

Now warming up: Lindor, Tribe sizzle in sweep

By Jordan Bastian MLB.com @MLBastian

CLEVELAND -- Indians manager Terry Francona did not have to ask if Francisco Lindor wanted to hit leadoff this season. During the spring, the Tribe's energetic shortstop brought it up himself, explaining that he wanted the responsibility of setting the tone.

On Thursday night, Lindor did precisely that in support of Trevor Bauer's strong start, launching a leadoff home run to help awaken the Indians' offense in a 9-3 rout of the Tigers at Progressive Field. Cleveland had maintained hope that its offense would warm with the weather, and Lindor led the way in backing up that belief.

"He's played with a ton of enthusiasm and energy," Francona said. "And he knows we need that from him. Not only him, but everybody else will heat up."

On the warmest night in Cleveland this season, Lindor put away the ski mask he had been wearing on the field of late and opened the first inning with a nine-pitch battle against Detroit starter Michael Fulmer. He watched four pitches and fouled off four more. He saw four-seam fastballs and sinkers. Fulmer threw him sliders and showed off a changeup.

Finally, Lindor sliced a 2-2 two-seamer high over left field, where the ball sailed through the warm air and easily cleared the 19-foot wall. That sparked a two-run first inning which was followed by a four-run second (capped off by a two-run shot from Jose Ramirez). Three more in the fourth sent Fulmer to the showers.

"It felt great," Lindor said of starting the Tribe's 15-hit attack. "The whole at-bat I was feeling good. I was working the count. I was trying to get a good pitch to hit. He threw me his fastball, his changeup, his slider, every pitch he has. So, my teammates were aware of every pitch he had that day and what they were doing. Overall, it was a happy at-bat for me."

The Indians scored just 10 combined runs in the first five games of the homestand, while the players took the field with hand warmers and extra headgear, and fought through near-freezing temperatures. When the first-pitch temperature climbed north of 50 degrees on Wednesday, Cleveland answered with five runs. On Thursday, the lineup thrived in the 74-degree weather.

Inside Cleveland's clubhouse, the players knew it was only a matter of time before the bats turned a corner.

"[It was] great for all of them," Bauer said. "It's nice pitching from ahead and having a comfortable lead as well. Nice on the pitching side, nice on the hitting side and nice for team morale. I don't think any one of them doubted that we were going to hit like this."

While Fulmer allowed a career-high nine runs (six earned) in three-plus innings, Bauer logged seven innings for the Tribe. The Indians right-hander allowed two runs on seven hits in the win, which gave Cleveland's rotation a 1.25 ERA in 50 1/3 innings over the past seven games at home.

"Awesome. They're doing what they do best," Lindor said of the pitchers. "They're competing day in and day out. They're helping us. They're giving us a chance to win and that's very important. That's all we ask for."

New life for Brantley: In the fourth inning, Michael Brantley popped up a 3-2 pitch from Chad Bell, sending it high into foul territory on the third-base side. Tigers third baseman Jeimer Candelario drifted over and camped under the popup, but botched the catch for an error. Given a second chance, Brantley then drove a pitch from Bell to the wall in right for an RBI double to give Cleveland a 9-1 lead.

Bauer's escape: Bauer ran into trouble in the second inning, when he allowed a single to Victor Martinez before later issuing a walk (JaCoby Jones) and hitting a batter (Jose Iglesias) with two outs to load the bases. Bauer then used a 1-1 curve to induce an inning-ending fielder's choice groundout off the bat of Dixon Machado, preserving the Tribe's 2-0 advantage at the time.

SOUND SMART

The win was the 11th in a row for the Indians against Detroit. In each those victories, Cleveland's pitching staff has limited the Tigers to three or fewer runs, posting a 1.00 ERA in 99 innings in that span.

YOU GOTTA SEE THIS

Bradley Zimmer complemented his three-hit showing at the plate with a dynamic diving catch in right-center field. In the seventh, Machado sent a pitch from Bauer over the gap, where Zimmer hustled to cover 66 feet in four seconds, per Statcast™. The center fielder snared the ball from the air with an all-out diving grab. The batted ball had a 45-percent catch probability, making Zimmer's play a four-star catch.

"Boy it's amazing, and I had a great view of that," Francona said. "I never thought he wasn't going to catch it. That's probably not fair to him."

"He's as advertised; a really good player. He's all over the field. He covers a lot of ground. He's got a great arm. Offensively, he's up there hacking. If you throw a first-pitch fastball, you have to believe it has a good chance to get whacked."

--Tigers manager Ron Gardenhire, on Lindor

UP NEXT Right-hander Mike Clevinger is slated to start for the Tribe on Friday in a 7:10 p.m. ET tilt against the Blue Jays at Progressive Field. Over the 2017-18 seasons, Clevinger has gone 12-4 with a 2.63 ERA in 23 outings as a starting pitcher. Toronto will send Marcus Stroman to oppose him.

Benson among top prospect performers

By Mike Rosenbaum MLB.com @GoldenSombbrero

• Class A Lake County had its share of offensive standouts in its walk-off loss against Dayton, as Indians No. 7 prospect Will Benson and Oscar Gonzalez (No. 18) both collected multiple hits including a home run. Benson's three-run shot in the first inning put the Captains ahead early, while Gonzalez added to the lead with a solo shot in the third. The two players are batting .318 and .333 this season, respectively, and they've both gone deep twice in their first seven games.

Covering the Bases: Game 13 by Jordan Bastian

FIRST: We have reached a point where incredible diving catches from Bradley Zimmer are just expected.

Consider the seventh inning on Thursday night. Dixon Machado sent a pitch from Trevor Bauer to deep right field. It was the kind of arcing line drive that often finds the grass and leads to a double. And, if that were the result, no one would raise an eyebrow.

Inside the Indians' home dugout, which is situated along the third-base line at Progressive Field, manager Terry Francona stays at the end closest to home plate. There is a pole with a bicycle-style seat attached, giving Tito a great vantage point of the field.

When the ball left Machado's bat...

"I never thought he wasn't going to catch it," Francona said. "That's probably not fair to him."

According to Statcast, Zimmer needed to cover 65 feet and only had an opportunity time of four seconds. The batted ball had a catch probability of 45 percent. The center fielder sprinted to his left—registering a Sprint Speed of 28.5 feet/second—and used an all-out dive to pluck the baseball from the air before it hit the green.

<https://medium.com/media/a5b669efba2ff197310df8ccf5b86ce4/href>

Here's a look at the play graphically:

Statcast rated that a four-star catch and Zimmer made it look easy.

"It's amazing," Francona said.

Now, the play came when Cleveland had a 9–1 advantage, so it wasn't critical to the outcome of the game. It was nonetheless impressive, but we've seen Zimmer do this plenty of times by now and so have his teammates.

Francisco Lindor, who has a locker next to Zimmer in the clubhouse, was even non-chalant about the play when it came up after the game.

"That was pretty cool. It was fun. It was fun to watch him," said Lindor, who then quickly changed the subject. "But, I like how he stayed on both breaking balls and went the other way. That shows that he's back at his best."

Yes, Zimmer also joined in the night's offensive outpouring with three hits, including two singles on sliders against left-hander Chad Bell. Entering Thursday, Zimmer was batting .215 with a .354 slugging on sliders over the 2017–18 seasons.

This seems like a good time to remind not to take things for granted.

When visiting writers come to Cleveland and see Lindor pull off a jaw-dropping play at short, we'll hear talk about it. For anyone who watches the Indians regularly, it's a common sight. Similarly, Clevelanders are spoiled to get to see Corey Kluber pitch. Out-of-towners rave at the pitch movement and strikeouts, while the locals wonder what's wrong with Kluber if he doesn't strike out 10 batters and log at least seven innings.

Zimmer is reaching that level with his play in center field. Incredible diving catch? Yawn. Been here, seen that.

SECOND: After Wednesday's win, reporters caught up with Indians hitting coach Ty Van Burkleo to discuss the lineup's recent struggles. VanBo, as he is affectionately called by the players and coaches, expressed optimism based on the underlying data.

"And, as the weather warms up," Van Burkleo said, "I think it's going to get better."

It's pretty much common sense that production in baseball increases with the temperature. There have actually been studies done on the matter, if you're interested in reading about that. But, let's just look at the very small sample of the past seven days for Cleveland.

