and work in the offseason to get better."

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The Astros wanted to stop the Indians' top four hitters, and they mostly did

By Scott Patsko, cleveland.com

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- You might not believe it after watching the Indians convincingly swept out of the ALDS, but Astros manager A.J. Hinch was concerned about the top of the Indians' order.

Francisco Lindor. Michael Brantley. Jose Ramirez. Edwin Encarnacion.

That foursome included three players with at least 30 home runs and a .300 hitter. So it's understandable that Hinch would want his pitchers locked in on them.

"That Lindor, Brantley, Ramirez, Encarnacion top four is as good as anybody's," Hinch said Monday. "And controlling that group, and not only that but the group at the bottom of the order before the lineup rolled over, was important."

It was not just important, but a catalyst in the Astros' ALDS sweep of the Indians, completed with an 11-3 thumping Monday at Progressive Field. The top of the Indians lineup was 7-for-42 in the three-game series. They were 3-for-13 in Game 3.

Lindor was the only one of the group to hurt the Astros, finishing 4-for-10 with a pair of home runs, including a majestic blast on Monday that gave the Indians a 2-1 lead.

The fact that it was his second solo home run of the series played into the Astros' strategy.

Everything ... and more.#RallyTogether pic.twitter.com/p78n8NFplx

-- Cleveland Indians (@Indians) October 8, 2018

"We didn't really control him," Hinch said. "He hit the ball out of the ballpark from both sides of the plate. We were able to minimize the people in front of him, the guys at the bottom of the order where it rolled around where he only ended up with an at-bat or two with guys on base."

Take out Lindor's four hits, two homers and two RBI, and the remaining trio was 3-for-31 with two RBI. Ramirez finished 0-for-11, Encarnacion 1-for-10 and Brantley 2-for-10.

But even with the large lead in the late innings and the top of the Indians' order struggling, the Astros weren't ready to relax.

"I remember a game here in early May, when we were up five," said Astros outfielder George Springer. "They scored five to tie it in the ninth. I think for me, (I relax) when the game is finally over, because with the lineup that those guys have, this game is not over until it's over."

The game was actually May 27. The Indians scored five in the bottom of the ninth to tie that game, then won it in the 14th. Ramirez and Encarnacion started the ninth-inning rally that night. Lindor and Brantley singled in the fourth and fifth runs of the inning.

On Monday, with the Indians trailing by eight runs, Lindor and Brantley hit back-to-back singles in the eighth. But Ramirez grounded into a double play to end the inning.

Encarnacion walked and scored in the bottom of the ninth, but it was just a final glancing blow for the top of the Indians' order that never got on track.

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 10.09.2018

Cleveland Indians season ends in sad shadows of October - Terry Pluto

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

CLEVELAND -- The Indians season ended with the diamond in the shadows, the stands nearly empty and big questions hanging over the franchise.

Not only were they swept out of the best-of-5 American League Division Series, Houston dominated them.

Final Score: Astros 11, Tribe 3.

The Indians had a 2-1 lead in this game after six innings.

Then they gave up nine runs in the next two innings.

That's right, nine runs against a bevy of beleaguered bullpen pitchers beginning with Trevor Bauer.

Bauer was supposed to save the sagging bullpen. In the seventh inning, he made TWO throwing errors and lost his composure. Bauer allowed four runs in his five innings of relief during this series.

Cody Allen entered the game, and was whacked for a homer and four runs in one-third of an inning.

I feel bad for the shaken Allen, the team's all-time leader in saves and a terrific guy. He gave up as many runs in this series (6) as the Tribe scored in three games.

And he pitched only one total inning.

Andrew Miller obviously isn't healthy.

The once great bullpen is a leaky row boat. No matter what the coaching staff did, this group was sinking fast.

THE SAD REALITY

The defending World Series champion Houston Astros, 103-59 in the regular season, were too talented and too focused.

All the games stayed close - for a while. But the Astros were never really threatened in the late innings, which is where these playoff games often are decided.

No matter how the Indians try to explain it, this was a rotten way to end the season. They played some of their sloppiest baseball in the last three innings.

The gap between these two franchises is wider than originally thought.

Something also happened to the Indians from the time they blew a 2-0 lead in the best-of-5 ALDS series against the Yankees last season.

Manager Terry Francona and several players such as Corey Kluber kept saying, "Last year has nothing to do with this year."

Only the Indians were out-scored 13-5 in the last three games of the Yankee series.

And they were outscored 21-6 in three games against the Astros.

It was like an extension of the 2017 playoffs, only worse.

The Indians have lost their last six playoff games.

And yes, there is a distressing message in that.

THE PLANS FAILED

The Indians sort of shuffled through the regular season, winning a very weak Central Division with a 91-71 record.

Moves were made.

The trade for Josh Donaldson...

Jason Kipnis moved from second base to center field...

Jose Ramirez from third base to second base...

Bauer to the bullpen...

Signing Yonder Alonso to play first base...

In the end, none of it helped the Indians in the playoffs.

"We prepared pretty extensively," said Francona. "Not a lot of things went the way we hoped they would."

Donaldson had one hit in three games. Same with Edwin Encarnacion.

Ramirez and Alonso had none.

The spark that was supposed to come from the playoff-tested Donaldson and the ready-to-pitch-everyday Bauer was a fizzle.

The Indians spent much of September like spring training, trying to nurse Miller (shoulder, knee) and Bauer (broken foot) back to health.

They shifted people around infield.

Part of the reason the Tribe made several dramatic moves during the season was to arm the team for playoffs. The front office knew it lacked the talent reach the World Series.

Some fans will want to blame Francona for the team being swept out of the post-season for the first time since 1954.

Francona didn't have a good series.

But he also had a bullpen that has collapsed. The hitters didn't hit. The late-season moves didn't work.

And the season ended quietly in the sad shadows of an early October afternoon.

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Hollywood homer can't save Cleveland Indians from being eliminated in ALDS by Houston Astros, 11-3

By Paul Hoynes, cleveand.com phoynes@cleveand.com

CLEVELAND, Ohio - A home run straight out of Hollywood couldn't save the Indians on Monday afternoon as their season was left on the cutting room floor by the powerful Houston Astros.

Francisco Lindor, with the Indians facing elimination in Game 3 of the ALDS, hit a 446-foot homer off the facing of the clock above the home-run porch in left to give the Indians a 2-1 lead in the fifth inning. The home run stirred memories of Roy Hobbs' fictional homer in the movie *The Natural*, but while Hobbs' homer shattered the scoreboard clock, all Lindor's did was give the Indians a moment or two of false hope.

Houston scored 10 runs in the last three innings to humble the Indians, 11-3, and complete a three-game sweep to advance to the ALCS for the second straight season. It is the first time the Indians have been swept in a postgame series since they lost four straight to the New York Giants in 1954.

The Astros are the second team in as many years to celebrate an ALDS victory on the Indians' home field. The Yankees celebrated last season when they rallied from a 2-0 deficit to beat the Indians in five games.

Still, what a moment Lindor delivered. The only thing missing was Glenn Close, the *Lady in White*, standing in the stands to encourage Hobbs, who was played by Robert Redford, before he shattered the clock.

What Lindor did was give the Indians a chance to put their postseason plan into action. Not only did they have a lead - just their second of the series - but it was late enough in the game to use Trevor Bauer in the ultimate leverage situation. The Indians put Bauer in in the bullpen for the ALDS for just that reason.

Bauer pitched a scoreless sixth, but ran into big problems in the seventh. He allowed a leadoff single to No.9 hitter Tony Kemp and made things worse by making an errant pickoff throw to move Kemp to second. In the third inning, starter Mike Clevinger did the same thing with Kemp on first.

George Springer, who homered twice, kept the inning going with a squib single 15 feet down the third-base line to put runners on the corners. Jose Altuve scored Kemp on a fielder's choice to short to tie the score, 2-2. Alex Bregman sent a double-play bouncer back to Bauer, but his throw to second was wide of the bag and both Altuve and Bregman were safe. Yuli Gurriel walked to load the bases and Marwin Gonzalez doubled to left to give Houston a 4-2 lead.

"It's disappointing," said Bauer. "We really didn't play well today. If you're going to go out, you want to make sure you put your best foot forward and that didn't happen. . . They outplayed us all series."

Andrew Miller and Cody Allen, in probably their final appearances with the Indians, relieved and managed to end the inning. Allen started the eighth, but the relentless Astros added six more runs in the inning -- homers by Springer and Carlos Correa highlighted the surge -- to complete the sweep.

The Indians were outscored, 21-6, in the series. They were beaten in all phases of the game - pitching, offense and defense. Houston out-homered them, 8-2. Springer out-homered them by himself, 3-2.

Their top five hitters-- Lindor, Michael Brantley, Jose Ramirez, Edwin Encarnacion and Josh Donaldson -- hit a combined .157 (8-for-51) with 13 strikeouts.

Houston pitches posted a 2.00 ERA compared to a 7.20 by the Indians. Cody Allen, who didn't allow a run and saved six games for the Indians just two years ago in the postseason, allowed six runs, including two homers, in two appearances covering one inning in the ALDS.

"They out-pitched us. They out-hit us," said Lindor. "They ran the bases better than us. Hats off to Houston. They've got a great ball club. . . They played way better than us the whole three games and they deserved to win."

The Indians and Astros entered the series with the two best rotations in the league. Justin Verlander, Gerrit Cole and Dallas Keuchel went 2-0 with 2.60 ERA and 21 strikeouts in 17 1/3 innings. Corey Kluber, Carlos Carrasco and Clevinger went 0-2 with a 4.20 ERA and 16 strikeouts in 15 innings.

The Tribe's bullpen posted a 14.63 ERA, allowing 13 earned runs in eight innings. Houston's pen posted a 0.93 ERA, allowing one run in 9 2/3 innings.

"Houston is really good," said manager Terry Francona. "They present a lot of challenges and they're worthy of moving on."

The Indians took a 1-0 lead in the third off Keuchel as Yan Gomes and Jason Kipnis opened the inning with singles to put runners on first and second. It was the first time in the series the Indians managed consecutive hits.

Lindor advanced the runners with a sacrifice bunt. He came into the game hitting .167 (2-for-12) against Keuchel.

Brantley gave the Indians their second lead of the series with a sacrifice fly to center that scored Gomes and advanced Kipnis to third. Keuchel ended the inning on Ramirez's line drive to the track in center.

Springer tied the score, 1-1, with a one-out homer in the fifth. He hit Clevinger's first pitch into the bleachers in left field. He finished the series with three homers and stretched his franchise record to 10 postseason long balls.

Clevinger walked the tightrope for the first four innings of a five-inning start. He threw 75 pitches, allowed two hits, two walks and hit a batter. In the process, he faced 17 Astros, but somehow held them scoreless. He was at his best when he escaped a one-out bases-loaded jam in the third.

In five innings, Clevinger allowed one run on three hits. He struck out nine and walked three. The nine strikeouts are a franchise record for a pitcher making his first postseason start.

What it means

These are the kind of things that happen in the postseason. In his career Bauer, a good fielding pitcher, has committed five errors. In one postseason inning on Monday, he made two.

