

Kipnis deals knockout punch after Bauer's gem

By Jordan Bastian MLB.com @MLBastian

DETROIT -- After the baseball dropped into Comerica Park's stands, and following a trip around the bases that Jason Kipnis described as therapeutic, the Indians' second baseman crossed home and waved at a group of people in the seats behind the plate on Friday night.

It was a greeting for a band of hecklers that had been wearing him out in the moments leading up to his go-ahead, three-run home run in the ninth inning.

"There are a lot of people who feel the need to remind me how my season's going," Kipnis said after the Tribe's 4-1 victory over the Tigers. "Like I don't already know. It was good to actually get one on my side."

Kipnis has not only heard it on the road -- his numbers are there for all to see, illuminated on every scoreboard -- but the second baseman has also dealt with critics in Cleveland. On Friday, he did some silencing with a powerful swing that backed a stellar start by Trevor Bauer and gave the Tribe its ninth win in 12 games.

The blast snapped a 1-1 deadlock and helped Bauer find the win column after eight innings, during which he piled up 12 strikeouts and held the Tigers to a 2-for-12 showing with runners on base. The home run also improved Kipnis' slash line to .290/.347/.478 over his past 18 games. Prior to that, he sported a .171/.259/.250 line on the season.

"I'm happy for him," said Bauer, who is 5-4 with a 2.62 ERA on the year. "Some of the balls that he's barreling that weren't falling early in the year are starting to fall. Shoot, early in the year, that's a long flyout and the guy probably climbs the wall and catches it or something. I'm pumped for him, that he's having some more success. It's got to be good for his mental state."

In the ninth, Jose Ramirez drew a one-out walk against Shane Greene and then bolted for third -- with the thought of scoring -- when Yonder Alonso sent a pitch into the right-center gap for a two-out single. Ramirez overran third, drawing a throw to the plate and allowing Alonso to advance to second on the play. Kipnis allowed them to jog home when he sent Greene's 1-0 slider into the seats.

"I've put a lot of pressure on myself," Kipnis said. "I'm in the on-deck circle and I'm mentally trying to prepare myself for the last at-bat and I'm saying, 'Hey, whatever's happened so far this game, forget it. Meet the challenge head-on.' The results paid dividends right there."

The Tigers opened the bottom of the first inning with back-to-back doubles from Leonys Martin and Nicholas Castellanos against Bauer, grabbing a swift 1-0 lead. The right-hander retired the next three hitters in order and continued to hold Detroit's lineup in check from there, trading zeros for much of the night with Tigers righty Michael Fulmer.

The Indians' lone breakthrough against Fulmer arrived in the fourth with two outs. Edwin Encarnacion got things started with a single to right field and then hustled home on a double to the wall in right-center field by Alonso. Fulmer then held the Tribe to a 2-for-11 showing over the remainder of his seven-inning outing.

Even with 113 pitches in the books, Bauer wanted the ball for the ninth, but Kipnis' shot created a save situation for closer Cody Allen. The reliever put the final touches on the win, and Kipnis was thrilled to see Bauer's outing pay off.

"That was big," Kipnis said. "We knew he was there, probably pacing back and forth in the dugout [in the ninth]. It was a good pitching matchup tonight with him and Fulmer, two good guys. [Bauer] has been on his game lately and when a guy goes out like that and wants the ball back out there for the eighth inning, you could tell he was in it and he wanted it. I'm really happy to get him the 'W' tonight."

MOMENT THAT MATTERED

Bauer outage: The Tigers had the makings of a rally in the sixth inning, when Miguel Cabrera led off with a single and went first-to-third on a one-out single to right from Victor Martinez. Bauer then worked to a full count on Niko Goodrum, who swung through a cutter for a strikeout. The Tribe starter then induced a flyout to left off the bat of James McCann, preserving the 1-1 deadlock with the Tigers.

"Man, he dug in and pitched his rear-end off," Indians manager Terry Francona said. "It's a good feeling, because he's going to compete, and he's durable."