Date: First-pitch temperature/CLE team SLG that day

Friday: 41 degrees/.200

Saturday: 34 degrees/.219

Sunday: 32 degrees/.241

Monday: 33 degrees/.308

Tuesday: 40 degrees/.370
Wednesday: 54 degrees/.353
Thursday: 74 degrees/.600

Yay, science!

"It's hard enough to hit" Van Burkleo. "You've just got to keep the frustration out of it when we do [struggle]. As it warms up, your muscles fire better. You just feel better as an athlete. You feel like you can move better. You don't have to wear as much heavy clothing that can make you feel stiff."

Over the first five games of this homestand, all batters (Cleveland and otherwise) posted a .500 average and 1.625 on batted balls with a 100+ mph exit velocity and a launch angle between 20–30 degrees. That sounds fantastic until you see the expected numbers on those same batted balls: .819 and 2.855.

Well, during Thursday's win, Earth finally cooperated. Balls off that bat that looked like home runs or balls off the wall or balls to the gap were exactly that (unless Zimmer could get there). One need look no further than the first batter of the game.

On the ninth pitch of a leadoff at-bat against Michael Fulmer, Lindor sliced a two-seamer over left. Instead of being encased in ice and plummeting to its doom, the baseball sailed into the bleacher seats. It had an exit velocity of 105.5 mph and a 29-degree launch angle. It looked like a home run off the bat, and then it was a home run.

"The offense has been dealing with the cold," Bauer said. "When it's cold like that, not only does the ball [not] travel, but it favors the pitcher. The pitcher can do whatever—sit by a heater in-between innings. The guys on offense are out there cold, freezing. Then, they have to go try to get loose and then go out there to hit."

THIRD: And hit, they did.

In the first dozen games of the season, no Indians batter had enjoyed a three-hit game. Two (Zimmer and Jason Kipnis) did so on Thursday. In those 12 games, there were 10 multi-hit performances. Thursday's win had four out of the Tribe nine.

Lindor's first plate appearance of the night set the tone.

"We did a good job. Frankie has a terrific at-bat to start the game," Francona said. "He had [nine] pitches and then he hits that home run to left field. That's a good way for us to start and it's a tough way for a pitcher to start."

Lindor finished 2-for-4 with a double, homer and three RBIs out of the leadoff spot for the Tribe. Kipnis had two singles, a double and knocked in two. Jose Ramirez belted a two-run homer in the second. Michael Branley had a pair of hits, including an RBI double. And on it went.

In all, Cleveland churned out 15 hits.

"It's huge," Lindor said of the hits finally falling. "I don't care how hard you work and how tough you are mentally, whenever you have results, it helps. It helps you to carry on with your day and it puts a smile on everyone's faces. I'm happy we finally gave some runs to the pitching staff."

HOME: Bauer continued the rotation's great run on this homestand. It's actually fairly remarkable that, while the offense was hitting at an MLB-worst level, Cleveland was still collecting wins on the strength of its pitching and defense.

"I was joking around the other night," Bauer said with a smirk. "I said, 'I think at some point we're going to have to find a way to win a game that we get no-hit in.' I think it's a testament to the team as a whole that that is even a possibility."

Bauer went seven innings and allowed two runs. That actually raised the rotation's ERA to 1.25 in 50.1 innings over the past seven games. The righty struck out seven, walked two, hit a batter and scattered seven hits.

Bauer's assessment: "Happy with the results for sure, but I know I can be sharper."

Francona's assessment: "It didn't seem like he was real happy when he came off the field, but I thought he did a real good job. Sometimes when he thinks he's struggling, maybe I don't."

That is also another example of the expectations that Bauer places on his own shoulders. Good enough isn't good enough.

Through three starts, though, Bauer has turned in a 2.25 ERA with 21 strikeouts against seven walks in 20 innings. He's not where he wants to be yet—Bauer says his new slider has been inconsistent so far—but the results to date have been strong.

"He's getting better," Francona said. "I think he's improving, which is what we get excited about

Clippers 2, Bulls 0 | Adam Plutko's gem highlights sparkling home opener

By Mark Znidar

After having played their first six games in Indianapolis and Louisville, and with a lot of new faces on the roster, the Clippers had every right to feel like strangers in their own ballpark for the home opener on Thursday night.

But there was no place like home for right-hander Adam Plutko as he gave up one hit and no walks and struck out eight in seven innings in a snappy 2-0 victory over the Durham Bulls in 2 hours, 14 minutes at Huntington Park.

Jeff Beliveau struck out three and didn't allow a hit the final two innings to get the save.

"It was a good night, a real good night, and it came together from a lot of hard work and tinkering," Plutko said. "Richie Shaffer made a heck of a play in right field – I thought it was gone (a warning-track fly ball in the fourth)."

Plutko was upset after walking three batters and giving up four runs in five innings his first start against Indianapolis, but the temperature that night was in the 30s and he is coming off hip surgery.

Durham's base runners came in the first when first baseman Mike Napoli dropped a popup by Jake Bauers, and in the second when Joe McCarthy led off with a single just out of the reach of shortstop Yu Chang.

What did Plutko work on between starts?

"I felt my shoulders were a little flat and I tried to get more of an angle on my pitches," he said. "(Pitching coach) Steve Karsay worked with me a lot. It just clicked yesterday during my day of work. I felt good. I got quick outs and the defense had my back all night."

Manager Chris Tremie liked what he saw of Plutko.

"He commanded his fastball and didn't walk anybody — he got ahead in the counts," Tremie said. "It was a great opening night. You couldn't ask for more with the weather and being back home."

The Clippers scored a run in the first when Greg Allen led off with a double to the wall in right, went to third on a groundout and scored on a groundout by Francisco Mejia.

The second run scored in the second inning when Shaffer walked with one out and scored on a triple to the wall in the right field corner by Brandon Barnes.

Plutko left after 85 pitches. Sixty-three were strikes.

Durham got no break from Beliveau, a 5-foot-11 left-hander who has had big-league stays with the Chicago Cubs, Tampa Bay and Toronto. He did not waste time getting the sign from the catcher and throwing.

"We are always told to work quickly," Beliveau said. "That keeps the infielders on their toes. When you work slower your mind is kind of spinning. When you are going well, you just want to get the ball and keep going."

Beliveau enjoyed the warm night.

"It snowed for the opener in Indy and got a little bit of warmth in Louisville, but this was like the Caribbean," he said. "Everyone was in short sleeves."

mznidar@dispatch.comMLB | Lindor drives in 3 runs, Indians top Tigers 9-3

By Brian Dulik, Associated Press

CLEVELAND (AP) — Francisco Lindor sparked Cleveland's slumbering offense with one big swing. Then he kept going.

Lindor hit his fourth career leadoff homer, drove in three runs and scored three times, and the Indians beat Detroit 9-3 on Thursday night for their 11th consecutive victory against the Tigers.

Jose Ramirez also homered for the Indians, who own the worst team batting average in the majors at .189. Jason Kipnis and Bradley Zimmer had three hits apiece.

Cleveland set season high for runs and hits with 15 while finishing off a four-game series sweep.

"I don't care how hard you work and how tough you are mentally, whenever you have results, it helps," said Lindor, who entered the night hitting .184 with one RBI. "This is huge. It's huge. It puts a smile on everyone's faces. I'm happy we finally gave some runs to the pitching staff."

Trevor Bauer (1-1) tossed seven innings of two-run ball in his first win over Detroit since May 5, 2016. The right-hander was handed a 6-0 lead in the second inning.

"We all know this offense is going to hit because there is way too much talent for it to struggle all season," Bauer said. "I joked the other night that we're going to have to find a way to win a game that we get no-hit in, but I think it's a testament to the team that it's even a possibility.

"It's a team game, so if you win 1-0 or 10-9, it doesn't matter, but it was nice pitching from ahead and having a comfortable lead." Lindor began his night with a nine-pitch at-bat against Michael Fulmer (1-2), resulting in his drive into the bleachers in left field. He added a two-run double in the second.

Michael Brantley also had two hits for the Indians. Kipnis drove in two runs and Zimmer robbed Dixon Machado of an extra-base hit with a diving catch in center field.

"It all got started because Frankie had a terrific at-bat to start the game," Indians manager Terry Francona said. "That's a good way for us to start and a tough way for a pitcher to start, and we faced a really good pitcher tonight."