The pitches

Clevinger threw 99 pitches, 60 (61 percent) for strikes. Keuchel threw 78 pitches, 50 (64 percent) for strikes.

Thanks for coming

The Astros and Indians drew a sellout crowd of 37,252 to Progressive Field. First pitch was at 1:33 p.m. with a temperature of 85 degrees.

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The Cleveland Indians, with a whisper, vanish from the 2018 playoffs: Doug Lesmerises

By Doug Lesmerises, cleveland.com dlesmerises@cleveland.com

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- With a whisper they were gone, a long season dispensed in a long weekend, and it may be hard to remember if the Cleveland Indians were ever here.

Their 20-game winner got knocked around in Game 1, their one-time MVP candidate made nothing but turns back toward the dugout for three games, and the second Cy Young candidate in the starting rotation got his chance with a game on the line in relief and tossed it away.

You'd thank Corey Kluber, Jose Ramirez and Trevor Bauer for the memories, but in this 3-0 sweep at the hands of the Houston Astros, was there anything to remember?

The 2018 Cleveland Indians made the playoffs.

Really? I don't remember that. Are you sure?

Yeah. Swept.

Get swept in the Division Series, and a 91-win season can fall out of your head like the last item on a grocery list.

That Monday's 11-3 lackluster effort served as an exit is the fault of the Indians and their frozen bats, but also the fault of baseball, the sport of the excruciating regular season and potentially fleeting postseason.

To slog through a 162-game regular season and get swept in a best-of-five series is to take part in a postseason that is 1.85 percent of your regular season.

Translate that to basketball's 82-game regular season and it would be like if the Cavs could lose Game 1 of a playoff series, trail at halftime in Game 2 -- and be eliminated.

Translate that to football's 16-game regular season and it would mean if the Browns finally made the playoffs again and were trailing three minutes into the second quarter, they were done.

This was the 34th time in the 24 years of a best-of-five Division Series that a team got swept. This was the first time for the Indians, making them the 18th of the 30 franchises to suffer the ignominy of working eight months for 27 losing innings.

The Indians clinched the AL Central and their playoff spot with a 15-0 win over Detroit in Game 148 on Sept. 15, then played 14 meaningless games over two weeks while treading water waiting for the postseason.

Then after three games in four days, they were done, swept in the playoffs for the first time since the New York Giants beat them 4-0 in the 1954 World Series.

Baseball expanded the postseason to include another second-place team as a second wild card. Fine. But how about finding a way to make sure the best teams, those who had to win a division, at least get a shot in a best-of-seven Division Series?

This is an awful lot of complaining about a winning team, but it's hard not to feel robbed of something right now. The Indians got invited to the party, then were handed some stale corn chips and sent home before they even heard the chorus of "Mo Bamba."

Terry Francona has dealt with this before. He was swept in the Division Series twice in Boston, in 2005 and 2009, and now became the third manager to be swept in a Division Series three times, joining Ron Gardenhire and Mike Scioscia in a stat no one likes and no one cares about.

But how else do you analyze this team? The Indians didn't give us much to work with.

They're a smart, overachieving small-market squad that is taking advantage of a pathetic division and is just two seasons removed from hosting the 10th inning of a World Series Game 7.

In that same ballpark, 37,252 fans turned out Monday afternoon on a beautiful and unseasonably warm October day. If they stuck it out, they saw Cody Allen, a demoted former closer with an ERA this season a full two runs higher than the first six years of his Indians career, get knocked around while getting charged with four runs in the eighth inning.

Brad Hand, the closer from the season-changing trade who replaced Allen? He came in and gave up the base runners he inherited from Allen, plus another two runs of his own.

Also, the Indians batters managed 13 hits in three games.

The Indians made the 2018 playoffs?

Yeah, remember? Francisco Lindor hit a home run off the clock.

Right. What else happened?

Nothing.

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Cleveland Indians' Leonys Martin urges teammates to take it 'one game at a time' vs. Astros

By Paul Hoynes, cleveland.com phoynes@cleveland.com

CLEVELAND, Ohio - Outfielder Leonys Martin isn't at Progressive Field in body, but he's here in spirit.

The Indians acquired Martin on July 31 from the Tigers to solve their problem in center field. He played six games after the trade before being struck by a life-threatening illness that cost him the remainder of the season.

On Monday, with the Indians facing elimination in Game 3 of the ALDS against Houston, Martin encouraged them on Twitter. There's a picture of Martin in his Indians jersey. The Tweet urged them to take one game at a time.

The Indians need to win three straight to avoid elimination and advance to the ALCS.

Manager Terry Francona said he's talked to Martin and that he's been in frequent contact with his teammates.

Let's do this today guys, one at the time #RallyTogether #letsgetribe #Indians pic.twitter.com/0UZzv1J6j

-- Leonys Martin (@leonys27martin) October 8, 2018

"I've got to be kind of careful with what I say because he's not really comfortable with being here," said Francona, "but he's been in communication with everybody and I think that's best for his sake."

Many of Martin's teammates have worn his initials on their caps throughout the season.

"He's doing OK, physically," said Francona.

The Indians expect Martin to report to spring training in 2019 ready to play.

"He's healing so fast that I think it's surprising the doctors at how quickly his heart has come back," said Francona.

Martin was admitted to Cleveland Clinic on Aug. 7 with several stomach pain. Tests revealed he was suffered from a bacterial infection that entered his bloodstream and attacked his internal organs, including his heart. After being released from Cleveland Clinic, doctors advised Martin and the Indians that he should take the rest of the season off.

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Cleveland Indians manager Terry Francona: 'As long as we're still breathing, we're still breathing'

By Joe Noga, cleveland.com jnoga@cleveland.com

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- As a big-league manager, Terry Francona has been here before, on both sides of a playoff series advantage.

Facing an 0-2 deficit in the American League Division Series against Houston on Monday, Francona remained optimistic and channeled his inner Yogi Berra when asked about his team's chances.

"There's some sense of 'we can do this,' even though you're down 0-2, it's kind of a cool feeling," Francona said. "As long as we're still breathing, we're still breathing. We just don't have a lot of margin for error."

Berra, the master of the malaprop, won three MVP awards and 13 World Series titles as a player and coach with the Yankees and often mixed phrases with unintended comical effect.

Francona rallied his Boston teams to victory in 2004 and 2007 when faced with seemingly insurmountable deficits in the American League Championship series against New York and Cleveland. He's also led teams to sweeps in the Division Series when leading 2-0 in 2004 (Boston) and 2016 (Cleveland).

On Monday, Francona said he is looking forward to seeing his players rise to the challenge. He said the team's energy after Sunday's workout made him feel better when he left the ballpark than when he arrived.

"You can philosophize about it however you want," Francona said. "We need to go out and find a way to be one run better, and they know that."

Francona said the best way for the Indians to keep their season alive is to channel their energy into finding a way to win today. Part of that includes blocking out the noise that comes with being down 0-2.

"You gotta try to eliminate that and know that, be confident enough in what you're doing that, 'hey, this is what puts our team in the best position,' and stay with it," he said.

In 2004 with Boston, Francona rallied his team to overcome an 0-3 deficit against the New York Yankees, winning four straight including Game 7 in the Bronx.

Francona balked at any comparisons between that Red Sox team and the situation facing the Indians.

"I think the best thing to do is keep it in small samples," Francona said. "It seems daunting ... you've got to beat them three in a row when they've kind of had their way with us the first two."

But breaking the task at hand down into a smaller sample can sometimes be an effective approach.

"Let's try to win today; we can do it," Francona said. "We've done that plenty this year. We can do that. That's probably the best way to go about it. They know what we're up against, but I don't think anybody wants to go home. So the best way not to go home is to win. That's pretty profound."

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 10.09.2018

Jose Ramirez failed in the playoffs again, and the Indians can't win without him: Doug Lesmerises

By Doug Lesmerises, cleveland.com

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Jose Ramirez is the worst hitter of the 2018 Major League Baseball playoffs, which wasn't a shock because he was the second-worst hitter of the 2017 Major League Baseball playoffs, and now, the Indians All-Star is the individual equivalent of the 0-16 Browns.

At least he can't get worse.

So prepare yourself for the triumphant return of Ramirez in the 2019 playoffs, when 3-for-22 with a bloop double or something would be seen as redemption.

His 2-for-20 effort a year ago gave way to an 0-for-11 postseason in 2018. It started with a walk in the first inning of Game 1 of the Division Series against the Houston Astros, but Ramirez got it back with a double-play grounder to end the bottom of the eighth in Monday's 11-3 season-ending Game 3 loss, so that's 12 plate appearances, 12 outs.

Imagine if he had done anything.

Anything.

"Maybe it could have been different, maybe it could have been different," Ramirez said through a translator at his locker after the Indians' season had ended. "Maybe the results would have been different. But we're a team and we lost as a team and it didn't go well for us as a team, and that's all I can say."

The Indians are a team, but what makes them work is a collection of stars.

There's Ramirez and Francisco Lindor and Michael Brantley and Edwin Encarnacion swinging the bat, the four of them ranked fourth, eighth, 17th and 22nd in the American League in OPS, that measure of overall offensive production. There's Trevor Bauer, Corey Kluber, Mike Clevinger and Carlos Carrasco throwing the ball after ranking second, fifth, sixth and eighth in the American League in ERA.

That's four bats and four arms, and then you pray the bullpen holds it together, and that's how the Indians have to win.

Lindor went 4-for-11 with the Indians' only two home runs. The only other extra-base hit in the series was a Yandy Diaz double.

Clevinger gave up one earned run in five innings of Monday's start before everyone else imploded, and he was the best Cleveland pitcher in the series.

But Brantley, Encarnacion and Ramirez went a combined 3-for-31. Kluber, Bauer and Carrasco had a combined 5.79 ERA in 14 innings.

Stars failed. Ramirez failed most spectacularly.

Over the last two regular seasons, his Wins Above Replacement is 14.7, which is third-best in baseball, behind only Mookie Betts and Mike Trout. In the entire American League, Ramirez helps a team win more than all but two players.

In the postseason, his Wins Above Replacement is a tree stump. You could cut off an oak in the batter's box and have it be as effective.

"I'm going to keep working and I'm going to keep working hard in the offseason," Ramirez said. "That's the only thing I can control. I'm healthy, I feel good, so I'm going to keep working and that's the only thing I can do."

It was a clubhouse full of cap-tipping on Monday, the Indians giving credit to the mighty Astros while perhaps forgetting that more than a handful of them are supposed to be mighty themselves.

So Ramirez is on a team-friendly contract and he's a heart-warming underdog story and he has become a player no one ever expected. But if he keeps this up in the playoffs, now 2-for-31 over the last two years, the Indians are dead.

Houston shortstop Carlos Correa, a 23-year-old former All-Star who had a lousy year, can go 1-for-10 in the playoffs and the Astros can survive with a deeper bullpen and a payroll \$35 million above the Indians'.

In Cleveland, the Indians can't rely on Ramirez for six months and then win when he disappears in the postseason.

