

Tribe's win streak snapped by slugging Jays

By Jordan Bastian MLB.com @MLBastian

CLEVELAND -- After the slider popped into the glove of Indians catcher Yan Gomes, Andrew Miller began walking off the mound. The fielders took a step toward Cleveland's dugout and Teoscar Hernandez started to head out of the batter's box.

In that moment, everyone on the field thought Miller struck Hernandez out with an 0-2 breaking ball, ending the seventh inning on Friday night. Instead, home plate umpire Gerry Davis called the pitch a ball, and the Blue Jays capitalized on their second chance to send Cleveland to an 8-4 defeat at Progressive Field.

"It was a good pitch," Hernandez said with a grin. "The umpire missed it. I got another chance and I did some damage."

Miller's next pitch -- the one that stuck with him more than the missed call in the aftermath of the loss -- was an elevated, inside slider that Hernandez pulled into the left-field corner for an RBI double. That broke a 4-4 deadlock and ignited a four-run push over the final three innings that was effective in ending the Tribe's five-game winning streak.

There were other contributing factors for the loss. Chief among them was the fourth-inning command woes of starter Mike Clevinger, who surrendered a four spot in the frame after cruising through the first three. That outburst was punctuated by a game-tying, three-run homer from Aledmys Diaz, whose drive to center erased the early work by the Tribe's lineup.

"I just kind of lost it for a little bit," Clevinger said. "I lost it just enough to lose the game."

Indians manager Terry Francona attempted to apply a tourniquet by going to the bullpen in the fifth, and that strategy worked for two innings. In the seventh, though, Zach McAllister entered, and issued a leadoff walk to Randal Grichuk, who stole second and moved to third on a Devon Travis groundout.

With one out, a runner on third and the score still knotted, Francona handed the ball to Miller, the manager's high-leverage weapon. Blue Jays manager John Gibbons countered by calling upon Steve Pearce as a pinch-hitter. Miller won that battle by inducing a chopper to first baseman Yonder Alonso, who fired to Gomes to cut Grichuk at the plate.

That set up the at-bat that served as the catalyst for Cleveland's collapse.

Hernandez watched one slider for a strike and then swung through another, which got by Gomes, allowing Pearce to move up to second. Hernandez then fouled off a fastball. Miller came back with another slider, which was sent to the outer third of the strike zone.

Did Miller think it was a strike?

"It doesn't matter what I think," Miller said. "I've got to move on. It's just the reality of it. Sometimes, you think one thing and you've got to move on and make the next pitch."

Gomes felt it should have been an inning-ending strikeout, but echoed Miller in saying the following pitch was more important in the end.

"Everyone's human," Gomes said. "Everyone's going to make a mistake in that kind of situation. I think we [Gomes and the umpire], at the end of it, kind of both agreed that it might've been a strike. We looked at it, and it was. I think everyone knew that it was. But, it's one of those things that we can't hang our heads on."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Lindor out at home: With two outs in the sixth inning, Jose Ramirez hit a hard chopper to Travis, who bobbled the ball in the infield. Francisco Lindor, who was on second base, sprinted around third and headed for the plate with the game caught in a 4-4 deadlock. Toronto's second baseman recovered the ball and fired a strike to catcher Russell Martin, who applied a textbook tag for a rally-halting out.

"I thought it was really good," Francona said of Lindor's aggressiveness. "They caught a break that that ball stayed [close to Travis]. Whether you're [third-base coach Mike Sarbaugh] or Frankie, there's no way to know exactly where that ball is, and it stayed close enough where they had a shot at us. But, I thought it was good baserunning and coaching."

Davis' painful dash: After reaching on an infield single with one out in the second inning, Rajai Davis stole second base. As the outfielder slid in headfirst, his helmet came loose, bounced off Diaz's left arm and struck Davis in the face. Davis sustained a cut above his left eye and a welt quickly formed, but he stayed in the game after having a bandage applied. Lindor and Jason Kipnis followed with back-to-back doubles to push the Indians in front, 4-0.

"He got a pretty good cut," Francona said. "I don't know if they'll butterfly it or stitch it, but he had a pretty good gash there. I wanted him to stay in the game."

SOUND SMART

Clevinger's abbreviated outing ended a streak of seven consecutive starts in which the right-hander allowed one earned run or fewer, dating back to last season. That was the longest such streak for an Indians pitcher since Bob Feller had a similar seven-start run from July 24-Aug. 17, 1946.

HE SAID IT

"Clearly I walked off the mound. For at least a moment, I had moved on. I was headed to the dugout. My mentality was there with it, too. The next pitch, honestly, I felt like I had the right idea. I just didn't spin the ball very well." -- Miller, on the at-bat against Hernandez

"That Diaz at-bat kind of sealed the deal, man. I think he took some good swings on his slider and took some good pitches, and then we tried to just get a heater away. Tip your hat to the guy. I think he had a tremendous at-bat and he ended up taking advantage of a pitch." -- Gomes, on Diaz's homer off Clevinger

UP NEXT

Indians ace Corey Kluber is slated to take the mound on Saturday, when the Tribe hosts the Blue Jays in a 4:10 p.m. ET tilt at Progressive Field. Kluber struck out 13 in eight shutout innings in his last outing on Monday against Detroit. The Blue Jays will send Jaime Garcia to the mound opposite Kluber.

Brantley making early push for playing time

By Jordan Bastian MLB.com @MLBastian

CLEVELAND -- Indians manager Terry Francona has reached the stage where he is bargaining with Michael Brantley about playing time. Cleveland still wants to closely monitor the left fielder's innings, but Brantley wants to be in the lineup as much as possible.

For Friday's game against the Blue Jays, Brantley was given the day off from being in the starting lineup. That was Brantley's choice, as the Indians wanted to build in an off-day for the veteran outfielder on either Thursday or Friday, while he continues to return from right ankle surgery in October.

"It was one or the other," Francona said. "He felt like he felt good, and he wanted to play [Thursday against the Tigers]. So, in my opinion, if you string more together and as long as he's OK, then we keep building him up."

Brantley, 30, played in three consecutive games after he was activated from the 10-day disabled list on April 6, took a day off and then played three more games in a row. In those six games, Brantley has hit .286 (6-for-21) with two strikeouts, one walk and four RBIs.

Francona said Brantley has been giving positive feedback along the way.

"He's doing really well," Francona said. "He wasn't going to play today, but I thought that he was fighting for it. It was obviously a really good sign."

Worth noting

- Francona expressed praise on Friday over the way Bradley Zimmer went to the opposite field on a pair of singles off lefty Chad Bell in Thursday's win over Detroit. The manager was also pleased with Zimmer's bunt single during Wednesday's victory. Given Zimmer's speed, Francona feels bunting can be a beneficial part of the center fielder's game.

"It wasn't a great bunt, but it doesn't have to be with his speed," Francona said. "We're really trying to encourage him, of all people, to try to get more comfortable bunting, because it's not something that was in his game that much. So, he's working on it, because as he gets better at it, it could be a big help for him."

- Going into the season, Francona indicated that Yan Gomes and Roberto Perez would likely see a relatively even distribution of innings behind the plate. Through the first 13 games, Gomes caught 74 1/3 innings, compared to 43 innings for Perez. Gomes got the start again on Friday against Toronto.

- Infielder Gio Urshela (10-day DL, right hamstring) is scheduled to make his first Minor League rehab appearance with Triple-A Columbus on Friday against Durham. Urshela had been doing rehab work in Arizona, and appeared in an extended spring game on Wednesday.

Blue Jays' rally snaps Indians' winning streak, 8-4

By Tom Withers, The Associated Press

Teoscar Hernandez thought for a moment Andrew Miller had struck him out. Then he struck back.

Hernandez made the most of his season debut — and a close call against Miller that went his way — by driving in the go-ahead run with a single in the seventh inning as the Toronto Blue Jays rallied for an 8-4 win over Cleveland, snapping the Indians' five-game winning streak on Friday night.

Hernandez, who was recalled earlier in the day when the Blue Jays placed third baseman Josh Donaldson on the 10-day disabled list, added an RBI double in a three-run ninth.

With the score 4-4 and a runner on second in the seventh, Hernandez fell behind 0-2 in the count and took an outside pitch from Miller that looked like a strike. The left-hander began walking toward Cleveland's dugout and Hernandez took a step toward Toronto's, but plate umpire Gerry Davis called a ball and the left fielder made the most of another chance with his single to left.

Asked if he had struck out, Hernandez smiled.

"It was a good pitch," he said, grinning. "The umpire missed it. I got another chance."

Miller, too, thought he whiffed Hernandez.

"It doesn't matter what I think," the All-Star said. "I just gotta move on. That's on me. I didn't do a good job on that."

Steve Pearce also doubled in a pair of runs in the ninth for Toronto, which trailed 4-0 after two innings but came back against Zach McAllister (0-2) and the normally unhittable Miller.

Aledmys Diaz's three-run homer helped the Blue Jays come back from a 4-0 deficit in the fourth against starter Mike Clevinger, who was spotted an early lead and coasted through the first three innings before running into trouble in the fourth with a pair of walks.