Leonys Martin posted his second consecutive three-hit game and scored twice for the Tigers, who have lost 17 of their last 22 games at Progressive Field. Nicholas Castellanos delivered a pair of RBI singles. The Tigers committed three errors in the first four innings, compounding a poor outing by Fulmer. The right-hander was charged with a career-high nine runs, six earned, in three-plus innings.

"My command wasn't there and they were hitting everything," Fulmer said. "No matter where I threw it — mistakes, good pitches — they were all hitting the ball pretty hard."

Tigers right-hander Jordan Zimmermann was in uniform, one day after being struck on the right jaw by a Kipnis line drive. The 31-year-old said he does not have a headache and expects to make his next start Tuesday against Baltimore. Detroit pitching coach Chris Bosio, who fell ill during the series opener, will be away from the team for several weeks with an undisclosed medical condition.

The first-pitch temperature was 74 degrees, more than doubling the 33-degree conditions that the teams played in Monday.

MAKING HISTORY

Tigers first baseman Miguel Cabrera singled in the seventh, tying Hall of Famer Jimmie Foxx for 78th place with 2,646 career hits. Next up for Cabrera, who went 4 of 23 on Detroit's seven-game road trip, is Ted Williams with 2,654.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Indians: LHP Ryan Merritt (left knee sprain) and 3B Gio Urshela (right hamstring strain), who have been on the disabled list since March 29, both played in an extended spring training game in Arizona.

UP NEXT

Tigers: RHP Mike Fiers (1-0, 0.00 ERA) takes on Yankees LHP Jordan Montgomery (0-0, 4.82 ERA) in the opener of a three-game series at Comerica Park.

Indians: RHP Mike Clevinger (1-0, 0.71 ERA), who has never started a game against Toronto, challenges Blue Jays RHP Marcus Stroman (0-1, 8.38 ERA).

By the numbers: Indians prove that it's a little easier to hit when you're not frozen

By T.J. Zuppe 3h ago 2

The jokes are easier to make when you're winning.

Indians starter Trevor Bauer tested that theory Thursday night.

After another impressive outing, Bauer was asked about their ability to win early this season despite little consistent offensive support. He brought some levity to the frustrating topic by introducing a little humor.

"I think at some point we're going to have to find a way to win a game that we get no-hit in," Bauer joked.

A few laughs filled the interview room. After all, most good jokes have some element of truth to them.

But to his credit, it didn't take long for him to spin it into a positive.

"I think it's a testament to the team as a whole that that is even a possibility," Bauer added.

Throughout the first half of the opening homestand — a stretch which featured just 10 runs of support — the pitchers did their best to navigate the close games, all while understanding that the frigid elements made life difficult on everyone. They were forgiving of their offense, utilizing whatever advantage they held over the opposing hitters.

Somehow, with little margin for error, they kept wins within reach.

Now, with the bats starting to show signs of life in the warmer weather, the Indians have managed to win six of seven on their current homestand. Overall, they've ripped off five in a row. But you don't see the starters demanding credit for the feat. And while Bauer offered a playful jab after the win Thursday, he believes more offensive outbursts are on the horizon.

"It's a team game," Bauer said. "So, if the pitchers can pick up the offense early while they deal with (some struggles), we know that in the middle of the season, when we hit a wall in the middle of the summer, when it's just exhausting, before you kind of get your second wind in August and September, they're going to be picking us up and we're going to have to win some games, 9-8.

"It's about winning. If we win 1-0 or 10-9, it doesn't matter."?

Here are the numbers behind their 9-3 rout of the Tigers Thursday night.

74 degrees: The temperature at first pitch. The ski masks and long sleeves were absent. Visible puffs of air, gone. Feeling returned to finger tips. Dugout heaters earned a rest. Compared to the frigid temps earlier in the homestand, 74 felt downright tropical. And while weather wasn't the only factor that limited the Tribe's offense throughout the first five games at Progressive Field, the club's 14-run outburst the past two games probably isn't a complete coincidence.

9: That's how many pitches Francisco Lindor saw in his leadoff at-bat in the bottom of the first. Lindor smacked the final one in the sequence over the left-field wall for a leadoff homer, his first deep fly of the season. "He threw me his fastball, his changeup, his slider, every pitch he has," Lindor said. "So, my teammates were aware of every pitch he had that day and what they were doing. Overall, it was a happy at-bat for me."

Terry Francona said this spring that he had no issue with Lindor's desire to serve as the leadoff hitter, but he did demand that the switch-hitter set the tone for the entire club. While the numbers haven't been pretty for the entire group, Francona was pleased with Lindor's day (2-for-3, 3 runs, 3 RBI).

"I think he's played with a ton of enthusiasm and energy, and he knows we need that from him," Francona said.

97.5 mph: You can probably look at the box score and reach a pretty solid conclusion about the Tribe's approach Thursday against Michael Fulmer. But if you're the type of person who enjoys a little context to back the nine-run, eight-hit outing against Indians hitters, this stat's for you.

The righty yielded an average exit velocity of 97.5 mph during the start, 10 mph faster than his average since the start of last season. Twelve of the balls struck by Tribe hitters registered an exit velocity above 95 mph.

Not bad, considering Fulmer had allowed just one run in 13 1/3 innings entering the game.

45 percent: The catch probability on Bradley Zimmer's diving play in the seventh inning, according to MLB Statcast. The lunge, grab and slide by the speedy center fielder stole extra-bases from Dixon Machado. In addition to the impressive catch, Zimmer finished with three hits and a run scored.

"Boy it's amazing," Francona said. "And I had a great view of that. I never thought he wasn't going to catch it. That's probably not fair to him."

That thought was partially echoed by Lindor, who was seemingly more impressed by the left-handed hitter's opposite field attack at the plate.

"It was fun to watch him," Lindor said. "But, I like how he stayed on both breaking balls and went the other way. That shows that he's back at his best."

70.4 percent: That was Bauer's strike percentage Thursday night. He logged seven innings, surrendering two runs on seven hits, working around two walks and a hit by pitch. Bauer also struck out seven.

The increased effort to throw more strikes wasn't by accident.

"I feel like my stuff is good, probably better than it's ever been, this year," Bauer said. "If I can just throw it in the zone more, not really worry about locating it perfectly, but throwing it in the zone more often, work ahead of guys, that's going to play more in my favor, even if it gets put in play."

Living with more contact, Bauer allowed an average exit velocity of 80.8 mph. Overall, he's posted a 2.25 ERA and 2.95 FIP in his first 20 innings, walking seven and recording 21 strikeouts.

"Early contact is welcome as long as it's not real hard," Francona said. "But I think he's getting better. I think he's improving, which is what we get excited about."

Indians 9, Tigers 3: 12 Walk-Off Thoughts on Trevor Bauer's on-going adjustments and Francisco Lindor breaking through in the leadoff spot

By Ryan Lewis

Here are 12 Walk-Off Thoughts after the Indians' 9-3 win against the Detroit Tigers Thursday night.