"Jose's had a tough last month," manager Terry Francona said. "When you're not feeling great at the plate, this isn't exactly the recipe to get out of it."

By that, he meant the Astros' starting pitching. They made it tough for Ramirez. But he's the kind of hitter who's supposed to make it tough for them, too. Why aren't Justin Verlander and Gerrit Cole and Dallas Keuchel shaking their heads over their inability to get Ramirez out?

Instead, it was five groundouts, two fly balls, a popup and three strikeouts -- no problem. He didn't live up to the responsibility of a star, to lead your team when it matters most.

In the clubhouse, after pulling on a Michael Jordan Jumpman white T-shirt and black Jordan pants, Ramirez didn't want to talk. He told the team translator there was nothing to say.

I said he was one of the leaders of the team and he should talk to the fans.

"Tell him yourself," said the Spanish-speaking assistant. "I'm just the translator."

"Jose, the fans want to hear from you," I told him.

And he talked. He understood.

What he needs to do in the clubhouse after playoff losses, he needs to do at the plate during playoff games to prevent losses. He needs to stand up. He needs to lead.

Right now, can the Indians rely on him in the 2019 playoffs?

"I always try to be positive," Ramirez said. "Everyone in here, we all try to be positive. We sometimes don't have control over what's going on with ourselves. So I hope they would be able to count on me in the future. But I think we just all try to stay positive and look forward to next year."

On Monday, positive was difficult.

The Indians' last three playoff series have ended with three straight losses. They blew a 3-1 lead to the Cubs in the 2016 World Series, a 2-0 lead to the New York Yankees in the 2017 Division Series and were swept 3-0 this time.

Somewhere in there, a star needed to stop that.

Ramirez was solid in the 2016 World Series, batting .310 with nine hits in 29 at-bats, though seven of them were singles. Since then, it's 1 for 31.

In his career, he gets an extra-base hit in the postseason in 3.4 percent of his at-bats.

In the regular season, he gets an extra-base hit 11.8 percent of the time.

Yes, the pitching improves in the playoffs. But the Indians need more.

Last year, Ramirez slumped in August, rebounded with a huge September, and then did nothing in the playoffs. This year, Ramirez fell off the map in both August and September and continued his slide into the postseason.

Maybe he's wearing down. Maybe pitchers are figuring him out and no longer throwing him fastballs. Maybe postseason scouting reports reveal the holes in his swing.

Whatever the reason, it can't happen. Because getting nothing from Ramirez leaves too big of a hole in the lineup, and the Indians can't fill it.

As he threw a black backpack over his shoulder, Ramirez headed out through the back entrance of the clubhouse with the same strut that takes him everywhere. That never changes.

But in the playoffs, he changes.

Out the front door of the clubhouse, there's a larger-than-life mural on the wall, in the line of vision of everyone who exited that door at the end of another season. It's Ramirez, bat in hand, snarling, looking like every pitcher's worst nightmare.

In the playoffs, that Ramirez doesn't exist.

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 10.09.2018

Playoff redemption for Francisco Lindor was not enough to carry Cleveland Indians in 2018 ALDS

By Joe Noga, cleveland.com

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- There are no silver linings for Francisco Lindor after his Cleveland Indians were eliminated from baseball's postseason Monday by the Houston Astros. The bottom line is winning, and that just didn't happen.

But for the 24-year-old Lindor, whose well-documented playoff struggles in 2017 were a motivating factor from the moment he arrived at spring training this year, a strong 2018 American League Division Series performance shows that he's ahead of the curve and ready to continue growing.

"It shows I learned from my mistakes and learned how the league is going to pitch to me and adjusted to it," Lindor said after the Tribe's 11-3 series-ending loss to the Astros. "You try to make the adjustments as soon as you can and try to be successful."

Lindor hit a mammoth 436-foot home run to left field in the fifth inning that gave the Indians a 2-1 lead. It answered George Springer's solo shot in the top of the inning and electrified the crowd at Progressive Field, if for a fleeting moment before the reality of Houston's offense brought things crashing back down to earth two innings later.

The blast to left off Astros starter Dallas Keuchel conjured memories of Lindor's grand slam in the sixth inning of Game 2 in last year's ALDS against the Yankees. That homer cut a five-run Tribe deficit to a single run in a game the Indians would go on to win in 13 innings.

Monday's game would have no such storybook ending. Lindor finished the series batting 4-for-11 (.364) with three runs scored, two homers, two RBI and a pair of strikeouts. It's a dramatic improvement from his 2017 postseason line of 2-for-18 (.111) with a homer, four RBI and six strikeouts.

"Just because I hit two home runs doesn't (change the fact that) I did absolutely nothing to help my team," Lindor said. "I wish I could have helped my team a little better."

The three-time All-Star credited Houston for sticking to its game plan and executing in every facet of the game in handing Cleveland its first postseason sweep since the 1954 World Series.

"You've got to respect that they came out here and they did what they had to do," Lindor said. "They played way better than us the whole three games and they deserved to win. They played better than us."

Astros manager A.J. Hinch said Houston's pitching did a good job of limiting Lindor's at-bats with runners on base throughout the series, but he managed to generate offense on his own.

"He's very similar to George (Springer) at the top of our order," Hinch said. "We didn't really control him. He hit the ball out of the ballpark from both sides of the plate."

Lindor's teammates credit him with taking on stewardship of the winning culture within the Indians clubhouse. Regardless of Monday's outcome, and regardless of what the future holds, veterans such as Jason Kipnis said afterward that they know the Indians organization is in good hands with talented young players such as Lindor and Jose Ramirez in the fold.

"We've got a lot of young talent here with Frankie and Josie and a bunch of guys who will be here for a few more years," Kipnis said. "You've got guys that are signed like Kluber and Carrasco and a bunch of guys who will keep this team where it needs to be for years to come -- competitive and hopefully winning division titles."

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Will free agency beat up the Cleveland Indians more than the Houston Astros did in the ALDS?

By Paul Hoynes, cleveland.com

CLEVELAND, Ohio - Change is coming to the Indians' roster and it could be widespread.

Carlos Carrasco, Michael Brantley, Josh Tomlin, Cody Allen, Lonnie Chisenhall, Andrew Miller, Melky Cabrera, Raja Davis, Brandon Guyer, Oliver Perez and Josh Donaldson could be free agents at the end of the World Series. Carrasco and Guyer are the only players with club options for 2019.

The reality of that change hit home Monday after the Indians were swept out of the ALDS in three games by the Houston Astros. Houston completed the sweep with an emphatic 11-3 victory at Progressive Field.

Tomlin, Brantley and Jason Kipnis sat in a far corner of the locker room after the game. They talked quietly and seemed in no hurry to leave. They'll be cleaning out their lockers in the next few days, but while Kipnis is signed through 2019 with a club option for 2020, Tomlin and Brantley may not be coming back.

Players like Tomlin, Brantley, Kipnis and Chisenhall, who was not with the team in September or the postseason, have played together for a long time. They went to the World Series in 2016, reached Game 7 and fell short. They believed they had the talent to finish the job, but it didn't happen.

Jason Kipnis on ALDS sweep: "Houston played better than us"

"It really would have been something special to finish it off (win the World Series) with the guys who have been here a long time because of how close we've gotten," said Kipnis. "That's why it's such a letdown. We've become a product of the high standards we've set around here, which makes it even more disappointing."

This is the second straight year the Indians have been eliminated in the ALDS, and the first year they've been swept in the postseason since the 1954 World Series.

"When you win a three division titles in a row and you keep going to the playoffs year after year, just getting there doesn't seem to be enough anymore," said Kipnis.

Kipnis said he doesn't know if he'll be back next year. The Indians tried to trade him last winter and his name came up again at the trade deadline in July and August.

Asked if he had an idea what the 2019 Indians would look like, Kipnis said, "Fortunately, that's not part of my job description. There will be questions a lot of guys in the front office have to answer. I'll be waiting to see if my name gets called, just like last offseason."

Regarding Monday's sweep, Kipnis said the Astros were just better.

"We were just outplayed," said. "I wish it weren't that simple. It just seems from top to bottom we were out-scouted, out-pitched, out-coached a little bit. They really did just a fantastic job over there of being ready and prepared before the series.

"I don't think we were underprepared; they just went out and executed and played the way you need to play to win."

Brantley, like Kipnis, Tomlin and Chisenhall, has spent his whole big-league career in Cleveland. The Indians acquired him as part of the CC Sabathia deal in 2008. He's spent nine-plus seasons with the Indians.

"It's been an honor to wear this uniform," said Brantley.

Should Brantley sign elsewhere, he felt the Indians were well positioned to continue to dominate the rebuilding AL Central.

"This organization is in great hands," said Brantley. "You look around this room. They've got phenomenal leaders still, great players. They're going to be good for a long time. I hope to be a part of it."

The Indians' starting rotation of Corey Kluber, Carrasco, Trevor Bauer and Mike Clevinger should be back next year. So will Shane Bieber, who was scheduled to start Game 4 on Tuesday if the Indians had managed to win Monday's game, and Adam Plutko.

The Tribe holds club options on Carrasco for 2019 and 2020. They are expected to exercise the 2019 option in November.

Infielders Francisco Lindor, Jose Ramirez, Yonder Alonso, Yandy Diaz and Kipnis are expected to return next year. So, will catchers Yan Gomes and Roberto Perez. The bullpen and outfield will need a lot of help.

The Indians acquired relievers Brad Hand and Adam Cimber from San Diego in July. They traded for center fielder Leonys Martin from Detroit, but he was stricken by a bacterial infection that ended his season. Greg Allen and Tyler Naquin will be available, but Bradley Zimmer is not expected to be available as he continues to recover from right shoulder surgery.

Cody Allen loves the culture the Indians have developed throughout the organization.

"This organization has done a good job of putting some pretty good teams on the field without making the big free-agent splashes," he said. "I know we went out and got Eddie (Encarnacion) and we've made some very good trades, but guys like Jose Ramirez, Frankie Lindor, Trevor Bauer, Corey Kluber, Carlos Carrasco -- the backbones and the core and the centerpieces of this club -- either came up in this organization or they got traded for in the minor leagues and were developed. This organization's going to be just fine with or without whoever the guys are that are free agents."

Allen, who set the franchise record in saves this year, was disappointed with his season, especially in the ALDS.

"You don't want to take getting into the playoffs for granted," he said. "I was not good. I was not good, and I feel bad for the guys who were extremely good this year and carried us to this point. I did not help in getting past a very, very good team in Houston. We knew we were going to have to play our best baseball and we didn't. . . and I didn't it."

Allen said he'd love to stay with the Indians, but that was a decision for later. If Monday was his last game in Cleveland, well, he was still processing that.

"It will take a few days probably," he said. "Right now, I'm just kind of numb to it all. This city. . . means a lot to my family and I. But guys move on. Carlos Santana was here forever and he moved. But, I mean, these places, they become home. My son was born here. So, we'll see."

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How the Cleveland Indians crumbled: 33 thoughts on a season and finish that left plenty to be desired

Zack Meisel Oct 8, 2018 58

CLEVELAND — As Melky Cabrera and Sandy Alomar Jr. trotted back to the dugout, the rest of the Indians retreated to the clubhouse to pack, to hug, to process how another promising season fizzled during the month of the calendar that matters most in Major League Baseball.