THEY SAID IT

"I'm slowly coming out of it, but little swings like that definitely help the process and get your head up and pick your chin up a little bit and take a little weight off the shoulders. It's been tough so far. I'm happy to keep plugging away, and I think this team needs me to keep plugging away. Hopefully, I can keep doing more things like that and help win." -- Kipnis

"Definitely, if I can lead the league in that every year, I think that'd be pretty cool." -- Bauer, who leads the Majors with 109.3 pitches per start

SOUND SMART

Bauer has registered at least 10 strikeouts in three consecutive starts, making him only the sixth pitcher in team history to achieve that feat, per the Indians. The others on that short list include Sam McDowell (five times), Corey Kluber (three times), Bob Feller (twice), CC Sabathia and Chuck Finley.

UP NEXT

Right-hander Mike Clevinger (4-2, 3.36 ERA) is scheduled to take the mound for the Indians on Saturday, when the Tigers host the Tribe in a 4:10 p.m. ET clash at Comerica Park. In his career, Clevinger has gone 4-1 with a 2.28 ERA in six appearances (five starts) against Detroit. The Tigers will counter with Mike Fiers (5-3, 4.33).

Miller takes step forward with bullpen session

By Jordan Bastian MLB.com @MLBastian

DETROIT -- There remains no definitive timetable for Andrew Miller's return to the Indians' bullpen, but the big left-hander took another promising step forward on Friday afternoon. Prior to the Tribe's game against the Tigers, Miller worked through a lengthy bullpen session at Comerica Park.

"The fact that he threw 30 pitches -- that's a lot," Indians manager Terry Francona said. "Where it goes from here, I don't think we know. Obviously, he's going to have to throw more. One, we just want to see how he bounces back, first of all, because that's one of the huge challenges."

Due to the volume of throws in Friday's workout, Francona was not sure if Miller would log another bullpen session during the current weekend series in Detroit. The next workout will likely come during the team's next road series in Chicago, where the Tribe begins a four-game set against the White Sox on Monday.

Francona was non-committal when asked if Miller -- working through mechanical issues stemming from right knee discomfort -- would require a Minor League rehab assignment before coming off the 10-day disabled list.

"Like we did last time, we'll get together as a group when it's [the appropriate time]," Francona said. "And he'll be a part of that, because I mean, shoot man, he knows his body better than we do. You guys are around him. He's about as conscientious as they come, so he will be a part of that decision."

Plutko to start Tuesday

With a need for a fifth starter looming on Tuesday against the White Sox, the Indians have discussed going with either Adam Plutko or Shane Bieber from Triple-A Columbus. Cleveland plans on promoting Plutko, and the decision comes after some hefty internal dialogue.

Chris Antonetti, the Indians' president of baseball operations, sought the opinions of Columbus pitching coach Steve Karsay, Minor League pitching coordinator Ruben Niebla and Tim Belcher, a special assistant to baseball operations, among others, in determining whether to go with Plutko or Bieber for the fifth spot.

"I don't think it's bad to have a split camp when you've got two guys you think are pretty good," Francona said. "And they really did a good job of laying it out, how they felt. And, I think that after reading that, it seemed like Plutko was the right choice for various reasons. And I understand it, and I really kind of respected the way that they went about it."

Plutko has gone 3-0 with a 3.93 ERA in three starts this season for Cleveland, but has spent the bulk of the year at Triple-A. In nine Minor League outings, the righty has a 1.83 ERA with 48 strikeouts against 10 walks in 59 innings. On Thursday, Plutko allowed one run and struck out five with no walks in six innings against Norfolk.

Worth noting

- Francona noted that outfielder Brandon Guyer (10-day DL, neck strain) will continue on his Minor League rehab assignment at least through this weekend. The Indians are not facing a left-handed pitcher (Guyer's specialty) in Detroit, and the outfielder has gone 2-for-40 between Triple-A and Double-A in 10 rehab games this year.

"He knows he needs the at-bats," Francona said. "Hopefully, it can help him, because shoot, when we get him back, I don't know how many times I've said it, we've got to have him do some damage when he's facing lefties."