1. Trevor Bauer, he of the perfectionist guild and one of his own biggest critics, will most likely always find at least something to improve upon from each start. That is surely the case early this season as he continues the early progressions of his newly-designed slider.
2. Bauer effectively went to the lab this offseason to develop that slider. He said late in the spring that he felt it was at the same level as his fastball and his curveball, his two best pitches. He's often had an expansive arsenal of pitches, but adding one to the level of his fastball/curveball combination was a way to consistently find the next tier as a pitcher that he briefly found late last season.
3. According to Baseball Savant, Bauer threw 18 sliders in Thursday night's quality start in which he allowed two runs on seven hits and struck out seven. He threw his fastball and curveball 37 and 38 times, respectively. He put in hours upon hours developing the slider over the winter and then had this spring to get the feel for it as much as possible. That aspect of it, though, is still a work in progress.
4. Bauer threw the slider 11 times in his second start this year, against the Kansas City Royals and had an average exit velocity on the pitch of 88.9 mph. Thursday night, he had an average exit velocity of 76.1 on his 18 sliders—and three swinging strikes in both cases. And while he didn't allow any hits on that pitch, he also wasn't too pleased with how it felt coming out of his hand.
5. Said Bauer: "My slider has been super inconsistent, so I haven't been able to finish bats as well as I know I can. I left three or four strikeouts on the table tonight because—with exception of like the sixth inning when I actually had a feel for it again—I didn't have very good feel for it. I probably should have given up a two-run homer to Victor [Martinez] on a bad slider, he just happened to hit it to the deepest corner of the ballpark. You leave strikeouts on the table, then you leave pitches on the table too, because the at-bat doesn't end. Then it's a foul ball, or whatever, then a hit happens or whatever the case may be, then you're five, six, ten pitches deeper into that inning, which limits how many innings you can go. Happy with the results for sure, but I know I can be sharper. I have been, but so far so good."
6. Overall, Bauer has had a strong start to this season to mirror his much-improved second half to 2017, when he posted a 3.01 ERA and went on to start Game 1 of the ALDS (though, of course, there were some contributing factors to that decision). Through three starts, he owns a 2.25 ERA and has struck out 21 hitters in 20 innings. Bauer in the past hasn't been afraid of putting people on base, but it was something that quickly increased his pitch count, and therefore hurt his ability to pitch deeper into games. He's now looking to throw more strikes—he threw 74 in his 105 pitches Thursday night, pounding the zone and working ahead of hitters.
7. Said Bauer: "It's kind of a focus of mine. I feel like my stuff is good, probably better than it's ever been, this year. So if I can just throw it in the zone more, not really worry about locating it perfectly, but throwing it in the zone more often, work ahead of guys, that's going to play more in my favor even if it gets put in play. That holds true for everything but my fastball, so since I've been able to limit the number of fastballs I've thrown, I'm just trying to fill up the zone with off-speed stuff. That's been working. I'll have to locate that stuff better as the season goes on, as hitters see more pitching and get in more of a groove, but so far, so good."
8. Bauer for a long time was in the rotation as a pitcher with a high ceiling but also a fairly low floor. He was one of the key cogs that could have sent the Indians in either direction, perhaps more-so than several other veterans. Last season, things began to click—his traditional statistics greatly varied from the first half to the second half, though some deeper digging reveals that he was pitching at least a bit closer to his average level even as he struggled—and he looked to be giving the Indians another higher-tier starting pitcher to add to Cy Young winner Corey Kluber and Cy Young candidate Carlos Carrasco (along with Danny Salazar when healthy, Josh Tomlin at times and now Mike Clevinger). Bauer is certainly off to a strong start again as the Indians' No. 3 starting pitcher in a rotation that only seems to be getting better. And for Bauer, a consistent season might be the only thing holding him back from the consciousness of baseball as one of the better pitchers in the game.
9. Francisco Lindor said last season that he felt comfortable in the leadoff spot, that he enjoyed being the hitter trying to start the offense. He had success, too, but hadn't yet found his footing in 2018. Thursday night was a different story. Lindor worked a nine-pitch at-bat and belted a solo home run to left field, his first of the season, to begin the bottom of the first. An inning later, he roped a two-run double to right field that put the Indians up 4-0. It illustrated why having such a dangerous hitter sitting at No. 1 can do for the lineup, along with the advantage of ensuring he receives a higher number of at-bats throughout a season.
10. Lindor was one of the five players who entered this series with a better hard-hit percentage this year than last, meaning he was overly due for some regression to the mean (and thus, positive results). It all poured out on Thursday.
11. Said Lindor: "I love it. I love it. I love it. I think it's cool whenever you can get the game going like that. I know it's not going to happen every day, but the day's it does happen and you see guys following up, that's special. That's special. Whether it's a base hit, a home run, a double or a walk and stealing second, that's huge for the team."
12. Added Indians manager Terry Francona: "I think he's played with a ton of enthusiasm and energy, and he knows we need that from him. Not only him, but everybody else will heat up. We faced a really good pitcher tonight but we had some really good at-bats."

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Indians notebook: Former Indians pitching coach Mickey Callaway off to hot start as New York Mets manager

By Ryan Lewis

CLEVELAND: Mickey Callaway in his time in Cleveland garnered a reputation as one of the better pitching coaches in the game. And his managerial career is off to nearly a perfect start.

Callaway this past offseason left the Indians to take over as manager of the New York Mets, a team brimming with pitching talent but one that has dealt with a slew of injuries in recent years and had a disappointing 70-92 season in 2017. It looked like a match made in heaven with Callaway taking over a club boasting pitchers Noah Syndergaard, Jacob deGrom and others.

So far, so good.

The Mets entered Thursday's games with a 10-1 record, the best mark in baseball and 4½ games ahead of the Washington Nationals, expected by most to win the National League East.

Losing a coach to another organization is normal a bitter-sweet situation. And the Indians were happy to welcome back Carl Willis to the organization. But like Kevin Cash in Tampa Bay, or front office types like Derek Falvey in Minnesota, there's always a bit more interest in what's going on with former colleagues.

Of course, everyone is mostly focused on their own clubs, though.

"I just know they're hot," Indians manager Terry Francona said of Callaway and the Mets. "I try to glance up and see, ya know like how Cashy's doing and Mickey, and I know they're doing really well. And ya know what? ... I don't think, regardless of what their record is, I kinda knew Mickey would be successful. He's just so good at what he does, whether it's a pitching coach, manager, he's one of those guys that's pretty gifted. He can, with his skill set, he can do whatever he wants."

Work in progress

The Indians have been introducing top prospect Francisco Mejia to the outfield in Triple-A this season as a way of potentially opening up another route for his promotion to the big leagues.

A switch-hitter who is primarily a catcher, Mejia is one of the better offensive prospects in the league. He was ranked as the No. 20 overall prospect in baseball by Baseball America and the No. 5 prospect in the game by Baseball Prospectus.

The problem is the Indians have two catchers at the major-league level — Yan Gomes and Roberto Perez — who are both under club control for at least the next two seasons, which has created a logjam. The Indians' hope is that Mejia takes to the outfield, which would allow him to reach the majors sooner than he would as only a catcher if a need should arise.

Still, he has to be able to at least play a passable corner outfield to make it work.

"It's a work in progress, which we knew," Francona said. "I don't know that you can go from being a catcher to being a Gold Glove outfielder, I don't think. But as long as he's willing to try it and put the work in, which he is, it just opens up maybe more avenues for him to get to the major leagues."

This is also something that, among other aspects, simply takes time and experience.

"You can take all the drills you want," Francona said. "And he does. But balls off the bat are probably the hardest thing. Your first step, making sure you're going in the right direction. Not coming straight up. But repetition will be the best thing for him."

Akron Beacon Journal LOADED: 04.13.2018

Indians 9, Tigers 3: Indians stay hot, win fifth in a row

By Ryan Lewis

CLEVELAND: The weather is warming, and the Indians' lineup is beginning to find its rhythm.

Free of the icy shackles of the frigid Cleveland weather, the Indians put up their best offensive game of the season, routing the Detroit Tigers 9-3 Thursday night at Progressive Field.

It marked the Indians' fifth consecutive win, completed a four-game sweep of the Tigers and was their 11th consecutive victory over the Tigers dating back to last season. The first-pitch temperature of 74 degrees was also more than 40 degrees warmer than some games earlier this homestand.

The Indians (8-5) piled on Tigers starting pitcher Michael Fulmer for six runs in the first two innings to jump out to a sizable lead. Francisco Lindor led off the bottom of the first inning with a solo home run, his first of the season. With Jason Kipnis on third, Michael Brantley later grounded a ball to first baseman Miguel Cabrera, who threw home to catch Kipnis in a run-down. But catcher John Hicks' throw sailed off Jeimer Candelario's glove and into left field, putting the Indians up 2-0.

Lindor followed up his solo home run in the first with a two-run double to right field in the second inning to make it 4-0. Two batters later, Jose Ramirez hit a two-run home run that appeared to get caught up in the wind — this time in a positive way after numerous fly balls were knocked down during this homestand — and just cleared the right-field wall. It was his third home run of the season.

Lindor had success in the leadoff spot last season, but thus far hadn't yet been able to put together a quality offensive night. That was until Thursday.

"I think he's played with a ton of enthusiasm and energy, and he knows we need that from him," Indians manager Terry Francona said of Lindor. "Not only him, but everybody else will heat up. We faced a really good pitcher tonight but we had some really good at-bats."

Kipnis ended Fulmer's day in the fourth inning with a two-run single, and Brantley added an RBI double to extend the Indians' lead to 9-1.