José Ramírez and Mike Clevinger stood on the far end of the dugout and stared out at the field as the Astros celebrated. Bench coach Brad Mills tapped Clevinger on the back, and the hurler ventured over to the other side and wrapped his arm around Jason Kipnis.

Some players stuffed their duffel bags with their gear, their gloves, the photos and keepsakes that adorned their lockers. Others will empty out their personal spaces on Tuesday, long before anyone on the roster anticipated commencing their winter break.

In the center of the clubhouse, atop a tall cabinet, stood an oversized Jobu figurine, flanked by two bottles of Jobu's Rum, one barrel-aged and one silver. At Jobu's bare feet sat a shot glass, about three-quarters full of the barrel-aged alcohol.

No magic elixir could vault the Indians past the Astros in the ALDS. For the first time since Bobby Avila led the club in hitting (1954), the Indians were swept out of the postseason.

On Thursday, the Indians' championship drought will officially reach the 70-year mark. That number will swell to at least 71. And as Kipnis, holding two bats, exited the clubhouse in his red Tribe shirt and backward cap, the Indians were left to wonder: How did they get here?

1. One team converts the mound into a mosh pit. The other stares ahead as if they were reliving the time their high school crush rejected their prom proposal.

"You don't really know what's going through your head," Josh Tomlin said. "It's almost like you're in a blank space. You're just looking out at an abyss, trying to understand what just happened. I'm sure it'll hit us more as time goes on and we're watching games on TV. But right now, it's a loss for words."

2. Let's back up, though. In fact, let's rewind to May 18, 2016, when Clevinger — after a vomiting session that brought him to his knees in the visitors clubhouse bathroom at Great American Ball Park — made his major-league debut. A contingent of Clevinger's relatives, who traveled from Jacksonville, sat about 20 rows behind the Indians' dugout along the third-base line that night. They cheered him when he recorded each of his five strikeouts, and they laughed at him as he stood in the batter's box.

3. Clevinger successfully harnessed his nervous energy Monday, as he delivered five strong innings to put the Indians in position to win, his only blemish being one of George Springer's 782 home runs. Alas, Terry Francona's lineup failed to rise to the occasion for the third consecutive game.

4. The Indians' first order of business last winter was to exercise Michael Brantley's option. He returned from ankle surgery and appeared in 143 games, posting an .832 OPS and earning his third career All-Star nod. That decision proved prescient. The rest of the outfield, on the other hand, was a disaster.

5. Bradley Zimmer struggled enough to be demoted to Class AAA Columbus before he underwent season-ending shoulder surgery. He could miss a decent chunk of next season as well. That left center field to Rajai Davis, Greg Allen and, for a minute, Leonys Martin, who, unfortunately, suffered a serious illness and missed the final eight weeks of the year.

In right field, Lonnie Chisenhall's calves again derailed his season. Brandon Guyer never found his footing. So, the team took two chances on Cabrera, who had been lifting weights and soaking up the Florida sun. Edwin Encarnacion implored the Indians to give Cabrera a chance and, for a while in the second half, he performed admirably at the plate.

But that desperation move highlighted how the Indians' roster was lacking in certain areas.

6. Just consider how the middle of the order fared against Houston.

José Ramírez: 0-for-11

Edwin Encarnacion: 1-for-10

Josh Donaldson: 1-for-11

Yonder Alonso: 0-for-6

Melky Cabrera: 1-for-8

That's a combined 3-for-46 for those keeping score at home.

7. For Ramírez, it should sting worse, because the guy who could be an MVP finalist for the second consecutive year again disappeared on the grand stage (even though these games aired during brunch on Tru TV). Ramírez has totaled two hits in 31 at-bats the past two Octobers and, moving forward, that's all anyone will care about. No one will be surprised by — or will concern themselves with — his gaudy regular-season numbers.

Ramírez seemed disinterested in speaking with the media after Game 3, but Encarnacion and a persistent reporter nudged the 26-year-old into holding court.

"We want to be successful, but I fell off," Ramírez said through team interpreter Will Clements. "That's all I can say. I didn't perform how I wanted to."

8. Encarnacion, meanwhile, will earn nearly \$22 million next year. He'll turn 36 on Jan. 7.

9. The Indians had a quiet winter last year. They signed Alonso, Davis and ... Brandon Barnes? They delayed addressing the bullpen until midseason, so they cycled through Alexi Ogando, Jeff Beliveau, Ben Taylor, Matt Belisle, George Kontos, Oliver Drake, Marc Rzepczynski, Chris Traeger, Mark Brendanawicz, Ben Wyatt and Li'l Sebastian. (OK, the last four are "Parks and Recreation" characters. And the last one is a deceased mini horse.)

10. It made some sense. Looking at the AL Central standings should require a hazmat suit. The Indians didn't need to rack up empty-calorie wins. They would punch their ticket to October with their third consecutive division crown, and that's when they needed to capitalize. So, they waited until summer arrived, and they snagged Brad Hand and Adam Cimber from San Diego.

11. But there was no contingency plan for if Andrew Miller never rounded into form, or if Cody Allen's arm stopped working properly — or both. Trevor Bauer deployed as a daily, multi-inning weapon? An interesting concept, but really, had he not been pelted with Jose Abreu's line drive in mid-August, would he instead have started one of the first two games in Houston?

12. Bauer will have an MRI on his ankle this week to make sure it has healed properly. He'll then throw a bullpen session, hang out with Shane Bieber in California and begin his offseason project. Last winter, he developed his slider. This year, he wants to perfect his changeup.

13. Oh, Bauer also said he has a plan to better his nutrition, and that he wants to be featured in ESPN's The Body issue in the near future.

14. The Indians' deal for Donaldson didn't pan out as intended, though that doesn't mean it wasn't worth the gamble of parting with Julian Merryweather. The Indians' defensive realignment ultimately made no difference in the ALDS. Then again, neither did Donaldson's bat.

15. The lineup card Brad Mills handed the home-plate umpire for Games 1 and 2 in Houston included nine hitters who each had at least one All-Star nod to their name. Then, the group produced 13 hits in 90 at-bats in the series (.144 average). Lindor's two solo homers accounted for two-thirds of the club's extra-base hits.

16. Where does the blame fall? For the second consecutive postseason, the club's stars flopped in the limelight. This wasn't Francona's finest hour, either. Any time a team falls completely flat at the wrong time — in any sport — the manager or coach deserves a spot under the microscope. The front office misjudged the roster's ability to gear up at precisely the right time, too.

17. As players started to file out of the clubhouse and the media contingent decreased in size, a handful of veteran players gathered in the corner of the room. Kipnis sat at the base of his locker. Tomlin and Yan Gomes sat in leather chairs in front of him. Brantley sat at his adjacent locker, with Alonso sitting on the floor beside him.

18. Brantley, Allen, Miller and Tomlin are all eligible for free agency. Kipnis knows the Indians might try to unload his contract, which will earn him \$14.7 million next year (plus a \$2.5 million buyout or \$16.5 million option for 2020).

19. Said Tomlin: "It's something you try to keep in the back of your mind so you don't have those negative thoughts where, 'If we do lose this game, this is the last time we'll play together.' But it's definitely something we've talked about. We've spent time communicating back and forth about how much we've enjoyed playing with each other. We're heavy in the heart, but that's the way it goes. We've been fortunate to be able to play with each other for this long, so we'll take it for what it is, be grateful for it and move on."

20. There will certainly be a changing of the guard next season. We have all winter to analyze and predict the state of the 2019 roster. But that core group never captured a World Series title in Cleveland, even after the trade for Miller. That surely stings. As time elapses, there's an increasing sense that, perhaps the postseason opportunity in 2016 was the best the club will get to capture that elusive ring.

21. Brantley, recovering from a second shoulder surgery, stood on the sideline and watched the Indians march to within one victory of a parade in 2016. He played in the 2017 ALDS, but he was hobbled by an ankle that ultimately needed some knife work. Finally healthy, and perhaps appearing in his final stretch of games for the franchise that acquired him at the end of the 2008 season as the player to be named later in the CC Sabathia deal, Brantley only got to enjoy three playoff games. And there wasn't much to enjoy.

22. Something felt off about the Indians all season. Some point to the 2017 club's 22-game winning streak and say that team peaked too early. (I don't buy into that theory, but that's neither here nor there.) This team never peaked. It never revealed the sort of potential it should have possessed.

23. The Indians were always waiting for something: a trade to patch up the leaky bullpen, Miller to return to full health, a trade to fix the faulty outfield, Kipnis to heat up at the plate, Bauer's ankle to heal, Donaldson's calf to heal, Ramírez's slump to cease.

Eventually, the sand all settles at the bottom of the hourglass.

24. Said Miller: "We never felt like we tapped our full potential, maybe because we didn't have to. If we were in a pennant race, fighting in games in September, maybe that helps us. I don't know. Unfortunately, there's no way to go back and get a do-over and set things up the way you want. You have to show up when the games start."

25. That's easy to say after the fact, and the state of the division isn't going to change any time soon, unless Derek Falvey bolsters the Twins' roster in grand fashion during the offseason.

26. Also, given what they've meant to the franchise over the past few years, it's incredible to think that maybe the Indians can stomach the losses of Allen and Miller. That would have seemed far-fetched in April or May, when the club was relying on Beliveau to secure a save. Sure, they'll need to revamp their bullpen this winter, but it's not as though those two are slam dunks to produce at a high level for their respective teams next season.

27. Some years, it seems as though randomness reigns supreme in October. A team catches fire at the right time and stuns the nation. But it requires a certain degree of talent to be able to pull off such a feat. A better team has a better chance of getting hot in the postseason.

28. On paper, it seemed as though the Indians could have followed that formula. They have four of the top starting pitchers in the AL. They have a couple of MVP candidates. But everything crumbled when the calendar flipped to October.

29. Said Tomlin: "You still have to go out there and you still have to execute and you still have to hit the ball and you still have to move runners and you still have to do the things that make up winning baseball. We didn't do that very well. You don't want to say wasted, but we did let an opportunity go that we all sure wish we could have back."

30. What will stand out about this Indians season? Lindor's momentous home run in Puerto Rico? Ramírez's rising popularity on the field and on the dirt track at Moo Moo Farm? Bauer's blossoming into the frontline starter he predicted he would become?

31. The overwhelming feeling about the 2018 Indians will be that anything the club achieves before October serves merely as a footnote. The Indians will be contenders next season, but they'll be accompanied by a sentiment of "Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me."

32. Mike Chernoff made the rounds in the clubhouse after the loss Monday. He chatted with players and coaches, shook hands and said goodbyes. The attention on the team now shifts to Chernoff and Chris Antonetti as the front office attempts to retool the roster and make the club more formidable entering next season.

33. The Indians will host the All-Star Game at Progressive Field in July. But 2019 will be all about snapping that soon-to-be 71-year drought. It'll be all about twisting open those bottles of Jobu Rum and putting them to use in a manner other than filling an idle shot glass in the center of the clubhouse.