"I just kind of lost it for a little bit," Clevinger said, "and I lost it just enough to lose the game."

Danny Barnes (1-0) pitched one inning, and three other relievers finished up for Toronto.

With starter Marcus Stroman in trouble from the outset, the Blue Jays looked like they were in for a long night before storming back.

Clevinger was in control before the fourth when Kevin Pillar cut Cleveland's lead to 4-1 with a soft RBI single and Diaz tied it with a shot over the wall in center for his second homer.

Despite a first-pitch temperature of 46 degrees following a high of 81, the Indians, who got a season-high 15 hits while completing a four-game sweep of Detroit on Thursday, stayed hot at the plate.

They scored twice in the first off Stroman and tacked on two more in the second on back-to-back run-scoring doubles by Francisco Lindor and Jason Kipnis.

Lindor's shot scored Rajai Davis, who sustained a cut above his left eye while stealing second on a strange play.

As Davis slid headfirst into second, his helmet popped off and was struck by shortstop Diaz, who backhanded it into the face of Cleveland's left fielder. Davis was momentarily dazed and his forehead quickly swelled, but he stayed in after being checked by a trainer and receiving a bandage.

"Yeah, he got a pretty good cut," manager Terry Francona said. "Couldn't figure it out, it wasn't bleeding though. But it sliced open pretty good. I don't know if they'll butterfly it or stitch it, but he had a pretty good gash there."

Blue Jays>> Donaldson went on the DL with inflammation in his right shoulder. He's had an issue with his shoulder since opening day and the team wants him to rest before it worsens. The 2015 AL MVP is batting .239 with three home runs and nine RBIs in 12 games.

Indians>> OF Michael Brantley was given the day off, even though he didn't want one as the club continues a cautious approach following his offseason ankle surgery. Francona was pleased that Brantley didn't want to sit. "He was fighting for it," Francona said. "It was obviously a really good sign."

Indians ace Corey Kluber struck out 14 Blue Jays the last time he faced them. The two-time Cy Young winner is coming off a 13-strikeout performance in his last start, when he allowed just two hits in eight innings against Detroit. Jaime Garcia starts for Toronto.

Covering the Bases: Game 14

by Jordan Bastian

FIRST: The Indians pride themselves on their aggressiveness on the basepaths. That will show up in the form of stolen bases, sure, but that's only one aspect of good baserunning.

Manager Terry Francona wants to see his players taking an extra base when it makes sense, legging out first-to-thirds, posting a strong stolen-base success rate and capitalizing on mistakes by the opposing defense. That was one reason behind bringing Rajai Davis back into the fold.

Heading into Friday's action, the Indians ranked first in the American League with 12 steals, third in extra-bases taken rate (50%) and fourth in BsR (0.9). Small sample? Yes, but those are positive early indicators for what Cleveland wants to be a season-long trend.

"It's huge. It's a difference-maker," Davis said earlier this week. "Especially when you're not scoring runs or hitting like we're capable of hitting. The weather makes a difference, you know? But, the legs? You can always have those. You can make a difference with the legs. That's showing."

It was on display in the first inning, when Jose Ramirez went first-to-third on an RBI single from Yonder Alonso and Alonso went first-to-third on an RBI single from Tyler Naquin. It was present again in the second, when Davis legged out an infield hit, stole second and soon scored.

The Tribe's aggressiveness, however, also led to a critical out in the sixth.

With the game caught in a 4–4 tie, Francisco Lindor doubled with one out. Following Jason Kipnis strikeout, Ramirez sent a soft liner in front of Blue Jays second baseman Devon Travis. Travis couldn't corral the ball cleanly and third-base coach Mike Sarbaugh waved Lindor home.

Travis scampered after the ball, plucked it from the ground and fired a perfect throw to catcher Russell Martin. The catcher spun and applied the tag on Lindor's left hand as the shortstop slid into the plate headfirst. What looked like a promising rally was snuffed out.

Now, to be fair, this was one of those plays where, had it worked, we'd be detailing the baserunning prowess of Lindor and the lauding the great send by Sarbaugh. Instead, we are gifted with the benefit of hindsight, and Toronto's late rally made this out loom large in the end.

Francona liked Lindor's aggressiveness on the play, and he thought Sarbaugh made the right call, too.

"I thought it was really good," Francona said. "They caught a break that that ball stayed [in front of Travis]. Whether you're Sarby or Frankie, there's no way to know exactly where that ball is, and it stayed close enough where they had a shot at us. But, I thought it was good baserunning and coaching."

SECOND: It isn't entirely fair to assign all the blame for this loss on one missed call in the seventh inning. There were pitches that were not made before it, and there were pitches that were not made after it.

That said, the strike that home-plate umpire Gerry Davis deemed a ball in the seventh did—without question—alter the complexion of the game from that point onward.

"It was a good pitch," said Blue Jays outfielder Teoscar Hernandez, who was the beneficiary of the call. "The umpire missed it. I got another chance and I did some damage."

Let's set the scene...

Two outs. Game knotted, 4–4. Steve Pearce was on second base, following a passed ball charged to Gomes on a low-and-inside slider that the catcher was unable to handle. Lefty Andrew Miller fires an 0–2 slider low-and-away to Hernandez and it landed in Gomes' glove here: The first thing you look for in this scenario is not the reaction of the pitcher and catcher. If it's a borderline call in this situation, they're going to take a step toward the dugout—like a basketball team running off the floor after a shot at the buzzer.

No, you look at the batter. Hernandez took a step and a half toward the visitors' dugout. He thought Miller got him. What did Miller think?

"It doesn't matter what I think," Miller said. "I've got to move on. It's just the reality of it. Sometimes, you think one thing and you've got to move on and make the next pitch."

According to Gomes, the umpire realized his mistake.

"Everyone's human," Gomes said. "Everyone's going to make a mistake in that kind of situation. I think we, at the end of it, kind of both agreed that it might've been a strike. We looked at it and it was. I think everyone knew that it was."

Alas, the only opinion that matters in the moment is the one issued by the umpire. After heading off the hill, Miller had to collect himself and come up with the next plan. He and Gomes opted for a high-and-tight slider, which Hernandez deposited deep into left for a go-ahead double.

That was the pitch that stuck with Miller.

"The next pitch, honestly, I felt like I had the right idea," he said. "I just didn't spin the ball very well. I think I wanted to wrap one around him. We had a runner on [second]. I felt like he kind of showed me something interesting when he pulled the fastball that far foul behind in the count. I didn't want to throw one for a strike down and in. I wanted to kind of get one wrapped around him."

"Usually, if I execute that, they can't keep the ball fair. I didn't do that. I didn't execute. I think the ball, I have to watch to watch it and think through it more. I think the conviction I had behind the pitch was the right idea. I just didn't execute."

"I didn't get it to the point I wanted to. Credit him. He had a good swing. I think the ball was in and he kept it fair, did damage and did what he was supposed to do."

Francona's take on the non-strike call?

"Yeah, that hurts," said the manager. "I don't think we should have been in that position, but it still hurt."

THIRD: Of course, Miller might not have been put into that situation had starter Mike Clevinger not bowled out after four innings.

Clevinger cruised through the first three frames, but then lost his lower-half mechanics in a 39-pitch fourth. Toronto pounced for four runs, erasing the 4–0 lead that the Indians' lineup had built against Blue Jays starter Marcus Stroman.

"I'm kicking myself," Francona said, "because I left him out there for a long inning. I just didn't want him to think that the first time he ran into trouble we'd go to the bullpen. But, it didn't end well."

The biggest blow was a six-pitch battle with Aledmys Diaz, who drilled a 93-mph fastball over the heart of the plate to center for a game-tying, three-run home run.

Said Gomes: "That Diaz at-bat kind of sealed the deal, man. I think he took some good swings on his slider and took some good pitches, and then we tried to just get a heater away. Tip your hat to the guy. I think he had a tremendous at-bat and he ended up taking advantage of a pitch."

HOME: There were a few decisions on Francona's part that warranted some questions in the wake of the loss, too.

In the eighth inning, for example, Gomes led off with a single with the Indians trailing by one run. With the fleet-footed Bradley Zimmer up next, it looked like a good opportunity for a bunt. Instead, Zimmer swung away, struck out, and Rajai Davis followed with a 4–6–3 double play.

Why not bunt?

"The problem is," Francona said, "even though we're at home, it's hard to play for a tie when we go to the bullpen that early. [Nick] Goody had thrown 27 pitches [Thursday] and we weren't going to pitch him, so we're starting to run short. So, if we get in a tie game and we go to Cody [Allen] all we have is [Tyler] Olson left. So, I thought, 'Let's try for the win.'"

That played into this question: Why did Matt Belisle stay in the game for the ninth inning? He also pitched on Thursday and logged 14 pitches in the eighth inning. Toronto tacked on three runs off Belisle in the ninth to put the game away.

"That's what happens when you have an early exit," Francona said. "You know I felt bad, because I thought Matt came in and pitched a real good first inning. And then he got extended and ran into trouble and you wish you could help out more, but that's what happens when you have early exits."