After the Indians failed to record 10 hits in any of their first 11 games, they have now accomplished that feat twice in a row. Lindor (2-for-4), Kipnis (3-for-4), Brantley (2-for-4) and Bradley Zimmer (3-for-4) all registered multi-hit games.

"Sometimes it's harder to win — doesn't mean you can't," Francona said. "But our pitching and our defense for the most part, tonight we had a couple of errors but our defense has been really good. And our pitching has been really good. So when you score, it's meaningful. That's not a bad way to play."

Indians starting pitcher Trevor Bauer (1-1) allowed two runs on seven hits and two walks and struck out seven in seven innings, bringing his season ERA to 2.25.

"It's nice pitching from ahead and having a comfortable lead as well," Bauer said. "Nice on the pitching side, nice on the hitting side and nice for team morale.

"I don't think any one of them doubted that we were going to hit like this, but when it's not happening and it goes on for a week or two, then the focus like you said is on that. Gets a little bit harder to keep the faith. So, it's good to see it warm up a little bit, then the bats come alive."

Cleveland Indians, Toronto Blue Jays series preview, pitching matchups

By Paul Hoynes

CLEVELAND, Ohio - Here is the preview and pitching matchups for the series between the Blue Jays and Indians that begins Friday.

Where: Progressive Field, Friday through Sunday.

TV/radio: SportsTime Ohio will carry the series. WTAM/1100 and WMMS/FM 100.7 will carry Friday and Saturday's game. WMMS/FM 100.7 will do Sunday's game.

Pitching matchups: RHP Marcus Stroman (0-1, 8.38) vs. RHP Mike Clevinger (1-0, 0.71) Friday at 7:10 p.m.; LHP Jaime Garcia (1-0, 3.18) vs. RHP Corey Kluber (1-1, 1.57) Saturday at 4:10 p.m. and LHP J.A. Happ (2-1, 3.94) vs. RHP Josh Tomlin (0-1, 9.00) at 1:10 p.m.

Series: The Indians went 4-2 against the Blue Jays last year.

Friday: Clevinger has allowed one run in 12 2/3 innings in two starts this season. He's faced the Blue Jays just once, throwing 1 1/3 scoreless innings in a relief appearance.

Stroman is 1-0 with a 2.17 ERA in five games against the Tribe. Edwin Encarnacion is hitting .400 (2-for-5) against him.

Saturday: Kluber, who threw eight scoreless innings with 13 strikeouts in his last start, is 2-3 with a 4.46 ERA against Toronto. Josh Donaldson is hitting .360 (9-for-25) with two homers and six RBI against Kluber.

Garcia, who beat Texas in his last start, is 0-2 with a 5.59 ERA against the Indians. He took both losses last year while pitching for the Yankees. Jose Ramirez is hitting .429 (3-for-7) against Garcia.

Sunday: Josh Tomlin, who threw five scoreless innings in his last start, is 1-1 with a 5.53 ERA against Toronto. Curtis Granderson is hitting .300 (3-for-10) with one homer and two RBI against him.

Happ, with wins over the White Sox and Baltimore in his last two starts, is 3-2 with a 4.19 ERA against the Indians. Francisco Lindor is hitting .556 (5-for-9) with two RBI against Happ.

Team updates: The Indians took a four-game winning streak into Thursday's night's game against the Tigers at Progressive Field. The Blue Jays have won three of their last four games. Justin Smoak is hitting .313 (15-for-48) with a team-high 10 RBI.

Disabled list: Blue Jays - CF Anthony Alford (right hamstring), DH Kendrys Morales (right hamstring), CH Dalton Pompey (right wrist) and SS Troy Tulowitzki (bone spurs both feet) are on the disabled list. Indians - OF Lonnie Chisenhall (right calf), INF Giovanni Urshela (right hamstring), LHP Ryan Merritt (left shoulder), RHP Danny Salazar (right hamstring) and RHP Cody Anderson (right elbow) are on the disabled list.

Next: The Indians travel to Puerto Rico for a two-game series against the Twins starting Tuesday night at Hiram Bithorn Stadium in San Juan.

Cleveland Indians complete sweep of Tigers behind 15 hits, 9 runs and 7 good innings from Trevor Bauer

By Paul Hoynes, cleveland.com

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Now they're just showing off.

The Indians, a night after reaching 10 hits for the first time this season, put together their biggest offensive night on the way to a four-game sweep of the Tigers with a 9-3 victory at Progressive Field.

Francisco Lindor opened the game with a leadoff homer against Michael Fulmer (1-2, 3.86). Jose Ramirez, with the help of a strong wind, added a two-run homer in the second as the Indians ran their winning streak to 11 against the Tigers.

The Indians, who have won five straight overall, finished with 15 hits. Jason Kipnis and Bradley Zimmer had three hits each, the first three-hit games by Indians players this year.

Trevor Bauer pitched seven solid innings to continue an impressive stretch by manager Terry Francona's rotation. The Indians have gone 6-1 on this 10-game homestand with the rotation posting a 1.25 ERA (seven earned runs in 50 1/3 innings).

Bauer (1-1, 2.25) allowed two runs with seven strikeouts and two walks. The Tigers have had their way with Bauer -- he went 0-2 against them last year with a 13.00 ERA -- but he threw strikes Thursday night and kept them off the bases for the most part.

"He walked two and hit a guy and threw a lot of strikes," said Francona. "It didn't seem like he was real happy when he came off the field, but I thought he did a good job."

Terry Francona on Francisco Lindor's lead-off homer, Trevor Bauer's start

"It's kind of a focus of mine," said Bauer, who threw 70 percent of his pitches for strikes. "I feel my stuff is good, probably better than it's ever been, this year. So if I can just throw it in the zone more often, work ahead of guys, that's going to play more in my favor even if the ball gets put in play."

Lindor's blast was his first of the season and the fourth leadoff homer in his career. He hit a 2-2 pitch into the left field bleachers to get the Tribe off and running. Kipnis followed with a double and went to third on a ground out. He scored when catcher John Hicks made an errant throw to third when Kipnis was caught in a rundown on a grounder by Michael Brantley.

It's hardly a coincidence that the rise in offense follows the rise in game-time temperatures. It was 54 degrees on Wednesday night when they reached 10 hits for the first time this season. On Thursday it was 74.

When this series started Monday night, it was 34 degrees.

The Indians put the game away with a four-run second. Lindor doubled home Roberto Perez and Tyler Naquin, who started the inning with consecutive singles against Fulmer. The Tiger ace came into the game with a 0.68 ERA, but allowed nine runs, six earned, in three innings.

Ramirez, after Kipnis grounded out, skied a ball toward right field. When it left the bat, it looked like a pop up, but the wind carried it just over the right field wall for a 6-0 lead. The homer was Ramirez's third of the season.

Something about the Tigers brings the best out of Ramirez. He's hitting .341 (62-for-182) with 11 homers and 32 RBI against them.

Lindor's lead-off homer came on 95 mph fastball. It was the ninth pitch of the at-bat.

"That's a good way for us to start and a tough way for a pitcher to start," said Francona. "He's played with a ton of enthusiasm and energy and he knows we need that from him."

Francisco Lindor talks about homer, helping pitching staff

The Indians made it 9-1 with three more runs in the fourth. The Tigers helped by making two of their three errors for the game in the inning.

Naquin reached base on an error by second baseman Dixon Machado. Zimmer followed with a single and Fulmer hit Lindor to load the bases. Kipnis bounced a two-run single through the right side of the infield to end Fulmer's night.

Chad Bell relieved and should have been out of the inning when he induced a foul pop from Brantley. Third baseman Jeimer Candelario dropped it to give Brantley another chance. Brantley followed with a double off the wall to score Kipnis.

What it means

Miguel Cabrera doubled past first in the seventh inning for the 2,646 hit in his career. He's tied with Jimmy Foxx for 78th place on the all-time list.

Cabrera, who came into the game hitting .330 (230-for-696) with 45 homers and 151 RBI against the Indians in his career, went 2-for-16 in the series.

The pitches

Fulmer threw 72 pitches, 46 (64 percent) for strikes. Bauer threw 105 pitches, 74 (70 percent) for strikes.