Thanks to all of you for following along this season, for reading and interacting. It's been a blast chronicling this journey and attempting to take you behind the scenes, whether in the clubhouse, on the road or on the "Mario Kart" track. We have plenty of fun stuff in store to keep you entertained throughout the offseason.

Final Thoughts: The solution to the Indians' problem might have been in front of them all along

By Jason Lloyd Oct 8, 2018 25

CLEVELAND — At some point the randomness of small sample sizes and the excuses of a short series begin to fade. At some point, after watching opponents celebrate on their infield and drown the visiting clubhouse in champagne year after year, the Indians will have to start finding answers to hard questions, beginning with the most obvious one.

How does this keep happening?

"I didn't expect us to lose the way we lost, 3-0," Edwin Encarnacion said. "With the talent we have in this clubhouse, that's not supposed to happen."

He's right.

The Indians have long been the best-run franchise in town and it isn't really close. The Cavs have a championship because the greatest player on Earth chose to come home, not because of any sustained culture or stability. And let's leave the Browns out of this.

For decades, Cleveland has been the model franchise where baseball teams come to find their next manager or executive. The Twins did it. The Rays did it. The Mets did it. In a previous lifetime the Rockies and Pirates did it, too.

Cleveland hires bright young minds from top academic institutions like Princeton, Georgetown, Northwestern and Vanderbilt and molds them into baseball savants other teams covet. The Indians should be proud of that.

So how does a franchise with this type of culture and stability, an organization that is a model for small-market teams across the league, a roster with this blend of power and speed and a rotation this deep ... how does all of it continue to unravel year after year in the postseason?

A solution might have been right in front of them all along.

The Indians can boast one of the best player development programs in baseball. They continue to invest in their Dominican academy, which produced José Ramírez and Francisco Mejía among others. (Yes, Ramírez stunk again this postseason, but he's still a terrific homegrown talent.)

None of that is good enough anymore for a team with the Indians' narrowing championship window and financial constraints. For a smart, stable franchise always seeking competitive advantages on the margins, it might be time to fall in line behind the Houston Astros in something other than the standings.

All teams in professional sports guard their analytics knowledge like nuclear codes, yet we can surmise by now that most every team has analytics departments. But few — none? — have gone to the extreme that they have in Houston. And when searching for a competitive advantage in a short series, things such as scouting reports and analytics become more magnified with the importance of each pitch.

"Offensively, our hitters are uber-prepared," third baseman Alex Bregman said after the Astros' Game 2 victory over the weekend. "We know which counts pitchers throw which pitches the most, the different percentages — there's a bunch of stuff. Our organization does a good job of providing us with that information. But our team is a very focused team and we take pride in being prepared."

The Indians? It doesn't sound as if they can say the same.

The Astros dominated them in every facet of this series. They pounded mistake pitches and even hit good ones. Indians hitters looked uncomfortable and off-balance flailing at pitches throughout this series. The Astros simply looked like the better prepared team.

"I'm going to keep it really short," Mike Clevinger said when asked to explain what happened in this series. "We were a little bit, I don't know, kind of had our backs against the wall before this started when it came to the analytical side."

And one Indians player, speaking privately, told me he believed the Astros' batters were far better prepared for this series than Indians hitters. He believed the scouting reports were more intricate and the attention to detail was more precise.

After all, this is the type of information the Astros thrive on these days.

Nobody knows more about the analytics movement than Trevor Bauer, who works tirelessly every winter at Driveline on such matters. Speaking on Yahoo Sports' podcast in July, Bauer praised the Astros for their willingness to embrace the technology — while acknowledging there is far more information available to teams that no one is using.

"They're probably the furthest ahead, I would guess. But they haven't even scratched the surface," Bauer told Yahoo's Jeff Passan in July. "I don't know what all they have. They may have everything figured out and have been able to keep it under wraps. But I have my ear out there and I hear about what's going on and they do a lot of things very, very well. There's just other things that no one does that should be done."

Neither Bauer nor Clevinger was the player who spoke privately to The Athletic about the different approaches between the Astros and Indians. But Bauer suggested on the Yahoo podcast that every organization should have six high-speed cameras filming every single play — three on the batter and three on the pitcher. The camera he was likely referring to is the Edgertronic, which records 1,000 frames per second. Bauer owns one and has brought it with him to the stadium.

Baseball America reported in May that the Astros are significantly ahead of the field on subjects such as high-speed camera usage.

"It is known publicly that the Astros use their Edgertronic for pitch development and pitch improvement," J.J. Cooper wrote, "something that has been done at Driveline Baseball (and by Bauer) for several years."

Bauer, incidentally, used the Edgertronic to help develop his slider last winter.

Is a slow-motion camera the only reason why the Indians' OPS in this series (.306) was lower than the Astros' team average (.333)? No. It also doesn't explain how the Indians blew a 3-1 lead to the Cubs two years ago in the World Series and how they unraveled last year up 2-0 in the first round against the Yankees.

As one player grumbled Monday before leaving the locker room, "Two years ago was the worst team we had here and it went the furthest."

But if the Astros really are as far ahead of the field in technology information and implementation as it seems, it might help explain how George Springer is already the franchise leader in postseason home runs (10) and how Houston is poised to win its second World Series in as many years.

And Bauer, easily the leader in all of this, insists there is volumes more that teams haven't explored.

"There's just other things that no one does that should be done," he said on the Yahoo podcast. "The high-speed cameras, you can compute biomechanics on every single play. Hitters, pitchers, whatever. You should have three focused on the hitter and three focused on the pitcher so you can get biomechanics on literally everybody that comes through your stadium. You can check biomechanics on the first and last pitch a pitcher throws, you can check biomechanics on a hitter's swing that he gets a home run and where he swings and misses. There's so much data there that no one has any idea what to do with."

Often dismissed as unorthodox and stubborn, it seems as if the Indians are finally ready to listen to him.

"This year my input actually seems valued, instead of feared, which is nice," Bauer told our Zack Meisel last month. "I've actually been able to have productive conversations with people about my knowledge that can help a lot of other people."

More information is never a bad thing. Because right now the only important numbers associated with the Indians are 2-8. That's their record in their last 10 postseason games.

Something has to change. Maybe it's the technology.

Astros feast on Indians bullpen in ALDS sweep

By Nate Barnes nbarnes@news-herald.com @NateBarnes_ on Twitter 14 hrs ago Comments

Indians manager Terry Francona called on his relievers to cover 10 innings during the American League Division Series against the Houston Astros. Those frames incontrovertibly tilted the series in Houston's favor.

The Astros' 11-3 victory over the Indians illustrated a final, pronounced sample from a beleaguered relief corps.

Mike Clevinger exited with a 2-1 lead after he struck out nine in five innings. Trevor Bauer, Andrew Miller, Cody Allen, Brad Hand and Adam Cimber proceeded to yield 10 runs to the explosive Astros lineup.

The Astros scored 14 of their 21 runs in the ALDS in the seventh inning or later. They battered Indians relievers to the tune of a .404 average and an exorbitant .766 slugging percentage.

Houston's approach at the plate complicates proceedings for any pitcher. The Astros' lineup is stuffed with power hitters who are as patient as they are aggressive.

"We make you throw strikes but we aren't afraid to ambush you," manager AJ Hinch said. "That makes it a little bit of a dilemma from pitch one for a reliever."

The Indians bullpen struggled all season.

By Wins Above Replacement, the Indians relievers' 0.4 was the fourth-worst in the major leagues. Their 4.60 earned run average was sixth-highest.

Despite those struggles, the bullpen pitching to the tune of an 11.70 ERA in the postseason would've been an absurd proposition — especially with Hand's addition, a healthy Miller and Bauer's addition to the relief unit.

"You can't come in and expect free strikes," Hinch said. "That makes you have to execute from the very beginning and then when you make a mistake, honestly, we were able to keep the ball off the ground. That allowed the ball to get to the outfield for some extra-base hits."

The two plays in the series that made the most significant impact on the Astros' win probability came at the bullpen's expense.

Marwin Gonzalez's two-run double off Miller in the sixth inning of Game 2 put the Astros up, 2-1, and shifted momentum more than any play in the series. Another two-run double by Gonzalez in Game 3 achieved the same effect, when his drive to left broke a 2-2 tie in the seventh Oct. 8. As far as the Astros' success against the bullpen in Game 3, Francona attributed the late outburst to circumstance. Houston scored three in the seventh, an inning aided by Bauer's two throwing errors.

"I think it's different every game, let alone every inning," Francona said. "I mean, today, we finally get Bregman to hit a ball back to the pitcher and we don't execute the double play. From there, you have to start playing the infield in, because one run was too much and then that leads to a crooked number."

Clevinger's start was the best among those authored by Corey Kluber in Game 1 and Carlos Carrasco's Game 2 effort. All series, but especially in Game 3, Hinch wanted his offense to knock the Indians' starter out as soon as possible.

The bullpen needed to cover four innings Oct. 8, a span in which the fate of the Indians' season was decided.

"Any time you've got to ask your bullpen, I don't care how good it is, to get that many outs," Hinch said, "you feel like it's advantage offense."

Heart of Indians order flat-lines in series sweep by Houston

By John Kampf JKampf@News-Herald.com @NHPreps on Twitter 14 hrs ago Comments

The term "heart of the order" refers to the best bats a given baseball team has to offer.

The meat of the order.

The dudes that you can always count on to produce when needed.

Most generally, the "heart of the order" is relegated to the third, fourth and fifth hitters in a lineup. But in the case of the Indians, their "heart of the order" - the meat of their lineup - is one-through-five.

Francisco Lindor, Michael Brantley, Jose Ramirez, Edwin Encarnacion and Josh Donaldson are widely considered the heartbeat of the lineup for the American League Central Division champion Indians.

But come this year's divisional series, the heart of the order - the pulse - came up blank.

As in flat-lining blank.

How bad was the heart of Cleveland's order in a 3-0 sweep by the Astros?

The Indians quintet went 4-for-16 (.250) in Game 3 on Oct. 8 at Progressive Field - where the Astros put an 11-3 exit whipping on the Indians - and that was the best game of the series in a landslide.

"We didn't get a lot of hits," said Michael Brantley. "Plain and simple, Houston came out and threw the ball well. We didn't string enough hits together."

Truth be known, the Indians didn't string hits period.

In the three-game series, the Indians were a frigid 13-for-90 (.144) as a team.

The five guys at the top - considered the "heart of the order" - combined to go 8-for-43 (.151) with 14 strikeouts.

"They pitched very well," said Francisco Lindor. "Hats off to their pitching staff. They did very well."

Lindor's .364 batting average (4-for-11) from the leadoff position, which included a pair of home runs, was far and away the best of the top five batters.

Brantley was 2-for-10 (.200), Encarnacion was 1-for-10 (.100), Donaldson was 1-for-11 (.091) and American League MVP candidate Jose Ramirez was hitless in 11 at-bats.

The heart of Cleveland's order was a bone-chilling 2-for-18 in Game 1 and 2-for-19 in Game 2, leading into the 4-for-16 heat wave in Game 3.