In light of Davis' inning-ending double play in the eighth, it was also fair to wonder why Francona didn't call upon Michael Brantley as a pinch-hitter. Well, Brantley was given a scheduled day off due to him still building up his endurance following the right ankle injury.

"It's worth having him [on the roster]," Francona said. "You've just got to have the perfect situation."

Baseball returns to Akron with RubberDucks home opener on warm evening by Beacon Journal/Ohio.com

The Ducks are back in town.

Minor league baseball returned to Akron on Friday night when the RubberDucks hosted the Trenton Thunder in the home opener at Canal Park.

A sellout crowd of 8,296 came to the ballpark to watch the return of America's pastime to Summit County amid sunshine and warm temperatures.

Yes, you read that correctly. The temperature was indeed 80 degrees when Ducks right-hander Michael Peoples delivered the games's first pitch to the Thunder's Gosuke Katoh.

"This is the best place to make memories," Ducks fan Tara Langston said before the game in front of the scoreboard in right field with her husband, Matt, and their sons, Brantley, 2, and Easton, 1.

"This is the perfect way to have them grow up and see what we grew up doing."

Tara and Matt Langston, who said they have been together since eighth grade, graduated together from Rootstown High School in 2007.

"We have seen this team go from the Aeros to the RubberDucks," Tara Langston said.

Matt and Tara both smiled when they discussed the warm weather, which was the opposite of last Friday's Indians home opener against the Kansas City Royals with temperatures in the 40s. The Indians won that game 3-2, and then topped the Royals 3-1 on Sunday with a game-time temperature of 32 degrees.

Cold weather and snow in April wasn't just exclusive to Northeast Ohio, as the Pittsburgh Pirates can attest after playing their first nine games in Detroit and Pittsburgh. The average temperature for the first nine Pirates games was 39.6 degrees.

Snow also postponed games earlier this week at Yankee Stadium in New York and Wrigley Field in Chicago.

"This is a fantastic night for a home opener," said Matt Langston, with a Ducks jersey on. "This nice weather definitely encouraged us to come out and see them play."

Seven Ducks fans threw out ceremonial first pitches. Akron Mayor Dan Horrigan tossed the first pitch to Ducks owner Ken Babby, and Akron native Gabe Spiegel delivered the second first pitch, a strike to Ducks reserve Dorssys Paulino.

Spiegel, a 1992 North High School graduate and television news anchor on WJW-Fox 8 in Cleveland, wore a blue Indians Corey Kluber No. 28 jersey.

Marissa and Quinn Parker, of Canton, were also in attendance with sons Paxton, 3, and Gabriel, 1½, for the 22nd home opener at Canal Park.

"We are really excited to be here," Marissa Parker said. "We love coming out to the park. We try to get out here a few times a year. It's a fun time for us."

There were quite a few sights and sounds Friday inside and outside the ballpark, including Julia Mullin of Akron singing the national anthem.

One of the largest sights is an advertisement sign near the stadium that hangs on the side of a downtown building on which the Ducks promote their product with three words: "affordable-family-fun."

The sign features three current Indians players — Francisco Lindor, Mike Clevinger and Bradley Zimmer.

Amy and Phil Heyn, of Akron, know all about those three Major League Baseball players, and said they are looking forward to this 2018 season for both the Indians and the Ducks.

The Heyns came to the ballpark on Friday in a group that included their daughter, Madi, 6½. Megan and Andrew Hannan, of Copley, were with them along with their son, Wyatt, 7, and a friend, Alana Carducci, 6, of Wadsworth.

All three children took a turn going down the inflatable slide beyond the home run fence in right field before the game.

"This is my second home opener," Wyatt said. "This is awesome."

Madi added: "It was really fun and exciting to go down the slide."

Indians notebook: Trevor Bauer still working on feel for new slider; Michael Brantley progressing well after playing three consecutive games
by Beacon Journal/Ohio.com

CLEVELAND: 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.

Bauer effectively went to the lab this offseason to develop that slider. He said late in the spring 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 remain in the upper tier of pitchers to which he briefly ascended late last season.

According to Baseball Savant, Bauer threw 18 sliders in a quality start Thursday night in which he allowed two runs on seven hits and struck out seven in a 9-3 victory over the Detroit Tigers. He threw his fastball and curveball 37 and 38 times, respectively.

Bauer put in hour upon hour developing that slider over the winter and then used this spring to get the feel for it as much as possible. That aspect of it, though, is still a work in progress.

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 Bauer didn't allow any hits on that pitch, he also wasn't too pleased with how it felt coming out of his hand.

"My slider has been super inconsistent, so I haven't been able to finish at-bats as well as I know I can," Bauer said. "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 a very good feel for it. ... Happy with the results for sure, but I know I can be sharper."

Three up, one down

The Indians continue to operate with no clear, set schedule for outfielder Michael Brantley.

Brantley returned to the lineup from offseason ankle surgery for the home opener on April 6. At the time, Indians manager Terry Francona said the team would simply use "common sense" in determining when he would play and when he would need to rest to ensure there isn't a setback.

Brantley played three games and then rested on Monday with Tigers left-hander Francisco Liriano on the mound. He played three in a row again and then had the day off on Friday.

If Brantley continues to feel good enough, the Indians could start to expand how many days in a row he plays. But that is something that could still progress at a slow rate.

"It was either going to be [Thursday or Friday that Brantley rested]," Francona said. "It was one or the other. And I think he felt like he felt good and he wanted to play [Thursday]. So, in my opinion, if you string more together and as long as he's OK, then we keep building him up."

Taming the Tigers

There was a time in the not-so-distant past in which the Indians were tormented by Tigers. A severe role reversal has taken place since the beginning of last season.

With the Indians' sweep of the Tigers this week, they have now won 11 games in a row against Detroit dating back to last season. During those 11 games, the Indians pitching staff has posted an ERA of 1.00. And since the beginning of 2016, the Indians are 31-10 against the Tigers.

And, at least on paper, those numbers might only continue to become more extreme in the near future, with the Indians remaining a World Series contender and the Tigers only a bit down the road of a long rebuild.

Captains fall short despite late rally

By David Glasier, The News-Herald

The season is young and already the Captains are a team of extremes.

After opening the season with four straight victories in abysmal weather, they now have lost five straight games in better weather.

The latest setback was a 6-5 loss to the South Bend (Ind.) Cubs on April 13 in the opener of a three-game series at Classic Park.

To their credit, the Captains did not go quietly into a night that began on the warm side and ended on the nippy side.

Trailing, 6-2, going into the bottom of the seventh inning, they narrowed the gap to 6-3 on a solo home run by first baseman Ulysses Cantu. It was the first home run of the season for the 19-year-old Texan who was a New York-Penn League All-Star last year at short-season Single-A Mahoning Valley.

The Captains pulled to within one run at 6-5 in the bottom of the eighth inning on a two-run single by Jorma Rodriguez.

In the bottom of the ninth, against South Bend reliever Brian Glowicki, the Captains made a spirited effort to extend a game that already had lasted more than three hours..

Glowicki surrendered a one-out walk to Austen Davis and a single to Oscar Gonzalez. After striking out Will Benson, Glowicki and Lake County catcher Mike Rivera engaged in a spirited battle that ended with Rivera getting a walk to load the bases for Rodriguez.

There was no repeat of his heroics of the previous inning for Rodriguez, who went down swinging for the final out.

The Cubs upped their record to 6-2 with the hard-earned victory.

While he would have preferred a different outcome, Captains manager Luke Carlin liked a lot of what he saw from his team starting with the late push.

"They battled, for sure. I loved the energy and the fight," Carlin said.

Carlin also was pleased with the improved quality of at-bats in the last three frames.

Lake County Grant Hockin (1-1, 6.00 ERA) gave up five runs, all earned, on nine hits over four innings to take the loss.

"I like how he turned it around after getting off to a bad start," Carlin said of the 22-year-old right-hander.

Jean Carlos Mejia was outstanding in relief of Hockin, limiting the Cubs to one run on four hits over five innings.

Carlin said third baseman Nolan Jones, sidelined since April 7 with soreness in his left knee, feels better and is slated to be the designated hitter when the Captains host the Cubs on April 14.

Cleveland Indians: How they keep winning -- Terry Pluto (photos)

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

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- One of my favorite assignments of the year is to spend a week or so in spring training with the Cleveland Indians.

There are few members of the media in Goodyear. Tribe manager Terry Francona talks with us every morning, at least for 15 minutes. It's informal and informative.

One day, the subject was this: "What kind of team would Francona prefer to manage?"

The obvious answer is a winning team. But we were talking about the type of games. Francona won two World Series titles in Boston with powerhouse lineups.

I don't recall Francona's exact quote, but the bottom line was he preferred a team capable of winning a lot of games by scores of 3-2, compared to 9-8.

That's because in the 162-game marathon of a baseball season, pitching wins.

Earlier in the week, Francona mentioned how the Indians scored only 10 runs in five games ... and had a 4-1 record.

Pitching. Pitching. More pitching.