Thanks for coming

The Tigers and Indians drew 12,901 to Progressive Field on Thursday night. First pitch was at 6:10 p.m. with a temperature of 74 degrees (that is not a typo).

Next

The Indians open a three-game series against Toronto on Friday night at Progressive Field. Mike Clevinger (1-0, 0.71) will face the Blue Jays and right-hander Marcus Stroman (0-1, 8.38) at 7:30 p.m. SportsTime Ohio, WTAM/1100 and WMMS/FM 100.7 will carry the game.

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It's an issue of trust and 5 other things we learned about the Cleveland Indians on Thursday

By Paul Hoynes

CLEVELAND, Ohio - Manager Terry Francona, over the years, has learned to let his players make some decisions during games. It has not always been easy.

"When I first became a manager, that was one of the hardest things for me, because you want to be in charge," said Francona. "To relinquish, to trust your players enough, I had to grow into that. That was hard."

Trust as in letting Jose Ramirez start a double steal in the fourth inning on Wednesday night against the Tigers. The double steal - Ramirez stealing third, Michael Brantley stealing second - set the table for a four-run inning and a 5-1 victory.

"I don't think you can tell a guy, especially at second base, to steal ... you just can't tell a guy go on a pitch," said Francona.

He said the key to a successful double steal is the trail runner, who has to stay in step with the lead runner, but can't get too aggressive because the lead runner may scramble back if he doesn't get a good jump.

"I'm watching Josie," said Brantley. "You have to make sure he commits. You have to keep your head up."

Said Francona, "The trail runner, that's the hard thing. Say Jose tries to go and he doesn't get a jump. You can't just go on first movement when you're on first base."

No. 1: Tribe's two-game rotation for Puerto Rico series

The Indians, after completing this 10-game homestand against Toronto on Sunday, will travel to Puerto Rico to play the Twins in a two-game series Tuesday and Wednesday at Hiram Bithorn Stadium in San Juan.

Carlos Carrasco will face Minnesota's Kyle Gibson on Tuesday, while Trevor Bauer faces Jose Berrios on Wednesday. Both games will start at 7:10 p.m. Fox Sports 1 will televise Tuesday's game, while ESPN will carry Wednesday's game. WTAM and WMMS will broadcast the series.

No. 2: Jaws of steel

Detroit right-hander Jordan Zimmermann, struck on the right side of the jaw by a line drive Wednesday night, is expected to make his next start. Zimmermann left the game when the Tribe's Jason Kipnis hit him in the jaw with a liner on the seventh pitch of the game.

Zimmermann passed MLB's concussion protocol and X-rays of his jaw were negative.

"He's ready to go, which is pretty amazing," manager Ron Gardenhire told the Associated Press. "He's a very lucky man."

No. 3: Streaking in the Central

The Indians, following their 5-1 victory over the Tigers on Wednesday, have won 14 straight series against AL Central foes. It is the longest streak, according to STATS LLC, since the start of the divisional era in 1969.

Last year the Indians went 50-26 in the AL Central to win their second straight AL Central title. In the last 30 divisional games, Indians pitchers have posted a 1.73 ERA (52 earned runs in 271 innings).

No. 4: If you don't like the weather, just stick around

On Monday, when the Indians and Tigers opened this four-game series, the first-pitch temperature was 33 degrees. On Tuesday, it was 40 degrees followed by 54 on Wednesday and 74 on Thursday.

No. 5: Update on the disabled list

Ryan Merritt (left knee, left shoulder) started a game in extended spring training on Wednesday and pitched well. Infielder Giovanny Urshela played in the game and was expected to report to Class AAA Columbus to begin his rehab assignment. He's recovering from a strained right hamstring.

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Go the distance: Cleveland Indians, Detroit Tigers lineups for Thursday, Game 13

By Paul Hoynes, cleveland.com

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- The complete game is a thing of the past. Every starting pitcher says they want to finish what they start, but it rarely happens anymore.

Effective starting pitchers are so valuable (and expensive) that they are protected by pitch counts and seven and eight-man bullpens. So when a complete game does happen, it should be appreciated.

Carlos Carrasco threw one Wednesday night in the Indians' 5-1 win over the Tigers. He allowed just three hits and two walks, while striking out six. It was his first of the season and ninth of his career.

"It feels great to get a complete game," said Carrasco. "It's good when you go into the ninth inning.

"Actually this is the first complete game I've thrown at home. I have nine, the first one here at home. I think the more important thing is that we won the game."

Hall of Famer Bob Feller is the franchise leader with 279 complete games. Those numbers will never be repeated.

This will explain why.

Last year the Indians led the AL with seven complete games, including five by Cy Young winner Corey Kluber, as a team. In 2016, the Indians finished third with five complete games, including three by Kluber. In 2015, they led the AL with 11 complete games, including four by Kluber and three by Carrasco.

Dry Friday, thunderstorms possible for Cleveland Indians, Toronto Blue Jays weekend games at Progressive Field

By Kelly Reardon, cleveland.com

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Depending on which game Indians fans have tickets to this weekend against the Toronto Blue Jays, you'll need either sandals or a poncho. Friday's game is looking best.

Friday, 7:10 p.m.

The 7:10 p.m. game in downtown Cleveland will start off in the low 70s, and cool to the low 60s through 10 p.m. Skies are looking partly cloudy, but thankfully clear of rain. Winds will be a bit breezy, especially in the first few innings.

Saturday, 4:10 p.m.

Saturday's game has a risk of being delayed or postponed. It's too early to get an exact hour-by-hour look, but rain and thunderstorms are likely most of the day, and chances trickle into game time. Accompanying the storms will be temperatures in the mid to low 50s, and gusty winds over 18 mph.

Sunday, 1:10 p.m.

Sunday's game is also at risk since the storms will stick around. This forecast will be updated daily through Sunday with any changes, but right now the rain, thunder and lightning chances last into the afternoon game. Temperatures will hover in the mid 50s, and winds gusty again over 20 mph, so watch out for that Tribe cap!

Go Tribe!

Keep checking cleveland.com/weather for daily weather updates for Northeast Ohio, and don't forget to submit any weather questions you may have!

Kelly Reardon is cleveland.com's meteorologist. Please follow me on Facebook and Twitter @KellyRWeather.

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TRIBE NOTES Indians notes: After hot start to the season, Edwin Encarnacion has cooled off in the cold

Chris Assenheimer ByChris Assenheimer | The Chronicle-TelegramPublished on April 12, 2018 | Updated 6:28 a. m.

CLEVELAND — Edwin Encarnacion got off to a hot start to the season, hitting three home runs over his first four games, but he's offered no production since.

Over his last eight games through Wednesday — six of them in the Cleveland cold — Encarnacion was without a homer or RBI, going 2-for-28 and striking out 11 times.

“Edwin kind of got into a funk when he got back here,” manager Terry Francona said. “His timing’s off. You can see, he’s kind of jumping at the breaking ball or he’ll recognize it late. The good news for us is we’ve seen him do this before and you’re going to look up and he’s going to have his numbers. Whatever we had got contagious, though. When we got home, everybody caught it.”

Encarnacion struggled at the beginning of his debut season with the Indians last year, but finished with 38 homers, 107 RBIs and a .258 batting average over 157 games.

Along the same lines, second baseman Jason Kipnis appeared poised for a hot start after batting .346 with six homers and 12 RBIs in 19 exhibition games. But like nearly all of his teammates, Kipnis has struggled out of the gate, going 5-for-46 with one RBI and 13 strikeouts in 12 games through Wednesday.

Kipnis has hit plenty of balls hard and finally got some results in a 5-1 win Wednesday over Detroit, snapping an 0-for-23 skid with an opposite-field double in the seventh inning.

“I mean, (I’m) obviously not having the ideal start,” Kipnis said. “I’m not going to say it’s just been all bad luck. I’ve had bad at-bats, too, and bad swings, but when you mix in bad results with bad luck, you’ve just got nothing to hang your hat on and that’s been happening. But there’s a lot of positives I can take out. (I’m) starting to see it better and get better. I’m just going to keep hitting the ball.”

Third baseman Jose Ramirez has been headed in the opposite direction. It took him five games to record his first hit, but over the first six games of the homestand, he went 5-for-18 with a homer and three RBIs.

Injury updates

Left-hander Ryan Merritt (shoulder fatigue) and infielder Giovanni Urshela (right hamstring strain) made appearances in an extended spring training game in Goodyear, Ariz., on Wednesday.