Donaldson pointed to Houston's pitching staff, particularly starters Justin Verlander, Gerritt Cole and Dustin Keuchel as the primary problem for his team.

"I didn't see too many pitches that I felt I could really drive," he said. "I felt they did a good job getting Strike 1 for the most part.

"Their No. 1 and No. 2 guys are damn good and they were on their games. Their No. 3 (Keuchel) is a former Cy Young winner, so...."

The most glaring offensive no-show was Ramirez, who ended the regular season with a .270 batting average, 39 home runs, 110 runs and 105 RBI. But he tailed off dramatically toward the end of the season, perhaps in correlation with his from from third base to second base with the acquisition of Donaldson from the Blue Jays, and never recovered.

"Jose's had a tough last month," manager Terry Francona said. "When you're not feeling great at the plate, this isn't exactly the recipe to get out of it, facing Verlander, Cole and those guys. They're pretty good."

Speaking through interpreter Will Clement, Ramirez said "maybe things could have been different. Maybe the results would be different" if he had a better series. But he said the Indians win as a team and lose as a team.

When asked if he can be relied upon in the postseasons of the future, Ramirez said: "I always try to be positive. We all try to be positive. I hope they'd be able to count on me in the future. I think we'll all try to be positive and look forward to next year."

A familiar mantra of Cleveland teams - Wait 'Til next year.

Maybe then the bats will show up.

Especially the ones in the proverbial "heart of the order."

"We've got to continue to get better," Lindor said. "We worked as hard as we could, but they outplayed us. They outpitched us, outhit us, ran the bases better than us ... Hat's off to Houston. They played way better than us in all three games."

Astros expose under-achieving Indians in ALDS sweep | Jeff Schudel

Jeff Schudel

So what does Indians president Chris Antonetti do now?

Antonetti put together an Indians team that should have been good enough to challenge for the American League pennant. Instead, the Tribe exited 2018 meekly after being swept by the Houston Astros in three games in the ALDS. They lost 7-2 and 3-1 in Houston and 11-3 in Game 3 on Oct. 8 in Cleveland.

Reliever Andrew Miller says the problem was the Indians never did reach their full potential. Read on.

Progressive Field was packed and loud when Francisco Lindor gave the Indians a 2-1 lead on a mammoth home run in the bottom of the sixth. Excluding Astros fans on the first-base side, it was nearly empty after the Astros torched the Indians bullpen – again – with six runs in the top of the eighth.

Who cares about three straight Central Division championships? No one else in the weakest division in baseball will be good enough to challenge them next season, either.

The Indians are 2-9 in their last 11 postseason games since taking a 3-1 series lead over the Cubs after Game 4 of the 2016 World Series. They have gotten worse instead of better since coming within one game of winning a World Series for Cleveland for the first time since 1948.

"If you keep giving yourself a chance, there's, at some point, you believe you'll break through," manager Terry Francona said. "We haven't been good enough to this point. Nobody's going to quit, quit trying or quit trying to get better.

"But, I mean, it is frustrating for sure. I think there's a lot of teams that would like to be in this situation, but when you come up short, you take stock and try to do better. We have to go home now, before we're ready to. That hurts. It always stings.

"I just told the guys, we've got a number of guys that are free agents. You know there's going to be some turnover, and it's a real special group to all of us. So that's a hard one, when you're saying goodbye before you're ready to."

The Astros are better than the Indians. There is no doubt about that. But it's the way the Indians were overmatched in all three games that sends out alarm bells about what the future holds.

Left fielder Michael Brantley, relief pitchers Andrew Miller and Cody Allen and third baseman Josh Donaldson will all be free agents. Donaldson, acquired on Aug. 31 from Toronto exclusively for the postseason, was 1-for-11 in the series. Brantley was 2-for-10. The Indians picked up his 2018 option for the promise of what he could do in October, not for what he could contribute in the grind of the regular season. The Indians hit .144 for the series.

Antonetti traded top prospect Francisco Mejia to the Padres for closer Brad Hand and reliever Adam Cimber in July. That trade was as much about the future as this season with Allen headed to free agency and Hand under club control through 2021. But Hand was on the mound in Game 3 when the Astros removed all doubt in the eighth. He gave up a run on a wild pitch and a three-run home run to Carlos Correa.

And it wasn't just the players Antonetti acquired who should have had the Indians poised to challenge the Astros. Winning the division by 13 games allowed Francona to rest his starters and give his relievers just enough work so they would be primed for the playoffs.

Instead, Corey Kluber gave up four runs in 4 2/3 innings in Game 1, and the Indians' bullpen, a strength in the 2016 World Series run, was awful. The Astros scored 14 of their 21 runs in the series from the seventh inning on.

But maybe the quick exit wasn't so surprising. Maybe playing in the AL Central hid weaknesses the Astros easily exposed.

"This sucks right now," Miller said. "This isn't the way we drew it up.

"You can't pick your division. In a lot of ways, we didn't play as well as we thought we were capable of all year.

"Maybe it was a good thing we were able to get into the playoffs the way we did because we had guys hurt. We never felt like we tapped our full potential, maybe because we didn't have to. If we were in a pennant race and fighting to get in in September, maybe that helps us. Unfortunately, there's no way to get a do-over and set things up the way you want it. You have to show up to play when the games start."

The Indians have to start all over at spring training in February. Nothing from the 2018 ALDS gives reason to believe 2019 will end differently.

Trevor Bauer's move to bullpen fails to pay off for Indians

Shaun Bennett ByShaun Bennett | The Chronicle-TelegramPublished on Oct. 9, 2018 | Updated 6:30 a. m.

CLEVELAND — Trevor Bauer truly became a member of the Indians bullpen Monday afternoon.

After a Cy Young worthy regular season — shortened after a line drive broke Bauer's right fibula Aug. 11 — Cleveland manager Terry Francona, in an attempt to strengthen a group that struggled for most of the regular season, made the decision to add the All-Star starter to the list of relievers for his postseason roster.

Cleveland's bullpen went 15-29 during the regular season, finishing with a 4.60 ERA and allowing opponents to hit .253 against it. The Indians relief corps was ranked 13th out of 15 American League teams.

Francona used Bauer during both games in Houston — Bauer went 2⅔ innings, giving up a hit and an earned run while striking out three — but Bauer didn't look like an actual Indians reliever until Game 3 in Cleveland — an 11-3 Astros win that completed the Indians' ALDS elimination sweep.

After allowing a hit during a scoreless sixth inning, Bauer surrendered three runs on three hits and a pair of errors — both by the pitcher — in the seventh.

"When I came in I fully intended on protecting the lead and finishing the game myself," Bauer said. "I think my stuff was elite, I executed pretty well pitch-wise — I obviously didn't execute very well defensively — but it is what it is."

No. 9 hitter Tony Kemp singled to right field to start the seventh inning, then moved to second when Bauer's pickoff attempt sailed past first baseman Edwin Encarnacion and into the camera bay.

George Springer reached first — moving Kemp to third — on a swinging bunt that dribbled down the third-base line, and Kemp scored to tie the game at 2-all on Jose Altuve's groundout to Francisco Lindor.

Alex Bregman followed with a weak shot to Bauer, whose throw pulled Lindor off the bag at second. Lindor tried to get Bregman at first but was late with the throw.

"The one to first was just a bad throw. It happens from time to time, and it was just unfortunate that it was such a bad throw that (Kemp) went to second," Bauer said. "The one at second, obviously a very bad throw as well. I caught the ball, I turned around to throw it and I saw Frankie going to my right and the umpire crossing over to the left and I was in the middle of throwing and I kind of flinched and I made a bad throw."

"There's no way around it. That should have been the end of the inning. It was a 2-2 game in the seventh and we had a good chance."

The double play did not happen and the inning did not end. Instead, after Bauer walked Yuli Gurriel to load the bases, Marwin Gonzalez doubled down the left-field line to give Houston a 4-2 lead.

While the errors kept the inning going, the Astros hitters were the true cause of Bauer's frustration.

"More deflating is the swinging bunt that gets tapped up the line and then the pop fly that just bloop in the perfect spot. Nothing got hit hard," Bauer said. "I got what probably should have been about four or five outs that inning, plus the two that we had to get when I left. I didn't help myself at all. It's just one of those days."

It was a day Bauer probably didn't imagine while going 12-6 with a 2.21 ERA — the lowest for an Indians starter since Gaylord Perry's 1.92 in 1972, the year he won the Cy Young — and 221 strikeouts in just 175⅓ innings. Not just the rough outing against the Astros in Game 3, but making three relief appearances in four days during the postseason.

"Pitching is pitching. That was my role," Bauer said. "Tito and I and a couple of guys had a meeting in Chicago towards the end of the year. I let them know what I had to say and they told me what they had to say, and I told them, 'When I leave this room I'm 100 percent bought in on my role.'"

"That's what I did. I left that room and got ready to pitch out of the bullpen. So ... it is what it is."

Bauer won't let the final inning taint his career-best season, and he's excited to see if he can improve upon his numbers next year.

"I think I had a very good year," he said. "It was unfortunate that I got hit with the line drive. It kind of disrupted the flow for me personally. I have a lot of bitterness about that."

But we have a good group of core players, so there's a lot of hope for the future."

Jim Ingraham: Indians have a nice little team that needs some serious shaking up

Jim Ingraham | The Chronicle-Telegram Published on Oct. 9, 2018 | Updated 6:27 a. m.

No hitting, plus no defense, plus no bullpen, plus no fight, equals no chance.

It's all over now, and major changes will most certainly have to be made in the offseason. The Indians are done playing ball in 2018, after playing their three worst games of the season in their three biggest games of the season.

All three were various degrees of gruesome. But the shocking 11-3 drop kick administered by the Houston Astros to the Central Division champions (how empty does that sound?) on Monday, completing an overwhelming three-game sweep in a totally uncompetitive ALDS, was the most gruesome of all.

“Playing for their baseball lives,” as manager Terry Francona termed it, playing in front of their home fans, trying to prove they still had a pulse, the Indians laid an egg the size of the Progressive Field scoreboard.

Three errors, two wild pitches, one balk, eight walks, a hit batter — and that was just by the Indians’ pitchers.

The hitters were just as bad, scoring just three runs, two of them coming on a sacrifice fly and a wild pitch. When Houston’s Carlos Correa clubbed a monstrous home run over the center field wall in the eighth inning, the Astros in the series had almost as many home runs (eight) as the Indians had hits (10).

The Indians were outscored 21-6 in the three games. They were 0-for-6 with runners in scoring position, while Houston was 11-for-30 (.367). As a team, the Indians hit .144 in the three games. Throw out Francisco Lindor, the only Indians hitter who didn’t look overmatched (4-for-11, two home runs), and the rest of the team hit .114.

During the three games the Indians’ bullpen went from suspect to nonexistent. From the sixth inning on, the Astros outscored the Indians 16-3.

It was like Francona showed up for a gunfight with a slingshot. His two best relievers, Andrew Miller and Cody Allen, were, for whatever reason, toast. Miller, the MVP in the 2016 ALCS, actually threw a pitch BEHIND one batter in Game 2.