"If you have a good pitching staff and good defense, when you score it's really meaningful," Francona said last week.

I thought about this when receiving emails from some fans about how the Tribe isn't hitting -- and did little to improve its offense.

It is frustrating. The Tribe's 5-game winning streak ended Friday night when the team jumped to a 4-0 lead after two innings against Toronto. Then they stopped scoring...

The pitching faltered, and the Tribe lost, 8-4.

Here's what happens in baseball. Most of us watch only one team. I'm guilty of that. If I'm watching a baseball game, it's a Tribe game. I have very little context of what is happening across the Majors.

When I received an email about how the Indians have not been hitting the last few years, I checked the stats:

2017: They ranked No. 3 in the American League in runs scored.

2016: They ranked No. 2 in the American League in runs scored.

You can point to a bunch of other stats to prove various points, but the bottom line is scoring runs.

In general, the Indians have been scoring more than enough runs to be a playoff team.

But to Francona's point, when you can pitch and catch the ball -- you can win a lot of games even when the bats are baffled. Or as in the case this season, frozen.

Starting in the 2015 season, the Tribe has ranked in the American League's top two in lowest earned run average. They probably will be there again.

Team president Chris Antonetti and general manager Mike Chernoff have built a strong staff and a rotation that is likely to be around for several years. Carlos Carrasco (2021), Corey Kluber (2022), Trevor Bauer (2022) and Mike Clevinger (2023) are under team control for a long time because of contract extensions or distance from free agency.

To be fair, trades for Carrasco and Kluber were made when Mark Shapiro was the general manager, Antonetti was his top assistant. Chernoff also was a part of that front office. The Tribe has been pursuing pitching for a long time.

Among the starting pitchers, only Josh Tomlin will be a free agent at the end of this season.

The big losses will be in the bullpen, where Cody Allen and Andrew Miller are headed to free agency after the season. Those will hurt, assuming they both leave.

But the long-term success of the team is built on the starting rotation -- and that should be strong for several seasons.

ABOUT COREY KLUBER

1. Kluber has won two Cy Young Awards, so it's hard to say "He's better." But Kluber looks even better than in many of his starts last season. In 23 innings, he's allowed only 11 hits. He's fanned 27, walked four, with an ERA of 1.53.

2. The Indians and Kluber don't want to talk about it, but his back did bother him last fall in the playoffs against the New York Yankees. The Indians believed the 32-year-old Kluber would be healthy this season. But let's face it, they are thrilled to see how he's dominating hitters once again.

3. Kluber never threw as hard as Justin Verlander in his prime. But Kluber reminds me of Verlander -- the steely stare, the toughness, the old-fashioned determination to complete games.

4. Verlander is now 35 and with the Houston Astros. He is 2-0 with a 1.45 ERA this season. The righthander spent most of his career with the Detroit Tigers, where he had a 183-114 record with a 3.45 ERA.

5. My point with the comparison of Kluber to Verlander is you can project Kluber pitching well into his middle 30s -- as has been the case with Verlander. In his Tribe career, Kluber is 77-49 with a 3.09 ERA.

ABOUT THE INDIANS

1. Why didn't I mention Danny Salazar? He is under team control until 2021. But he is in Goodyear coming back from arm problems. I'm told he's not close to being ready to pitch in big league games.

2. There have been some strange things happening early in the season that fall into bad luck. Jose Ramirez was 8-for-50 (.160) heading into the weekend. He has struck out only four times, compared to 10 walks. Three of his eight hits were homers.

3. I'm not going to drown all of us in baseball's new stats. But I will use something called BABIP. It's Batting Average Ball In Play. When a player hits a fair ball, what is his batting average? In the previous two years, it was .324 for Ramirez. This season, it's .098. It's why the Tribe isn't worried about Ramirez. He's making decent-to-good contact in most at bats, and he'll end up hitting well.

4. Edwin Encarnacion hit three homers when the Tribe opened the season in Seattle and Anaheim. Since coming home ... brrrr ... he went into Friday's game 3-for-28 (.107) at home. Encarnacion is a career .239 hitter (.750 OPS) in April, his worst stats of any month of the season.

5. Meanwhile, in Philadelphia ... Carlos Santana is cold. He entered the weekend batting .150 (.620 OPS). He was 6-for-40 with two HR and eight RBI. Tribe fans know Santana seldom begins to hit until June.

6. Tyler Naquin probably felt forgotten when sent to the minors early in the 2017 season. He played primarily at Class AAA Columbus last season. He went back to the minors this season when Michael Brantley was activated for this homestand. Then Lonnie Chisenhall's cranky calf muscle landed him on the disabled list, probably for more than a month, and Naquin returned.

7. In 2016, Naquin batted .296 (.886 OPS) with 14 HR and 43 RBI. Bradley Zimmer has taken Naquin's job in center. Zimmer is a superior defender. But Naquin can play a lot in right field. The lefty hitter will platoon with Brandon Guyer while Chisenhall recovers.

8. In spring training, Francona told Naquin, "We haven't forgot about you." The manager stressed a lot of things can happen and to be ready. Well, it happened with Chisenhall injured. Naquin is hitting .280 (7-for-25) with 4 RBI.

9. The Indians have been stressing to hitters not to become discouraged -- to make major alterations to their swings -- during the early-season slumps. In 2015, the Tribe signed power-hitter Brandon Moss. He became distraught when it seemed the wind kept knocking down fly balls that he thought should have been homers. Then he changed his swing, and was a real mess. He hit only three of his 15 HR with the Tribe at Progressive Field.

10. I just love to watch 37-year-old Rajai Davis, who already is 4-for-4 stealing bases.

11. At Class AAA Columbus, Mike Napoli is 1-for-21 with nine strikeouts. At some point, Napoli and the Tribe will have to decide what comes next for the veteran because it doesn't make sense for him to spend a long time in the minors.

12. Shane Bieber has not allowed a run (or a walk) in 13 innings at Class AA Akron. He has struck out 17. The 22-year-old righty has made only 39 minor league starts. But he could be on the fast track to Class AAA ... and positioning himself if the Tribe needs a late-season spot starter.

Blue Jays 8, Indians 4: 12 Walk-Off Thoughts on one call and one pitch, bringing your mind back from the dugout and a wayward inning brought on by past demons

By Ryan Lewis

Here are 12 Walk-Off Thoughts after the Indians' 8-4 loss to the Toronto Blue Jays Friday night.

1. At least for now, until the robots take over the world, a human element exits in the game of baseball. Surely, at some point, all 30 teams benefit it from time to time, including the Indians. Roberto Perez is one of the best pitch-framers in the game, so they might be as guilty as any team in benefiting from borderline calls. Often times, a call deemed to be poor is just chalked up to another close ball or strike, and it'll likely even out. Normally, it's close enough that there it's pretty subjective, so we just move on from the topic.

2. On Friday night, it affected the Indians on the other end of the spectrum. With the go-ahead run on second base and two outs in the seventh, Andrew Miller delivered a slider that bent back over the plate and appeared to catch the outside corner. Miller took a few steps to the dugout. Catcher Yan Gomes started to get out of his stance. Several fielders began their jog from their respective spots. Even Toronto's Teoscar Hernandez, at the plate, had succumbed to Miller's slider and took a step toward his dugout as well. He knew he was fooled.

3. There are close calls all the time, and they often go both ways in a given game. When even the hitter admits it, as Hernandez did after the game, it might qualify as being worthy of pointing it out as a step above just another borderline call from an umpire. Hernandez when asked about the call, according to the Associated Press, smiled and said, "It was a good pitch. The umpire missed it. I got another chance."

4. An interesting aspect of situations like that, whenever they occur, isn't just that the hitter gets an extra chance, it's that the pitcher in that moment isn't just heading toward the dugout—his mind is already there. The inning is over. What's next? Indians manager Terry Francona in the past has detailed that it can tough to return to play after an overturned call via replay. There is a natural flow to the game—up and down, wait around and hurry. Walking off the field, resetting and then returning for one pitch isn't necessarily the easiest thing to do. The next pitch, Miller left a slider up in the zone and Hernandez ripped it to left field for the go-ahead RBI double, and the Blue Jays rolled from there. But in an overhead view, it's more-so an interesting case study of these situations, and how complex they can be beyond simply, "ball one."

5. While much of the focus will be on that one call and the pitch that followed, the Indians had chances before and after that particular sequence to put themselves in a better position to win Friday night's game. And, as Miller went on to say, few will use it as an excuse. It's just a reality of baseball.

6. Said Miller: "It's part of the game. Sometimes you're wrong and you've got to make the next pitch. That's on me. I didn't do a good job of that. ... I think, clearly I walked off the mound. For at least a moment, I had moved on. I was headed to the dugout. My mentality was there with it, too. The next pitch, honestly, I felt like I had the right idea, I just didn't spin the ball very well. I think I wanted to wrap one around him. We had a runner on third. I felt like he kind of showed me something interesting when he pulled the fastball that far foul behind in the count. I didn't want to throw one for a strike down and in. I wanted to kind of get one wrapped around him. Usually if I execute that, they can't keep the ball fair. I didn't do that. I didn't execute. I think the ball, I have to watch to watch it and think through it more. I think the conviction I had behind the pitch was the right idea. I just didn't execute. I didn't get it to the point I wanted to. Credit him. He had a good swing. I think the ball was in and he kept it fair, did damage and did what he was supposed to do."