According to Francona, Urshela is still 4-5 days away from beginning a minor league rehab assignment.

Both players are out of minor league options, so when they are ready to leave the disabled list, the Indians will have to decide whether there is a spot on the big league roster. If not, they will most likely be designated for assignment.

On your own

As he has gotten older, Francona said he has loosened the reins on his base stealers and rarely signals them to go.

“I’d be willing to bet if you ask every guy that steals bases if they’d prefer to go when they’re comfortable, as opposed to when the manager tells them, it’s going to be about

99 out of 100,” he said. “When I first became a manager, that was one of the hardest things for me, because you want to be in charge. To relinquish, to trust your players enough, I had to grow into that. That was hard.”

Taming the Tigers

The Indians did an effective job of shutting down Detroit’s dangerous duo of Miguel Cabrera and Victor Martinez, which went a combined 2-for-20 without an RBI over the first three games of the series.

Cabrera entered Thursday batting a career .330 with 45 homers and 151 RBIs against Cleveland, while Martinez was at .298 with 14 homers and 72 RBIs.

“I know there’s series where you go through Miggy and (Nicholas) Castellanos is pretty tough and Victor and you get nicked up every time through,” Francona said. “Fortunately, so far, we haven’t. But, like our guys, they’re not in midseason form yet, either. There will be series where we’re facing those guys and you’re like, ‘hold your breath.’”

Next up

The Indians wrap the homestand with a three-game series against Toronto that begins tonight at 7:10.

Mike Clevinger (1-0, 0.71 ERA) opens the set, opposing RHP Marcus Stroman (0-1, 8.38), while Corey Kluber (1-1, 1.57) starts against LHP Jaime Garcia (1-0, 3.18) on Saturday (4:10 p.m.).

Josh Tomlin (0-1, 9.00) starts the series finale Sunday (1:10 p.m.), while the Blue Jays counter with LHP J.A. Happ (2-1, 3.94).

Roundin' third

Kluber and Carlos Carrasco are the first two Indians pitchers to toss complete games over the first 12 games of the season since David Huff and Mitch Talbot in 2010. Since the start of the 2016 season, Cleveland and Boston are tied for the most complete games (14) in the majors, with Kluber, who led the American League with five last year, leading the way with nine.

SPORTS Indians bats come alive to back Trevor Bauer, complete sweep of Detroit

Chris Assenheimer | **The Chronicle-Telegram** Published on April 12, 2018 | Updated 4:08 a. m.

CLEVELAND — The Indians said their bats would heat up with the weather.

They weren't kidding.

A night after producing 10 hits for the first time this season, Cleveland took it a step further Thursday at Progressive Field, reaching a season-high run total in a 9-3 rout that completed a four-game sweep of Central Division rival Detroit.

The win was the Indians' fifth straight and 11th straight over the Tigers, whom they've outscored 65-13 in the 11 wins.

It was 74 degrees at first pitch and the bats were sizzling early, with the Indians getting a leadoff home run from Francisco Lindor and scoring six times in the first two innings.

Cleveland had 15 hits to Detroit's nine.

"It's huge. It's huge," Lindor said of the offensive success. "I don't care how hard you work and how tough you are mentally, whenever you have results, it helps. It helps you to carry on with your day and it puts a smile on everyone's faces. I'm happy we finally gave some runs to the pitching staff."

The Detroit pitcher the Indians beat up was no slouch — 2017 All-Star Michael Fulmer, who allowed a career-high nine runs (six earned) and was pulled after failing to record an out after facing four batters in the fourth.

Cleveland scored four times in the second on a two-run double from Lindor and a two-run home run from Jose Ramirez.

"We faced a really good pitcher tonight and we had some really good at-bats," manager Terry Francona said.

Right-hander Trevor Bauer was the recipient of the run support, continuing the rotation's strong start to the season by allowing just two runs and striking out seven over seven innings.

"I don't think any one of (the hitters) doubted that we were going to hit like this, but when it's not happening and it goes on for a week or two and the focus is on that, it gets a little bit harder to keep the faith," Bauer said. "So it's good to see it warm up a little bit and the bats come alive. We all know that the offense is going to hit. There's way too much talent in the offense for it to struggle like that all season."

Bauer allowed only a run through the first six innings.

"I think he walked two and hit a guy, but he threw a lot of strikes," Francona said. "It didn't seem like he was really happy when he came off the field, but I thought he did a good job."

Bauer has been more efficient to start the season, throwing 75 of his 105 pitches for strikes Thursday.

"It helps a lot," he said. "Mostly it helps Tito not want to take me out of the game every inning, so that's good. The longer I can hold off having him think about taking me out, the better. But mostly it doesn't turn the lineup over as much."

"It's kind of been a focus of mine. I feel like my stuff is good, probably better than it's been this year. So if I can just throw it in the zone more, not really worry about locating it perfectly, but throw it in the zone more often, work ahead of guys, that's gonna play in my favor."

While the offense has been stuck in low gear, the starting staff has kept the Indians afloat. Over the last seven games, the rotation has posted a 4-1 record and 1.26 ERA, while striking out 44 over 50 innings.

It finally got rewarded the past two nights.

"They're competing day in and day out," Lindor said of the starters. "They're helping us. They're giving us a chance to win and that's very important. That's all we ask for."

Contact Chris Assenheimer at 329-7136 or cassenheimer@chroniclet.com. Like him on Facebook and follow him @CAwesomeheimer on Twitter.

Stark: The Useless Inf-Oh Department, offbeat walk-offs, and more

By Jayson Stark Apr 12, 2018 16

My mother used to tell me all the time I should write a book and call it, I Never Saw That Before.

Well, I never did write that book. But you know what I did do this week? I mined through the strange but true, the weird, the wacky and, most importantly, the Ohtani. And I'm ready to present another edition of the Useless Inf-oh Department!

THE OHTANI WATCH

All right, what do you say we review Shohei Ohtani's first two weeks in the big leagues:

—Threw four pitches clocked at 100 miles per hour.

— Went 34 straight hitters over two starts without allowing a single freaking hit (0-for-33, with one walk).

— Got 25 swings and misses in one game – 16 of them against one pitch (his killer splitter).

— Hit a home run off a reigning Cy Young winner (Corey Kluber).

— Hit a home run in three straight games in which he got to swing a bat.

— Still owns as many home runs (three) as the Tigers (all of them) despite a slight disparity in plate appearances – 24 for Ohtani, 427 for the Tigers.

OK, this is nuts. But fun! (Unless you're a Tiger, in which case you were already battling frostbite before that embarrassing note reared its ugly head.)

Well, here at the Useless Inf-Oh Department, we love fun. So here come a lot more fun Ohtani tidbits which you may not know ...

—The 3-2 club: This dude hit three home runs as a hitter and won two games as a pitcher in the same week? Really. He's the only active player who has ever even done that in the same calendar month.

In fact, in the DH era, just four men have ever had a month like that:

Mike Hampton: June 2001 (3 HR, 2 wins)

Walt Terrell: August 1983 (3 HR, 3 wins)

Rick Wise: August 1973 (3 HR, 3 wins)

Ken Brett: June 1973 (4 HR, 4 wins)

(MadBum Fan Club note: Yeah, I was shocked Madison Bumgarner had never done this, too.)

—Paging Mr. Babe: And while we're on this topic ... here's the latest, greatest Elias Sports Bureau Bambin-Oh note from last week:

Ohtani is the first player to hit at least three home runs in between games started on the mound since – yes, here comes that name again, and not for the last time this year, we're guessing – Mr. Babe Ruth, in 1919.

The Babe's three homers, by the way, came off Jim Shaw, Win Noyes and Hank Thormahlen. We list those names just because, well, face it – Win Noyes doesn't get enough attention these days.

Oh-for-33-tani mania: Then there's that streak of 34 straight hitters without allowing a hit.

The last 15 hitters of his first start of the season (0-for-14, one walk). Then the first 19 hitters of his next start (19 up, 19 down). Is it OK to mention that those were merely the first two starts of his whole U.S. career? Amazing. And that's because ...

—The Elias Sports Bureau tells us he's the first rookie to run off a streak of at least 33 straight hitless at-bats, starting in April, since Steve Busby – 45 years ago! Busby actually ripped through a stretch of 50 in a row in April/May 1973 without a hit. But there were eight walks and a sac bunt in there, along with an 0-for-41.