Starter Trevor Bauer, pressed into service as a reliever, was quickly overworked, appearing in all three games, and running out of gas Monday, when he gave up four hits and three runs, and committed two errors in the span of four batters after not making an error all year.

“Not a lot of things went the way we hoped they would,” said Francona, whose team, in the last two years, has lost six consecutive postseason games, three in a row to the Yankees and three in a row to the Astros. In those six games the Indians were outscored 34-11, hitting .148 as a team and .059 (1-for-17) with runners in scoring position.

The Indians have also lost their last eight postseason games when facing elimination, dating to Game 7 of the 1997 World Series. According to the Elias Sports Bureau, that’s the longest such streak in major league history.

But getting taken to the woodshed by the Yankees and Astros the last two years should send a message to the front office that their recipe needs some tweaking.

“We’ve got to go home now, before we’re ready to,” Francona said. “We’ve got a number of guys that are free agents. You know there’s going to be some turnover.”

There SHOULD be some turnover. Blowing a 2-0 lead to the Yankees last year and getting swept by Houston this year screams it.

The numbers are ugly enough, but what the Indians need most is a change in attitude. There’s no edge to the team. No hard-nosed, hard-charging competitors. They have a nice group of productive major leaguers, but perhaps the stoicism of Corey Kluber, Edwin Encarnacion, Michael Brantley, Jose Ramirez, Carlos Carrasco, Yan Gomes, most of the roster, really, needs to be augmented by a player or two willing to move the needle on the team’s emotional meter.

Throw a bat. Glare at an opponent. Argue with an umpire. Anything. This Indians team seems way too comfortable. Maybe it’s a product of playing six months of baseball knowing there is no team in their division that can threaten them.

It was almost like they weren’t ready, after playing a month’s worth of yawners in September, for a high-stakes postseason series with an elite, ultracompetitive team like the Astros, whose leaders are all fiery competitors. Guys like Justin Verlander, Gerrit Cole, and especially Alex Bregman, just to name a few.

The Astros are a great team, and they know it. They show it. The Indians are a nice little team, and they act like it. Their signature and symbolic emotion is Lindor’s smile. There otherwise doesn’t seem to be any edge or personality to this Indians team. An Indians team good enough to win their division, but, in the last two years, to do nothing else.

Where’s Albert Belle when you need him?

TRIBE NOTES Astros 11, Indians 3: Tribe’s season ends in disappointing fashion for second straight year
Chris Assenheimer | **Chris Assenheimer** | **The Chronicle-Telegram** | **Published on Oct. 8, 2018** | **Updated 6:22 a. m.**
CLEVELAND — Well, that escalated and ended quickly — again.

A season that began with legitimate World Series dreams came to another early nightmarish postseason end for the Indians, who were drubbed 11-3 by the Astros on Monday afternoon at Progressive Field and were eliminated in the first round for the second straight year.

After losing in five games to the Yankees in the Division Series last season, it was even worse this time around for Cleveland, which was swept out of the playoffs by the defending world champion Astros in front of a sellout crowd of 37,252 fans.

The Indians didn't hit — six runs and a .144 batting average over three games — and for the most part didn't pitch, either, posting a 7.20 ERA.

That's a recipe for defeat whether you're playing the lowly Kansas City Royals in a weak Central Division regular-season game or the defending World Series champions.

"They outplayed us," shortstop Francisco Lindor said of the Astros, who scored 21 runs, batted .327 and owned a 2.00 ERA. "They outpitched us, they outthrew us, they ran the bases better than us. Hat's off to Houston. They've got a great ballclub and you've got to respect that. You've gotta respect that they came out here and they did what they had to do. They played way better than us the whole (series). They deserved to win."

"They beat us in every area of the game," said right-hander Trevor Bauer, who took the loss after relieving starter Mike Clevinger and allowing three runs on four hits over 1 1/3 innings. "They're tough, man. They keep coming. We haven't played our best and I'm not sure they played their best either, but they played much better than we did. The better team won."

Clevinger didn't shoulder any blame for the latest loss, keeping the Indians in the game through five innings of his first career postseason start.

The right-hander allowed a run on three hits and struck out nine, accounting for the highest total ever by a Cleveland pitcher in his postseason debut.

The right-hander allowed a run on three hits and struck out nine, accounting for the highest total ever by a Cleveland pitcher in his postseason debut.

"I fully expected that coming in," Bauer said of Clevinger's performance. "He lives for a big moment. He's very confident that he's going to go out there and give us a chance and he did."

"That's on me. Coming in with a 2-1 lead and it was my job to get us to the finish line and I didn't do that."

The game began to unravel for the Indians in the seventh inning with Bauer on the mound.

After working a scoreless sixth in place of Clevinger, Bauer allowed a leadoff single to No. 9 hitter Tony Kemp, then threw errantly on a pick-off attempt that allowed Kemp to advance to second.

George Springer followed with a swinging bunt single and Jose Altuve's fielder's choice grounder tied the game at 2.

Bauer got a grounder back to the mound on the following hitter, Alex Bregman, but threw wide of the second base bag for his second error of the inning.

Yuri Gurriel walked to load the bases and Marwin Gonzalez doubled down the left-field line to give Houston the lead for good at 4-2.

The Astros broke it open with a six-run eighth inning, the final three scoring on a homer from Carlos Correa off Brad Hand that sent the hometown fans to the exits.

Cleveland's offensive woes continued, but they were able to grab an early lead for the second time in the series, manufacturing the game's first run in the third inning off Houston starter Dallas Keuchel.

Yan Gomes laced a line-drive single to center and Jason Kipnis lined a base hit to right to start the inning, both moving up on Francisco Lindor's sacrifice bunt.

Michael Brantley's sacrifice fly to center scored Gomes.

After the Astros tied the game on the first of two solo homers from Springer in the fifth, the Indians responded in the bottom of the inning on Lindor's two-out solo shot.

Cleveland did little after that, managing only three hits over the final four innings and scoring once in the ninth on a wild pitch.

"They pitched very well. They executed," Lindor said of the Astros. "They did very, very well. We live and learn."

Outside of Lindor, who hit .364 (4-for-11) with both of his team's homers and two of four RBIs, there was little production out of a lineup full of All-Stars.

No one struggled more than Jose Ramirez, who went hitless in 11 at-bats and is 2-for-31 with one RBI in his last eight postseason games.

"Jose's had a tough last month," manager Terry Francona said. "When you're not feeling great at the plate, this isn't exactly the recipe to get out of it, facing (Justin) Verlander and (Gerrit) Cole and those guys. They're pretty good."

Since winning Game 6 of the 1997 World Series, the Indians have lost nine straight elimination games, the longest streak in the major league history.

They've qualified for the playoffs in four of Francona's six years as manager, but Cleveland's 70-year world championship drought lives on.

"I'm glad we've had a chance," Francona said of his team's postseason appearances. "If you keep giving yourself a chance, at some point, you believe you'll break through. We haven't been good enough to this point. It is frustrating for sure. I think there's a lot of teams that would like to be in this situation, but when you come up short, you take stock and try to do better."

"It's tough to swallow, but you've got to keep grinding, keep it going for next year," Clevinger said. "We definitely still have that core of a team that we know is going to be here and we know we're going to be able to compete. We were a special group. We just didn't really put the pieces together when we needed to."

TRIBE NOTES Indians notes: Terry Francona sticks with struggling Jason Kipnis in center field for Game 3

Chris Assenheimer | **The Chronicle-Telegram** Published on Oct. 8, 2018 | Updated 6:24 a. m.

CLEVELAND — Despite his offensive struggles over the first two games of the Division Series and Astros left-hander Dallas Keuchel on the mound in Game 3, manager Terry Francona stuck with left-handed hitting Jason Kipnis in center field Monday.

The statistics said Kipnis' potential replacements, Greg Allen or Rajai Davis, wouldn't fare much better. Davis is 0-for-20 in his career off Keuchel and Allen produced only a .448 OPS off lefties during the regular season, while Kipnis was at .646.

"Kip's faced this guy a bunch," Francona said of Kipnis, who went hitless in the first two games of the series striking out five times in six at-bats, but entered Monday owning a lifetime .292 (7-for-24) against Keuchel. "I'd like to not get too right-handed against this guy. I think we wanna kinda go middle of the road.

"To me, it would have just been change for the sake of change and that doesn't help."

Facing elimination, Francona did tinker with his lineup, replacing Melky Cabrera with Brandon Guyer in right field and moving Edwin Encarnacion to first base, with Yandy Diaz replacing Yonder Alonso in the batting order at designated hitter.

Tip of the cap

Francona gave much of the credit for Cleveland's offensive struggles over the first two games to Houston's strong-armed starting pitchers Justin Verlander and Gerrit Cole.

The duo limited the Indians to three runs on six hits, striking out a combined 19 batters.

"I mean, they are two really talented pitchers," Francona said, when asked if his hitters could have made adjustments. "They were on their game and I mean you can always say, 'I wish we would have done this,' but I mean, they were pretty overwhelming. At the time you're competing, you don't ever think that, because Frankie (Lindor) hit a home run (in Game 2). But when you look back, they were really good."

Checking in

Center fielder Leonys Martin wasn't with the Indians during the Division Series as he recuperates from a life-threatening illness that ended his season shortly after being acquired at the trade deadline. But he offered encouragement on social media Monday, posting a picture of himself in an Indians jersey on Twitter and tweeting, "Let's do this today guys, one at (a) time #RallyTogether #letsgotribe #Indians."

"He's not really comfortable with being here, but he's been in communication with everybody and I think that's best for his sake," Francona said.

Francona said Martin, who is under control through 2019, was doing well health-wise and he expects him to be ready for spring training in March.

"He's healing so fast that I think it's surprising the doctors, like how quickly his heart has come back," Francona said.

Cleveland strong

Browns coach Hue Jackson opened a conference call Monday by wishing the Indians well in Game 3.

"We're all pulling for them," Jackson told reporters. "Rally together. Let's get the Indians a win today."

Roundin' third

The Indians entered Monday with a 56-52 postseason record all-time, the fifth-best mark in the American League since 1901 and the ninth-highest winning percentage (.519) in the majors.

Cleveland is made its 10th appearance in the ALDS, which is the third-most in the AL behind New York (21) and Boston (13).

Former Indians slugger Travis Hafner threw out the ceremonial first pitch.

CC Sabathia let infielder Robbie Alomar call pitches in his first ALDS start

Ted Berg, USA TODAY Sports Published 5:57 p.m. ET Oct. 8, 2018

Yankees pitcher CC Sabathia addressed the media Monday in advance of his scheduled start in Game 4 of the ALDS on Tuesday, and a reporter asked the veteran lefty what he could remember from his first-ever postseason outing with the Cleveland Indians when he was only 21 years old in 2001.

"You know what I remember about that game?" Sabathia said. "Me and (catcher) Einar Diaz couldn't get on the same page with pitches. I was kind of all over the place in the game."