7. Added Indians manager Terry Francona on everyone walking off the field: "And Hernandez, too. Yeah, that hurts. I don't think we should have been in that position, but it still hurt."

8. One of the major issues for Mike Clevinger last season was that he routinely ran into trouble after falling behind hitters in the count. He had quality stuff, but getting ahead of hitters and pounding the strike zone earlier in counts became a focus of his. Through the first three innings of Friday night's game, that was the case. Clevinger was cruising, allowing only one hit and striking out four. He entered with a 0.71 ERA, and it looked like it was all systems go. Then, a malfunction. Clevinger lost the strike zone. He couldn't recover. His old issues came roaring back. Kevin Pillar brought home a run with a single and then Aledmys Diaz drilled a three-run home run, and the four-run lead the Indians had built vanished. After the game, he looked dejected and put the loss on himself.

9. Said Clevinger: "I just lost it for a little bit and lost it just enough to lose the game. You have to take what you did wrong, try to learn from it, try to capitalize from it. I just kind of lost my legs going into that fourth. ... I've been pretty good at adjusting middle of the at-bat and getting back to things, I just didn't do it quick enough there and by the time I was feeling where I was going, I was pitching myself out of the game and lost us that one."

10. Francona didn't want to immediately go to the bullpen at the first sign of trouble—Clevinger had back-to-back walks with one out in that inning—and things spiraled out of control.

11. Said Francona: "Yeah, he started missing down at first, he tried to overcompensate, just he was so good early and then we get the four and shoot, the wind is blowing straight in and probably the last thing you want to happen is to walk guys and you know and I'm kicking myself because I left him out there for a long inning, I just didn't want him to think that the first time he ran into trouble we'd go to the bullpen, but it didn't end well. He got ahead 0-2 to Pillar and got the broken-bat hit to left and then gave up the home run."

12. Clevinger completely revamped his workout routines this offseason, which included exercising on the balance beam without shoes to fix an issue he was having with shin splints. He corrected it, learned a breathing technique to control his heart rate and continued his progressions as a younger pitcher in this league. He has looked primed for a breakout season. Up until that fourth inning, everything was going according to plan for him.

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Blue Jays 8, Indians 4: Indians waste four-run lead

By Ryan Lewis

CLEVELAND: The Indians looked to be cruising to their sixth consecutive win, but a four-run lead was squandered in an 8-4 loss to the Toronto Blue Jays on Friday night at Progressive Field.

The Indians opened a 4-0 advantage through the second inning but allowed eight unanswered runs — four in the fourth, the decisive blow in the seventh and then some insurance runs in the ninth — to fall to 8-6 this season.

Similar to the temperature dropping more than 30 degrees a few hours before the first pitch, the Indians started well but had a quality start derailed.

The Indians jumped on an opposing starting pitcher for the second consecutive night to build a sizable lead. This time, it was against Blue Jays starting pitcher Marcus Stroman.

The Indians went up 2-0 after the first inning on RBI singles by Yonder Alonso and Tyler Naquin. In the second, Francisco Lindor ripped an RBI double at 111 mph to right field and Jason Kipnis followed by drilling a ball to center field that went for a ground-rule double when Kevin Pillar couldn't track it down to make it 4-0.

As the Cleveland weather has warmed up, so too has Lindor. He had a solo home run and an RBI double in Thursday night's 9-3 win over the Detroit Tigers. On Friday night, he followed that up by going 3-for-5 with an RBI and two runs scored. He also notched the 100th double of his career.

Indians starting pitcher Mike Clevinger cruised through the first three innings Friday night, allowing only one hit and striking out four. Then the wheels came off in a fourth inning that took 39 pitches to finish, and the Indians never recovered.

Clevinger lost the strike zone, walked two batters and then allowed an RBI single to Pillar with two outs. Aledmys Diaz followed by belting a three-run home run to center field, quickly erasing the Indians' advantage. Just like that, a game of which the Indians looked to be in control quickly was sent back to square one.

Some aggressiveness by Lindor didn't pay off in the sixth. With Lindor on second and two outs, Jose Ramirez lined a ball to second baseman Devon Travis, who stopped the ball but couldn't field it cleanly. Lindor made the turn around third, but the throw beat him to the plate and he was tagged out to end the inning with the score still tied 4-4.

One inning later, the Blue Jays took their first lead of the night. With Steve Pearce on second base, Andrew Miller thought he had delivered strike three to Teoscar Hernandez with a slider on the outside corner. Miller took a few steps toward the dugout and Hernandez, as well, started his walk from the plate. It was called a ball, though, and the next pitch was a slider that stayed up in the zone and Hernandez drove it to left field for a go-ahead, RBI double.

The Blue Jays (9-5) piled on Matt Belisle on the ninth to seal it. Pearce doubled home two runs and Hernandez followed with an RBI double to make it eight unanswered runs and extend the Blue Jays' lead to 8-4.

The loss dropped the Indians to 6-2 on the current homestand.

Cleveland Indians' defense stumbles, pitching implodes as Toronto Blue Jays rally for 8-4 win

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

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Lights-out starting pitching, solid relief and an impregnable defense had guided the Cleveland Indians to five straight wins prior to Friday's series opener against the Toronto Blue Jays.

A shaky start, a bullpen implosion and some sloppy glove work cost them a shot at six straight.

Toronto fell behind early, but rallied for eight consecutive runs as the Tribe committed two errors and a costly passed ball in an 8-4 loss at Progressive Field.

Teoscar Hernandez doubled home the go-ahead run in the seventh inning against Indians lefty Andrew Miller after Zach McAllister (0-2) had opened the frame by walking Toronto's No. 8 hitter, Randal Grichuk.

Miller relieved McAllister with one out and pinch runner Steve Pearce at first base. Pearce advanced to second on a passed ball by Yan Gomes and scored when Hernandez lined a two-strike Miller offering to the wall in left for a 5-4 lead. One pitch earlier, a very close pitch was ruled a ball by home-plate umpire Gerry Davis.

"It's part of the game," Miller said of the call. "Sometimes you're wrong and you've got to make the next pitch. That's on me. I didn't do a good job of that."

Both teams had runners thrown out at the plate with the score tied 4-4. Francisco Lindor doubled in the bottom of the sixth inning and was tagged out by Toronto's Russell Martin as he tried to score on an infield hit by Jose Ramirez.

"(Toronto) caught a break that that ball stayed, whether you're Sarby (third base coach Mike Sarbaugh) or Frankie (Lindor), there's no way to know exactly where that ball is, and it stayed close enough where they had a shot at us," manager Terry Francona said. "But I thought it was good base-running and coaching."

In the top of the seventh, Yonder Alonso threw out Grichuk trying to score from third on a grounder by Curtis Granderson.

Toronto struck for four runs in the top of the fourth inning on an RBI single by center fielder Kevin Pillar, and a three-run home run by shortstop Aledmys Diaz. The inning was set up when Justin Smoak and Yangervis Solarte drew back-to-back walks from starter Mike Clevinger with one out. Pillar then sent a broken-bat liner to left for the first run before Diaz blasted a 2-2 Clevinger offering 414 feet to dead center field to tie it.

Toronto's outburst spoiled what had been an otherwise decent start by Clevinger, who entered the game having allowed just one earned run in his previous two appearances. He threw 39 pitches in the fourth inning, a career high for a single frame.

Clevinger's outing snapped a streak of seven consecutive starts with one-or-fewer earned runs allowed. Per Indians PR, it was the longest such streak by an Indians pitcher since Bob Feller's seven-start streak from July 24-August 17, 1946.

Alonso ignited the Tribe offense in the first with a one-out RBI single off Toronto starter Marcus Stroman. Tyler Naquin added a two-out RBI single to left for a 2-0 lead as the Indians sent seven batters to the plate.

Lindor and Jason Kipnis pushed the Indians' lead to 4-0 with back-to-back RBI doubles in the second. Stroman got a pair of key strikeouts against Jose Ramirez and Alonso to escape further damage and worked around a pair of hits in the fifth behind a strikeout of Gomes.

Lindor's RBI double to right (00:25)

Toronto reliever Danny Barnes (1-0) got the win with a scoreless sixth inning.

Rajai Davis required a bandage and a few moments to compose himself in the bottom of the second after taking a ricochet shot above his left eye during a one-out steal of second base.

Davis' batting helmet fell off as he dove head-first into the bag. Toronto shortstop Diaz smacked the helmet off the side of Davis' face with his tag attempt. The impact caused a knot above Davis' eye and opened up a cut.

Trainer Jeff Desjardins treated the wound and Davis was able to remain in the game.

It was Davis' fourth stolen base in four attempts, tying him with Minnesota's Byron Buxton for third in the league.

What it means

The loss snaps Cleveland's five-game winning streak as well as a three-game winning streak against Toronto dating back to July 21.