(They were the 10th and 11th starts of Busby's career, however, since he'd been called up the year before.)

—So to find the last rookie with a streak as long as this, starting within his first month in the big leagues, you have to go back to Bob McClure, who did it in relief for the Royals in September of 1975. McClure faced 47 hitters in between hits, but also mixed in nine walks and a hitter reaching on an error.

—And one more we should mention that kind of fits: In 1989, Wilson Alvarez got called up to the big leagues for one start but never got an out. He then headed back to the minors for two years – but in his first start after he returned in 1991, he threw a no-hitter. That kicked off a streak of 34 consecutive hitless at-bats.

Have you noticed that all that happened a long time ago? Right. Us, too.

—By the dozen: Think about this. In the second game he'd ever pitched in the big leagues (last Sunday against Oakland), Shohei Ohtani struck out 12 hitters. And gave up one hit.

He did that over seven innings (the first six of which were hitless, by the way). But let's leave the innings out of this. I thought you'd enjoy seeing this list of active pitchers who have never made a start in which they struck out at least 12 hitters and allowed no more than one hit. Some of these names may look vaguely familiar:

Zack Greinke

David Price

Johnny Cueto

Adam Wainwright

Chris Archer

Jacob deGrom

Masahiro Tanaka

Gerritt Cole

And two Cy Young winners: Dallas Keuchel and Rick Porcello.

Heard of them? Thought so. Now here come three more Ohtani tidbits we had to mention:

— Ohtani leads the Angels in OPS (1.189) and ERA (2.08). Granted, we have to manipulate all standards of minimum playing time to tell you that. But we're going with 20+ PA and 10+ IP. And we're making that work because ... Ruth never led his team in both of those categories in any season when he pitched at least twice. You can look it up.

— As a hitter, Ohtani has come to the plate 24 times – and has reached base in 10 of them. But when he heads for the mound, opposing hitters have come to the plate 55 times – and reached base in six of them. So his OBP is .417. Their OBP is .133. Ridiculous, isn't it?

— And, finally, perhaps you're wondering: How many other pitchers have hit a home run off a Cy Young winner and thrown a pitch 100+ miles per hour over the last 10 seasons? Ho-ho-ho-ho-ho. That would be none. Of course.

This is all happening. In real life. In the major leagues. Mind-blowing.

WALK-OFF OF THE WEEK

Andrew McCutchen knows how to make an entrance. Even more importantly, for the Giants, he also seems to know how to make an exit.

In his third game in San Francisco as a Giant, last Saturday night, here's how that went:

He hit a 14th-inning walk-off three-run home run... with his team trailing... against the Dodgers... for his sixth hit of the night... on the 12th pitch of the at-bat.

Pretty good evening at the yard!

— As Baseball Savant's Daren Willman reported, that walk-off came in the 5,861st plate appearance of McCutchen's career. You know what the first 5,860 had in common? He'd never seen as many as 12 pitches in any of them.

— The great Dave Smith, founder of Retrosheet, checked every extra-inning walk-off homer for the last 30 years, by everyone. Not one of those walk-offs came on an at-bat as long as 10 pitches, let alone 12!

— So how many other National League players – since RBIs became an official stat in 1920 – have ever gotten six hits in a game and had the sixth end the game with a homer? Yep. That would be none. Only Jim Northrup, (for the Tigers, on Aug. 28, 1969) has ever even done it in the AL, according to Elias.

— McCutchen was the first player to hit a walk-off home run with his team trailing, in the 14th inning or later, since... Andrew McCutchen did it as a Pirate on July 11, 2015. (H/t Doug "Kernels" Kern)

— And how many other players – in this or any other "recent" era – have hit two walk-off home runs like that (team trailing in the 14th or later)? Dave Smith went all the way back to 1940. And the answer is... zero.

—But since 14 innings is a lot of innings, we should report that Smith did find two other active players who have hit two walk-off bombs like that in any extra inning: Asdrúbal Cabrera (11th and 10th) in 2016 and 2012, and Alex Avila (10th and 11th) in 2017 and 2012.

— Oh, and one more thing. McCutchen then had another walk-off hit (a single) three days later. Want to guess how many times, in all those years in Pittsburgh, he got two walk-off hits in the same month? How'd you guess? Never. Naturally.

NOT MR. WALK-OFF OF THE WEEK

But of course, the best part about walk-offs is that they come in all shapes and sizes. They just never come like this!

Saturday night. Tenth inning. A 0-0 game between the Astros and Padres.

Alex Bregman lifts quite the big-league pop-up into the Houston ozone. A flurry of chaos ensues. The baseball drops to earth, not caught. Derek Fisher roars in from second to score. Walk-off.

Ah, but not just any walk-off. A walk-off that traveled exactly 38 feet on the fly!

Our amigos from Sports Info Solutions (@SportsInfo_SIS) looked into that one. And found ...

It's the shortest walk-off hit, at least in the air, in their database in the 15 seasons they've been tracking stuff like this. Should there maybe be a cutoff for how many feet you have to hit a baseball for it to count as a "walk-off" — or even a "hit?" Just asking!

TWENTY WAS PLENTY GAME OF THE WEEK

Not sure what the heck was going on in baseball Saturday. But it was by far the zaniest day of the year so far. And here's one more reason:

The Phillies whopped on the Marlins that night, 20-1. Twenty to one. It was just the fifth 20-1 game since 1924. But here are two things that made it even wackier:

— Jake Thompson got a save for the Phillies. In a 20-1 game.

He was the first pitcher to save a game his team won by 19 runs or more since Texas' Wes Littleton "saved" the legendary 30-3 game in Baltimore on Aug. 22, 2007. Thompson was so delighted to learn of that development (by reading my tweet about it, actually) that he then tweeted himself:

— Meanwhile, the Phillies scored 20 unanswered runs — after actually trailing, 1-0. According to Dave Smith, it's only the seventh game since 1908 in which any team scored at least 20 runs in a row after falling behind!

The only other 20-1 game in the group: Marlins over Braves, July 1, 2003.

The most amazing of the bunch has to be that 30-3 game. The Orioles led, 3-0. And then gave up 30 runs in a row! Kids, don't try that at home.

FIVE STRANGE BUT TRUE FEATS OF THE WEEK

— Next time you hit against the Royals, keep an ice pack handy. In back-to-back games this week, their starting pitchers — Jakob Junis and Eric Skoglund — hit three Mariners apiece.

So when was the last time you saw that? How about never.

According to Baseball-Reference.com's handy-dandy Play Index, it's the first time in the last 110 years that any team had its two starting pitchers plunk at least three hitters in back-to-back games. Ouch! Literally.

— Will anyone ever pitch a complete-game no-hitter again? It's only April 12. And we've already had three starting pitchers (Kyle Gibson, Trevor Williams, Jarlin García) yanked from games before they'd given up a hit.

That has never happened this early in any season in the last 100 years. And we could only find two times it's happened in the same calendar month, period:

May 2007 — Phil Hughes (6.1 IP), Shawn Hill (5 IP), Shaun Marcum (6.1 IP)

April 2017 — Wei-Yin Chen (7 IP), Dan Straily (5.1 IP), Sean Manaea (5 IP)

There were two games like this in all 10 seasons of the 1950s, by the way.

— Doug (Kernels) Kern extravaganza: The Indians got four hits or fewer in three games in a row — and won all of them! Only two other teams have pulled that off in the live-ball era — Oddibe McDowell's 1986 Rangers and Willie Mays' 1963 Giants.

— It was memorable enough that Jameson Taillon threw a complete-game one-hitter for the Pirates on Sunday. What really made it memorable was this: The only hit was by the Reds' pitcher (Tyler Mahle).

Last time the Reds got one-hit in a game in which none of the position players got hits:

Sept. 19, 1914 — when pitcher Earl Yingling got the only hit (as a pinch hitter) in the sixth inning of a Jeff Pfeffer one-hitter, for those beloved Brooklyn Robins. Fill in your own Earl Yingling lager punch lines here.

— And somehow or other, on the same afternoon (Monday) in the same city (that winter wonderland known as Chicago), the Cubs got snowed out but the White Sox played a full nine-inning game. Watch out for that lake effect!