"Robbie Alomar came to me in the dugout after the second inning and said, 'Don't shake off Einar anymore the rest of the game. I'm calling the pitches from second base.' He was calling pitches from second base, giving them to Einar, and that's what I was throwing."

Roberto Alomar with the Cleveland Indians in 2001 (AP Photo/The Repository, Scott Heckel)

With help from his Hall of Fame second baseman, Sabathia allowed two runs over six innings and earned the win in Cleveland's 17-2 victory over the Mariners in Game 3 of that year's ALDS. The Indians would lose the series to the 116-win Seattle club.

Now 38, Sabathia will make his 23rd career postseason start on Tuesday against the Red Sox in the Bronx. At the same media session, he reiterated plans to return to pitch in 2019 regardless of the Yankees' postseason fate.

Fall failures: Indians swept, ousted early in October again

Associated Press

CLEVELAND -- The master plan was for Trevor Bauer to be Cleveland's secret weapon, the October surprise.

But that idea, and just about everything else the Indians tried, was tossed away.

Bauer's two throwing errors in Monday's seventh inning helped Houston rally for three runs, and the Astros overwhelmed the Indians 11-3 in Game 3 to complete a surprising sweep in the best-of-five American League Division Series.

After waiting months for a chance at redemption from blowing a 2-0 lead and losing to the New York Yankees in last year's ALDS, the Indians fell flat in the fall once again.

The Astros were in high gear in their sweep of the Indians in the ALDS, with pitching that was suffocating and hitting that was relentless. "Once we hit the postseason," manager AJ Hinch said, "our guys really, really turned it on."

October orbit: Astros advance with 11-3 win, sweep Indians

The Houston Astros advanced to the AL Championship Series for the second straight year, completing a division-round sweep of Cleveland on Monday with an 11-3 win in Game 3 helped by two key throwing errors from Indians reliever Trevor Bauer.

And the majors' longest World Series title drought has aged to 71.

"We were just outplayed," said center fielder Jason Kipnis, who was moved from his normal spot at second for the second year in a row. "I wish it weren't that simple. It just seems from top to bottom we were outscouted, outpitched, outcoached a little bit. They really did just a fantastic job over there of being ready and prepared before the series.

"I don't think we were underprepared, they just went out and executed and played the way you need to play to win."

The Indians were inept across the board.

They batted a collective .144, with All-Star Jose Ramirez continuing his postseason slump by going hitless in 11 at-bats. He's now batting .064 (2-for-31) over the past two playoffs, hardly numbers worthy of an MVP-caliber player.

Josh Donaldson, whose acquisition was supposed to put the Indians over the top, didn't get his first hit until the ninth inning of Game 3, and the Indians were outscored 21-6 in the three-game blowout.

But pitching, and more precisely Cleveland's flawed bullpen, was the main reason why the club watched a third straight team celebrate on its field before soaking the visitors' locker room at Progressive Field.

For months, the Indians managed to work around their bullpen issues, which were exacerbated by injuries. But when it mattered most, the same problems popped up again.

Andrew Miller, the star of Cleveland's 2016 postseason run, was never himself after the left-hander spent three stints on the disabled list for hamstring, knee and shoulder issues.

Miller wasn't charged with a run in his two appearances, but he retired only one batter, walked three and gave up a go-ahead, two-run double in the sixth inning of Game 2.

"There were certainly times it was a grind," said the 33-year-old, who is almost certain to sign elsewhere as a free agent. "Missing time was the hardest part for me. I felt like I was ready to go when the season wound down and I was in a good spot. There were certainly pitches that I didn't execute in the series.

"We tried to script things as best we could for me personally and for other guys on the team as well to be as sharp and as ready as we could for the playoffs. When the games started, obviously, it wasn't good enough."

Bauer, who was having a Cy Young Award-worthy season before his leg was broken by a line drive in August, absorbed the brunt of Cleveland's relief issues.

Manager Terry Francona chose to use him in a relief role, mostly because it was his best option with both Miller and closer Cody Allen struggling.

Bauer pitched in Games 1 and 2, and entered Game 3 with the Indians clinging to a 2-1 lead in the seventh. But the right-hander made two throwing errors, one on a pickoff throw and the other on a comebacker he should have turned into an inning-ending double play.

Instead, the Astros scored three runs and wound up plating 10 in their final three at-bats to put a bow on the blowout.

Bauer accepted the role, but it wasn't the one he envisioned having.

"I executed pretty well pitchwise," he said. "Obviously didn't execute defensively. But it is what it is, man. That was my role. Tito and I and a couple other guys had a meeting in Chicago towards the end of the year. I let them know what I had to say and they let me know what they had to say. I told them when I leave this room, 'I'm 100 percent bought in on my role.' That's what I did. I left that room and got ready to pitch out of the bullpen. It is what it is."

And it is going to be another long winter for the Indians, who could look drastically different next season with Miller, Allen and All-Star Michael Brantley all eligible for free agency.

"We tried. It's tough," Miller said. "There's probably a million things you can point to why we didn't win three games. It's tough. It's one of those things. You take the hand you're dealt and make the most out of it. Unfortunately, it wasn't enough for us."

Astros kick into extra gear in dominating sweep of Indians

Pat McManamon

CLEVELAND -- With efficiency and authority.

That's the way the Houston Astros handled the Cleveland Indians in a three-game sweep of the American League Division Series. After Monday's 11-3 victory, the defending World Series champions now have a few days before they play either Boston or the Yankees in the next round.

The Astros dominated the series as convincingly as a sweep would indicate. Their pitching staff held the Indians to 13 hits and a .144 batting average. Their hitters hit .327 with eight home runs.

George Springer celebrates his second homer with teammate Tony Kemp. Gregory Shamus/Getty Images

The Astros did the big things better; they also did the little things better. Their pitching was suffocating, their hitting relentless. In the deciding Game 3, they scored 11 runs while also leaving 12 on base.

"There is an extra gear that our guys have," manager AJ Hinch said. "And once we hit the postseason, it looks like, as of right now, that our guys really, really turned it on."

Houston tied an American League record by hitting a home run in 12 consecutive postseason games going back to last season. George Springer had two home runs in the deciding game, giving him seven in his past seven postseason games.

According to Elias Sports research, Springer is only the fourth player in Major League Baseball history to achieve that feat, joining Carlos Beltran (2004), Reggie Jackson (1977-78) and Lou Gehrig (1928-32).

The master plan was for Trevor Bauer to be Cleveland's secret weapon, the October surprise. But the starter couldn't solve the Indians' bullpen issues in the ALDS sweep by Houston.

Springer was unaware of the statistic as he spoke while teammates hooted and hollered and sprayed bubbly behind him. Shown the information on a phone screen via a tweet from ESPN Stats & Information, Springer didn't blink.

"I'll take it," he said. "Those are pretty prestigious names to be around. It's all great, but this is what it's about."

He then nodded toward the party behind him.

"It's about our team," he said. "It's about the organization. It's about our city. So I'm happy to contribute."

Springer said he might appreciate that home run stat "in 20 years, yeah, when I'm done playing."

It sounds corny until the Astros are seen up close. They play together, they play hard and they play the right way. Jose Altuve put it this way: "Play one game at a time and stay humble."

"Nobody wants to be the hero, or everybody wants to be the hero; I don't know which one," starting pitcher Justin Verlander said, a large cigar in his right hand. "Honestly, everybody's OK with whoever else is the hero. It's amazing."

The Astros also exploited a problem the Indians were aware was a concern when the postseason started: a leaky bullpen. Manager Terry Francona decided to use Trevor Bauer as a wild card of sorts. Andrew Miller, so dominant two years ago, struggled in two games (three walks

in one-third of an inning). As did former closer Cody Allen (54.00 ERA after giving up six runs in one inning). Bauer had two errors in one inning Monday. Cleveland's top four relief pitchers -- Bauer, Miller, Allen and Brad Hand -- gave up 11 runs in 6½ innings.

"Not a lot of things went the way we hoped," Francona said.

"We make you throw strikes," Hinch said. "But we aren't afraid to ambush you. That creates a little bit of a dilemma from Pitch 1 for a reliever."

Houston's pitching meant that any mistake an Indians pitcher made was magnified. Jose Ramirez was 0-for-11 in the series, and the quartet of Michael Brantley, Edwin Encarnacion, Josh Donaldson and Ramirez were a combined 4-for-42 (.095).

No team has repeated as World Series champion since the Yankees won three in a row from 1998 through 2000. The Astros have one small preference moving forward as they try to defend their title.

"The only thing I would like is in the playoffs it's really big to have home-field advantage," Altuve said. "So if we could start playing at home it would be better for us. It's not because I prefer playing either team; it doesn't matter who we play. We're going to go out there and try to win. I respect the Yankees and Boston, two of the best teams around.

"But if you ask me I would like to start at home."

Houston won 103 games during the season, Boston 108 and the Yankees 100. Houston would get home field if the Yankees win their series against the Red Sox.

"Our guys have an uncanny ability to focus on the day," Hinch said. "Whether that's at the beginning of the spring, into the season when we were pushed by our division, the A's, into entering a playoff series with all the expectations, the target on our back.

"We're the reigning world champs, and we really have a good ability to show up for the day."

Indians 'breathing' and tweak lineup for Game 3 of ALDS

The Associated Press

CLEVELAND (AP) -- Indians manager Terry Francona found a simple way to sum up his team's tenuous state this October.

And he channeled Yogi Berra to do it.

"As long as we're still breathing, we're still breathing," Francona said before Monday's critical Game 3 against the Houston Astros. "We just don't have a lot of margin for error."

With his club down 2-0 and batting only .100 (6 for 60) so far in the series and facing left-hander Dallas Keuchel in Game 3, Francona juggled his lineup by starting right-handed hitters Yandy Diaz at designated hitter and Brandon Guyer in right field. Also, Edwin Encarnacion was switched from DH and play first base, replacing left-handed Yonder Alonso.

The Indians were dominated in Games 1 and 2 by Astros fireballers Justin Verlander and Gerrit Cole. Cleveland has had some success against Keuchel, beating him on May 19 in Houston. The Indians scored three runs in the first inning and chased Keuchel after in five innings.

In his second matchup against Cleveland on May 25, he allowed two runs and eight hits in six innings.

Astros manager A.J. Hinch made two switches, starting Brian McCann behind the plate and using Tony Kemp as his DH instead of Tyler White, who served that role in the first two games.

Francona knows all about overcoming daunting odds in October.

In 2004, his Boston Red Sox rallied from a 3-0 deficit to beat the New York Yankees in the ALCS and eventually win their first World Series title since 1918. Last season, the Indians led the ALDS 2-0 before the Yankees stormed back to win the series.

Francona said there's no secret recipe to a comeback.

"You can philosophize about it however you want," he said. "There's different ways of looking at it. We don't want to go home yet, so in order for that to happen, we gotta win today. OK, that's the best thing we can do is channel our energy into finding a way to win today.

"And, from my point of view, some of that is eliminating the noise that comes with being down 0-2. That's part of it. Everybody's got a reason and this and that. You gotta try to eliminate that and know that, be confident enough in what you're doing that, 'Hey, this is what puts our team in the best position,' and stay with it."