The pitches

Clevinger threw 82 pitches, 48 (58 percent) for strikes. Stroman threw 99 pitches, 62 (61 percent) for strikes.

Terry Francona sees benefits in bolstering Bradley Zimmer's bunt attempts

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

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Count Indians manager Terry Francona among those excited to see Bradley Zimmer's bunt base hit in the third inning of Wednesday's win against Detroit. Expect to see it become more of a weapon in the young outfielder's repertoire.

Zimmer greeted Tigers lefty Daniel Norris by dropping down the first pitch he saw. Norris had entered the game in the first inning when Jordan Zimmerman exited after being hit in the jaw by a Jason Kipnis line drive.

It was Zimmer's first bunt attempt of the season. According to Baseball Reference, he attempted 11 bunts as a rookie last year, producing four base hits. Francona said he is trying to encourage Zimmer, perhaps more so than anybody else on the roster, to become more comfortable bunting.

In August 2016 Zimmer injured his finger on a bunt attempt in a Class AAA Columbus game against Toledo. He missed the team's next three games.

"It's not something that was in his game that much, so he's working on it," Francona said. "As he gets better at it, it could be a big help for him."

Meanwhile, Francona said he is pleased with Zimmer's approach to hitting left-handers lately. In his last five at-bats against lefties, Zimmer is 3-for-5 with no strikeouts. The 25-year-old is benefiting from getting a few more at-bats against lefties, with four hits in 11 at-bats including a home run this year.

Last year, Zimmer batted .243 with a home run and nine RBI in 74 at-bats against left-handers. Francona said mixing in a few at-bats against lefties helps young hitters keep their front shoulder in, because if they face strictly right-handers in a platoon situation, they tend to pull off the ball when called on to hit against lefties.

"When you see a lefty, it gets you back in where you're using the whole field," he said. "Righties, if they get you out, they'll get you out, but lefties, they can not just get you out, they can embarrass you."

'A rare combination'

Francona was asked whether or not Zimmer's defense in center field reminds him of anybody.

"No," Francona responded. "He's a pretty rare combination of stuff. The long strides, quick starts, really good arm. Experience is just what he needs and I think he makes really good decisions out there, but with experience and if he maintains his health, he's going to be one of the better outfielders for a while."

Francona likened Zimmer's diving catch of a fly ball to center field Thursday to rob Tigers infielder Dixon Machado of extra bases to the efforts of Minnesota outfielder Byron Buxton against the Indians in several games last year.

"From where I was looking, he had it the whole way," Francona said. "That's probably not fair to him, but you can see he was closing and he's got a nose for the ball. ... I think on a good team, when the ball is hit to center field, you're out. The more you can do that to other positions too, but especially in center field, it really helps."

After collecting a pair of hits and an RBI on Thursday, left fielder Michael Brantley was not in the starting lineup Friday. Brantley played in the final three games of the Detroit series after a scheduled off day on Monday.

Francona said the more games Brantley feels comfortable stringing together, the better.

"He was adamant that he wanted to play (Thursday)," Francona said. "He knew going in that he wasn't going to play (Friday). But I thought that he was fighting for it. It was obviously a really good sign."

Since joining the club for the April 6 home opener after starting the season on the 10-day disabled list, Brantley has played in six of the Tribe's eight games on the current 10-game home stand.

One of the keys to Indians starting pitcher Mike Clevinger's hot start has been staying ahead in the count.

Clevinger entered Friday's start against Toronto with a 0.71 earned run average in two starts this season. When he works ahead in the count, opposing batters are hitting .211 with four hits and three strikeouts in 19 at-bats. When he falls behind in the count, they're hitting .333 with four walks and four strikeouts in 15 at-bats.

In 2017, opponents hit .343 with eight home runs and a .642 slugging percentage when ahead in the count against Clevinger. When he got ahead, batters hit .143 with three home runs and 63 strikeouts in 140 at-bats.

"Last year when he worked ahead (in the count) he was one of the better pitchers in the game, and when he worked behind he really paid the price," Francona said. "So he's really trying to attack."

Francona believes that sometimes young pitchers when they come to the big leagues have difficulty staying in "attack mode."

"You see guys that you've been watching on TV, or you make a pitch and it gets hit that didn't used to get hit and that kind of gets you out of the zone," he said. "It takes a little while for guys to realize that the more they attack, the better off they're going to be."

The Indians and Major League Baseball will commemorate Jackie Robinson Day at Progressive Field on Sunday in the homestand finale against Toronto.

Robinson played his first major-league game at Ebbets Field on April 15, 1947 as a first baseman for the Brooklyn Dodgers. MLB has celebrated his legacy by retiring his number in 1997, dedicating April 15 as Jackie Robinson Day each year since 2004, and requesting that every player and all on-field personnel wear his uniform number 42 during games since 2009.

This year, a special commemorative '42' patch will appear on jersey sleeves. The '42' logo will also be worn on player hats, socks and sweatshirts.

On-field ceremonies before the game will honor the 2018 Jackie Robinson Foundation Most Valuable Diverse Business Partner Award, Ten10 Design from Chardon.

Esosa Osa, a 2012 Jackie Robinson Foundation alumnus, will throw a ceremonial first pitch.

MLB Puerto Rico Series Invitational Auction coincides with Indians-Twins games

By Marc Bona, cleveland.com mbona@cleveland.com

CLEVELAND, Ohio - The MLB Puerto Rico Series Invitational Auction, a multi-sport online sale being held to raise money for charities on the island, will run through 7 p.m. Thursday, April 19.

The auction ends the day after the Cleveland Indians and Minnesota Twins wrap up their two-game series in Hiram Bithorn Stadium. Both games begin at 7:10 p.m.

About two dozen items range from a meet-and-greet with Marlins manager Don Mattingly - minimum bid \$750 - to assorted autographed footballs and baseballs at \$75.

A Serena Williams autographed racquet, Tom Brady autographed jersey and a chance for a child to high-five Boston Bruins as they take the ice are among the offerings.

Hall of Famers Cal Ripken Jr. and former Indian Roberto Alomar are the auction's co-hosts. Proceeds will benefit Habitat for Humanity and Boys & Girls Clubs of Puerto Rico.

Hurricane Maria ravaged the island in September. The Indians were an early responder to mobilize relief efforts.

The pair of games for the Indians in Puerto Rico kicks off a six-game road trip. The Tribe returns home to host the Chicago Cubs in a two-game series, Tuesday-Wednesday, April 24-25.

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Cleveland street closures: Heavy traffic expected for Rock Hall induction, Indians, Cavs playoff

By Marc Bona, cleveland.com mbona@cleveland.com

CLEVELAND, Ohio - Heavy traffic is expected this weekend between the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductions, two Cleveland Indians games, the Cleveland Cavaliers opening playoff game and other events.

The Indians will host the Toronto Blue Jays at 4:10 p.m. Saturday and 1:10 p.m. Sunday. The Cavs open their postseason against Indiana at the Q at 3:30 p.m. Sunday. Rock Hall inductions are at Public Hall on Saturday night with an afterparty at House of Blues. The Cleveland International Film Festival is under way. There is ongoing construction at the Gateway area affecting area traffic patterns. And to top it off, rain and thunderstorms are forecast for this weekend.

No parking is allowed on these streets during Indians and Cavs games this weekend:

- * Prospect Avenue from Ontario Road to East 14th Street
- * Huron Road from Ontario Road to Prospect Avenue
- * East 9th Street from Prospect Avenue to Carnegie Avenue
- * West Huron Road from Huron Road to West Superior Avenue

Restrictions for Indians games will be 4 p.m. to midnight Friday; 2-9 p.m. Saturday and 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Sunday.

Fans are encouraged to use West Huron between Ontario and West 6th for pick-up and drop-off spots.

In addition, East 6th Street, East Mall Drive and West Mall Drive will remain closed all weekend and will reopen at 1 a.m. Monday because of the Rock Hall inductions.

As always, use of public transportation and carpooling is urged, and motorists should allow extra travel time.

The induction ceremony will be Saturday at Public Hall, 500 Lakeside Ave. Red-carpet festivities begin at 5:30 p.m. Induction starts at 7:30 p.m.

This will be the fifth time the inductions have been held in Cleveland. The 1997 ceremony was at the Renaissance Cleveland Hotel while subsequent ones in 2009, 2012 and 2015 were in Public Hall. The ceremony has rotated over the years, between Cleveland, New York and Los Angeles. Starting with this year's, though, Cleveland and New York will alternate as host cities.

Regular parking restrictions will remain in the Warehouse District 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays:

- * West 9th Street from Front Street to West Superior Avenue
- * West 10th Street from Main Street to West St. Clair Avenue
- * Old River Road from Main to Robert Lockwood Jr. Drive
- * West 6th Street from Lakeside Avenue to West Superior Avenue
- * St. Clair Avenue from West 3rd Street to W. 9th Street

* West Lakeside Avenue from W. 6th Street to W. 3rd Street

* West 3rd Street from Lakeside Avenue to Carnegie Avenue

West 3rd Street is encouraged as a ride service pick-up/drop-off location.

The city's Traffic Bureau will have controllers at key intersections to help improve traffic flow.

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Out of nowhere: How did the Cleveland Indians do what they've done on this homestand?

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

CLEVELAND, Ohio - The Indians, in the first 13 games of the season, are the "how did they do that?" team of the American League.

They're like the car in the blind spot of your rear view mirror. Just when you think it's safe to change lanes, they nose into view and speed away, leaving fellow drivers muttering, "they came out of nowhere."

The Indians came home from a season-opening West Coast trip at an unimpressive 2-4. They weren't hitting and were looking at 10 home games against three teams to be played in wind, snow and rain. On Friday night, they open the final series of the homestand, a three-game set against Toronto, with six wins in the first seven games.

The Indians still aren't hitting above .200 as a team. In Thursday's 9-3 win over the Tigers, the highest batting average in their starting lineup belonged to Michael Brantley and Tyler Naquin, both hitting .235. The seven other starters were below .200.

That lineup set season highs with nine runs and 15 hits. Francisco Lindor, who hit a leadoff home run and drove in three runs, said, "I'm happy we finally gave some runs to the pitching staff."

Ah, yes, the pitching staff. It is often said that teams can win with pitching and defense alone. Without an offense sharing equally in the responsibility of winning, it is a hard way to do things. But that's what the Indians have been doing.

Pitching has been the strength of the organization over the last few years and it is again in 2018. In the first seven games of the homestand, the starting rotation is 5-1 with a 1.25 ERA. In the one loss, Trevor Bauer allowed one run in eight innings as the Indians fell, 1-0, to Kansas City.

Here are the earned runs the starters have allowed in the first seven home games on game-by-game basis: 2, 1, 1, 0, 0, 1, 2. That's seven earned runs, 44 strikeouts and 12 walks in 50 1/3 innings.

Here are the number of runs the Indians have scored in those seven games: 3, 0, 3, 2, 2, 5, 9. Through 13 games they have the lowest batting average in the AL at .189 and rank ninth with 45 runs.

The bullpen is doing the job as well. Headed into Friday night's game, Indians relievers have gone 2-0 with three saves and a 1.42 ERA on this homestand. They've allowed three earned runs, while striking out 16 and walking two, in 14 appearances.

Andrew Miller is 1-0 with a save and has not allowed a run in 5 1/3 innings. Closer Cody Allen is 1-0 with three saves. Allen has not allowed a run in six innings.

Allen entered the season needing 18 saves to become the franchise leader. He's moved up to third place with 124 career saves behind Bob Wickman at 139 and Doug Jones at 129. He is the franchise leader in strikeouts and appearances for relievers as well.

Defensively the Indians rank third in the AL in fielding percentage at .992 behind Boston and the Angels. They've made four errors. Fangraphs.com has them leading the AL with 14 defensive runs saved. The Blue Jays are second with seven.

The defense was on display again Thursday night. Lindor made a diving stop in the hole at short and threw out Nicholas Castellanos to start the second inning. In the seventh, center fielder Bradley Zimmer robbed Jose Iglesias of extra bases with a diving catch in right center.

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

Don't have a machine playing center field?

Combine that kind of defense with a pitching staff that ranks second in the AL with a 2.27 ERA and the value of each run a struggling offense scores becomes more valuable. There's a reason seven of the Tribe's 13 games have been decided by one run.

Or as second baseman Jason Kipnis said, "It means we've got some pretty darn good pitching and some good defense. Tip the cap to the pitchers. They're the one who are doing great. We've got five starters who can go out every night and you feel like they give you a chance to win."

The pitchers have same feeling about the offense.

"We all know the offense is going to hit," said Bauer. "There's way too much talent in the offense for it to struggle like that all season. ... It's a team game, so if the pitchers can pick up the offense early while they deal with the cold weather, we know that in the middle of the season, when you hit a wall in the middle of the summer and it's exhausting, they're going to be picking us up when we have to win some games 9-8."

Cleveland Indians minor league director James Harris excited about farm system (video)

By Branson Wright, The Plain Dealer

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- James Harris hopes his name is associated with baseball despite a past filled with football.

"I'd love that if I ever got the term baseball guy," said Harris, the Cleveland Indians director of player development. "Even in year three, I'm still considered a football guy in baseball. But 20 years from now if people are calling me baseball guy, I'd consider that an honor."

Harris joined the Tribe in his current position in 2016, after he established a relationship with GM Mike Chernoff. Harris, despite limited baseball experience, has been given the responsibility of leading the team's minor league system. He oversees all aspects of the Indians farm system, including the organization's six minor league affiliates and Dominican Summer League team.

Harris leads the continued improvement and implementation of player development philosophies, programs and systems, while directing staffing and personnel decisions for the department.

And Harris likes what has developed in his three years.

"The talent [in our system] is evident in what we've done in scouting," Harris said. "I'm really excited in [what we have]. There's arms, there's bats, there's speed in the system. We want them to continue to sharpen their skills so they can one day come up and help us here in Cleveland."

Harris has not helped develop the system alone. There are nearly 70 staff members involved in player development. Harris works directly with Tribe assistant GM Carter Hawkins.

But baseball is still an adjustment for Harris, who served as chief of staff for the Philadelphia Eagles under coach Chip Kelly from 2013-15. Before the Eagles, Harris was chief of staff under Kelly at Oregon and he worked in the athletic departments at Nebraska, his alma mater, and Arizona State University.

"He did a fantastic job with my nephew and all of the players at Oregon," said Cleveland native Courtney Carter, the uncle of former Oregon and Brush High School player Pharaoh Brown. "James is a good counselor who helped develop the players on and off the field."

Harris was not sure if baseball was a possibility until he became acquainted with people in the game.

Harris first moved into baseball in 2016 as a special assistant to baseball operations with the Pittsburgh Pirates.

"The fact that you have players that are young and they won't get to play in the majors for five to seven years gives you plenty of time to develop them," Harris said. "That was intriguing to me. Once I knew that, I figured it was something I'd have fun with."

Harris, a native of Los Angeles, especially saw the fun because of the similarities in the two sports.

"In the front office of baseball or football the front office is the same," said Harris, a native of Los Angeles. "You're trying to retain and develop talent to win a championship. Until the game starts and the balls are rolled out, that's when things change. A lot of my role is similar to what it was in football."

Harris is an example of how front-office executives have crossed over to other sports. Analytics guru Paul DePodesta left the New York Mets to join the Cleveland Browns as director of strategic planning. DePodesta started in the Indians organization. And top Golden State Warriors executive Chip Bowers, who served as their chief marketing officer, is now president of business operations for the Miami Marlins.

The change from another sport often brings a fresh new perspective and Harris certainly brings that with his background in biometrics and nutrition, counseling and experience with young athletes.

But no matter his previous experience, Harris hopes to have enough time in his new sport to help change the minds of any skeptics about his transition.

"I consider myself a guy who works in baseball and who wants to work in baseball for a long time," Harris said. "Hopefully I can earn that respect and be that guy."

Hernandez answers the call, leads Jays in Cleveland

Steve Buffery

CLEVELAND — Blue Jays outfielder Teoscar Hernandez may not be a drummer, but he does have great timing.

Hernandez was recalled by the Jays on Friday after Josh Donaldson went on the DL with right shoulder inflammation and he answered the call by delivering the game-winning hit in the seventh inning as Toronto defeated a red-hot Indians team, 8-4 at Progressive Field. Cleveland had won five straight heading into Friday's game. It was the Jays' fourth comeback win of the season.

With the score tied 4-4, Hernandez doubled to left off shut-down reliever Andrew Miller in the seventh, scoring Steve Pearce from second, the winning run. Miller appeared to deliver the strike-out pitch before Hernandez's home run, but umpire Gerry Davis called it a ball, much to the consternation of the Progressive Field faithful.

"Yeah, it was a good pitch. The umpire missed it," said Hernandez with a smile. "I got another chance and I did some damage."

Pearce, who turned 35 on Friday, put the game away in the ninth when he hit a two-run double off Cleveland reliever Matt Belisle. Hernandez then hit his second double of the game to bring in Pearce. Jays shortstop Aledmys Diaz hit a three-run home run in the fourth off Cleveland starter Mike Clevinger and also hit a lead off single in the ninth and picked up his first stolen base of the season.

"We know we can come back," Pearce said. "We got a lot of good hitters on this team and the pitcher's are doing a great job of (keeping us in it). Stroman didn't start off the way he wanted to, but he battled. He kept it within four runs and he gave the offence a chance to come back."

Toronto starter Marcus Stroman got off to a shaky start, giving up two runs in the first and two more in the second. Stroman threw 53 pitches through the first two innings. He was replaced by Danny Barnes in the sixth with the game tied 4-4. Stroman has yet to go more than five innings in any of his three starts but said his arm is feeling "better and better." He had inflammation his shoulder during spring training.

"Every day I'm getting close," he said. "It's almost there. I'm not there yet, but hopefully over these next few starts I'll get back to being where I was last year."

"Command and location. When I'm going good, I don't walk guys and when I'm going good I know where the ball's going to end up," Stroman continued. "Like I said, I'm getting pretty close, it's just a matter of executing and I should be there over the next few starts, hopefully by the next one."

The Jays got on the board in the fourth when Cleveland starter Mike Clevinger walked Justin Smoak and Yangervis Solarte with one out. Kevin Pillar, who went 2-for-4 with a double, hit a single down the left field line to score Smoak. Diaz then smacked a 2-2 offering from Clevinger over the wall in centre, a shot that went an estimated 414 feet, tying the game 4-4. The Jays have now hit home runs in an MLB-leading 13 different games this season

Toronto right-hander Randal Grichuk, who is hitting .071, made a beautiful diving catch on a Francisco Lindor line drive to right in the fourth. Lindor had a big night for the Tribe. On top of that liner to Grichuk, he hit a single and two doubles — the second was the 100th of his career.

Toronto second baseman Devon Travis made a great play in the seventh. With Lindor at second, Jose Ramirez smashed a high-hopper to Travis who blocked the ball from going into the outfield. Travis recovered, picked up the ball and threw it to catcher Russell Martin who tagged Lindor out at home to end the inning. Travis was hit in his right hand in the ninth by Belisle, but isn't expected to miss any games.

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Encarnacion can't understand why Bautista is unemployed

Steve Buffery

CLEVELAND — After launching a handful of balls over the fence during batting practice at Progressive Field on Friday afternoon, former Blue Jays slugger Edwin Encarnacion launched into a criticism of a system that has kept his friend and ex-Toronto teammate Jose Bautista without a contract.

"I think a lot of those teams don't want to win," the Indians' DH told a couple of Toronto journalists when asked why so many veteran free agents like Bautista are still unsigned this season. "If you want to win, you go for those players, Bautista, Melky (Cabrera)... There's still a lot of free agents that are still there that can help a lot of teams win."

Bautista struggled at the plate last season, hitting .203 with an OPS of .674, with 23 home runs, in 157 games. Almost all of his offensive numbers were down.

After the season, the Jays declined his option for 2018 (\$17 million).

Still, Encarnacion said he is very surprised that Bautista is still unemployed.

"The player he is, he doesn't deserve that," said the 35-year Encarnacion, who hit 38 homers with 107 RBI in his first season in Cleveland last year.

Bautista's numbers last season, his frequent strike outs, and the fact that he's 37 seemed to have scared teams off, even though he is reportedly willing to accept a one-year deal and is said to be in very good shape physically.

"We're still good friends, I talked to him (Friday)," said Encarnacion. "And he's still working out and he's still waiting for some calls."

Encarnacion said Bautista brings more to a team than just home run power.

"I think to have a guy like Jose Bautista, you learn a lot from him," said Encarnacion, who signed as free agent with the Indians on Jan. 5, 2017 for \$60 million over three years. "He's a very smart player, a smart hitter and he can help a lot of young players to continue their career. And for me, as my teammate, he helped me a lot."

"But he's good," Encarnacion added, when pressed about Bautista's frame of mind. "He's hanging. He wants to be playing right now but it's something that's not his decision. He can still do it."

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Blue Jays open Cleveland series with a bang

By Richard GriffinBaseball Columnist

It was an unlikely 8-4 win for the Blue Jays in the opener of their weekend series against the Indians at Cleveland's Progressive Field on Friday night, the kind of comeback victory they did not enjoy all of last April.

A sort-of Ohio two-step that set up the Jays' winning run in the top of the seventh inning. With Steve Pearce on second base and a 1-and-2 count, Cleveland reliever Andrew Miller threw a nasty slider to Teoscar Hernandez that seemed to catch the corner. Miller took two steps toward his dugout, and Hernandez took two steps toward his, but the umpire called it ball two. On the next pitch, the Jays left fielder pulled a double down into the left-field corner with Pearce scoring.

The Jays added three in the ninth on a two-run double by Pearce and another double by Hernandez, called up earlier in the day.

Stroman allowed four runs on nine hits over five innings, his a third straight disappointing start in 2018. He had a shortened spring due to right shoulder inflammation, but nevertheless managed to make his start in the opening series against the Yankees. In his second start in Texas, he suffered the loss after throwing 51 balls and 45 strikes, the first time in his career he'd logged more than 50 per cent balls. Then came Friday night.

The Indians' bats had come alive the last two games, scoring 14 runs. That beat went on against Stroman with two runs in the first and two in the second. His pitch count was racing toward 100 when the Jays struck big to tie it up.

Cleveland right-hander Mike Clevinger had been cruising before walking back-to-back Jays to start the fourth. With two out, Kevin Pillar singled, driving in the first run. Then on the seventh pitch of the at-bat, on a 2-and-2 pitch, Aledmys Diaz liked a fastball and drove it out to centre for his fourth homer of the year to tie the game. Stroman responded with a perfect 10-pitch fourth inning and it was game on.

Cleveland Indians' Yan Gomes tags out Jay's Randal Grichuk during the seventh inning.

The mystery of why Josh Donaldson did not pinch-hit on Wednesday in the ninth inning, when he would have represented the tying run in Baltimore, was answered mid-afternoon on Friday. The Jays placed their MVP on the 10-day disabled list with inflammation of the throwing shoulder, recalling the 25-year-old Hernandez from Triple-A Buffalo. By not allowing him to pinch hit, Donaldson will be eligible to return to the active roster next Saturday at Yankee Stadium.

Hernandez was immediately inserted into the lineup, batting second and playing left field. Manager John Gibbons left the struggling Randal Grichuk in right and kept Pearce in reserve. It paid off.

The Jays broke a six-game losing skid at Progressive Field that included two games in the AL Championship Series in 2016.

Blue Jays place Josh Donaldson on DL with shoulder inflammation, recall Teoscar Hernandez

By Laura Armstrong

The Teoscar Hernandez fever has been bubbling within the Blue Jays' fan base since an impressive September debut last year and a strong showing in Florida this spring. But there's an unfortunate flip side to his return to the big leagues.

The 25-year-old Hernandez will take Josh Donaldson's place on the Blue Jays roster, after the 2015 AL MVP was placed on the 10-day disabled list on Friday with right shoulder inflammation. The move is retroactive to April 11. The earliest he could return would be during next weekend's series at the New York Yankees.

The third baseman has struggled with what he called a "dead arm" since spring training. Donaldson spent five of his 11 games this season as Toronto's designated hitter in order to give his arm a rest. He did not play in the final game of the Blue Jays' last series against Baltimore. Prior to being sidelined, Donaldson was hitting .239/.352/.457, with an .808 OPS, three home runs and nine RBIs.

Donaldson was sent for additional imaging procedures this week, which found no structural damage or instability. He will rehab in Florida, working on a throwing program at the club's minor-league complex. It is not clear how long Donaldson might be sidelined.

Donaldson is the second Blue Jays player to hit the disabled list this week, after designated hitter Kendrys Morales was sidelined on Tuesday with a grade one strain in his right hamstring.

Many Blue Jays fans on social media had expressed hope that Hernandez would be the player called up in Morales'w place, but the club opted to add left-handed reliever Tim Mayza to the 25-man roster.

Speaking to the Star in Buffalo on Thursday, on a day when he hit his second home run of the season for the Triple-A Bisons, Hernandez said he was aware of, and thankful for, the support up north.

"It makes me feel good," he said. "A lot of people are asking for me up there but the time is today. I've just got to try to continue to do my thing here, try to improve things that I have to improve and get better and get there."

Now that he is there, expect Hernandez to try to soak up everything he can from the veterans around him. Hernandez counts his month in the big leagues last fall — when he hit .261 with nine homers and 20 RBIs in 26 games as a September call-up — as a vital part of his success early this year.

"When you're getting experience, you're getting more confidence on the field," he said. "Every day you learn something new from veteran guys. I think that was the key for me last year. I learned a lot from (Jose) Bautista, Donaldson, Morales. Those guys were always telling me something new every day; how to play the game, how to get focused every day and get ready. I think that was the key to last year and this spring."

In Florida, Hernandez picked up where he left off last year. He slashed .358/.386/.698 with an 1.084 OPS in 23 Grapefruit League games, hitting four home runs and driving in 15 runs. He travelled with the team to Montreal for two exhibition games against St. Louis before being sent to the Bisons to start the year. In a small sample size of 18 at-bats in Triple A, Hernandez hit .278 with the pair of homers.

"(The front office) said, 'Everybody knows they don't have space,'" Hernandez said Thursday of being a late cut. "They have a lot of guys under contract and I understand that. I'm not mad about that. I'm just going to try to do better, to improve my things, improve my skills and just try to get better every day."

Blue Jays manager John Gibbons has already seen an improvement in the native of Dominican Republic, who started in left field and batted second in the lineup for Toronto in the first of three games against Cleveland this weekend.

"I think the guy's going to be a good major-league player," Gibbons told SiriusXM's MLB Network Radio on Friday, before the roster move was announced. "We saw that last year and in spring training I thought he was a better player. He has learned how to hit, he's learning the strike zone better. I'm a huge fan."

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