- Outfielder Tyler Naquin (10-day DL, left hamstring) was scheduled to play five innings with Triple-A Columbus on Friday, per Francona. The Indians' manager noted that Naquin will move between right and center field over the next week, while building up to playing nine innings.

- Left-hander Jeff Beliveau, who was designated for assignment on Saturday, cleared waivers and has accepted an outright assignment to Triple-A Columbus.

Indians 4, Tigers 1: Jason Kipnis' 3-run homer in 9th delivers Trevor Bauer a much deserved win

Dave Hogg | The Associated PressPublished on June 8, 2018 | Updated 2:04 a. m.

DETROIT — The Detroit Tigers gave the Cleveland Indians an extra out in the ninth inning, and Jason Kipnis made them pay.

The Tigers failed to take advantage of a two-out baserunning mistake by Jose Ramirez, and Kipnis hit a tiebreaking, three-run homer two pitches later to lift the Indians to a 4-1 win.

Ramirez almost broke the tie himself, hitting Shane Greene's 3-1 pitch just past the foul pole down the right-field line, but ended up drawing a walk. Yonder Alonso hit a two-out single into the right-center-field gap, and Ramirez stumbled as he took a wide turn around third.

Instead of throwing to third, though, second baseman Dixon Machado sent his relay to the plate, allowing Ramirez to get back to third and Alonso to take second.

"That's a play where, at the worst, we let them have runners on first and third," Tigers manager Ron Gardenhire said. "If Dixon just runs the ball back in, that's what we give them, and if throws to third, we've got a chance at an out. You need to take those opportunities."

Kipnis then connected off Greene (2-3) for a drive over the right-center-field scoreboard for his fourth homer of the season.

"I've only got four this year, but I still know when they are gone," he said. "I caught it flush."

Kipnis came into the game hitting .205.

"That was a therapeutic trot around the bases, and hopefully this is the start of something big," he said. "I've put a lot of pressure on myself to get this going, but I tried to forget everything right there and just hit my pitch."

Trevor Bauer (5-4) struck out 12 in eight innings, giving up one run and seven hits. He has fanned 37 in 21 innings over his last three starts.

"I was ready to go back out there for the ninth," he said. "I tend to feel better as the game goes along, and my velocity stays the same or gets better."

Cody Allen pitched the ninth for his 12th save, staying in the game after being hit by a ground ball.

"It got him pretty good, but he's OK," Indians manager Terry Francona said. "He might not pitch tomorrow, but that's because he's been up a lot."

Tigers ace Michael Fulmer came into the game with a 1-3 record and 6.89 ERA in his past six starts.

Against Cleveland, though, his fastball regularly reached 98 mph as he allowed one run on five hits in seven innings. He struck out seven without walking a batter.

"This was huge, because we've been working on my mechanics, and this is what I needed," Fulmer said. "That's my old fastball and my old command — being able to throw quality fastballs where I need them down in the zone."

Even after a loss, Gardenhire knew how much Fulmer's performance meant to a team with a banged-up pitching staff.

"That's exactly what we needed to see," he said. "We all knew that he had to get back to commanding the fastball down in the zone, and he did just that."

The Tigers took only four pitches to grab a first-inning lead on doubles by Leonys Martin and Nicholas Castellanos, but Bauer quickly settled down.

Cleveland tied it in the fourth on Alonso's two-out RBI double. Edwin Encarnacion scored from first, but Alonso was thrown out trying for his third triple in nine major league seasons.

Hall of Fame coach

Tigers first base coach Ramon Santiago is away from the team with his wife about to give birth, so Alan Trammell filled in. Trammell, who now works as a special assistant to Tigers general manager Al Avila, will be inducted into the Hall of Fame and have his No. 3 retired later this summer.

Trammell played for the Tigers from 1977-1996 and managed them from 2003-2005.

Working hard

Bauer threw 113 pitches, increasing his major league-leading average to 109.3 per start. Max Scherzer of the Washington Nationals is second at 106.2. Bauer has thrown at least 100 pitches in all 13 starts this season.

"That's not a big enough lead — I need to bulk that up," he said. "It would definitely be cool if I could lead the majors in that category every year."

Trainer's room

INDIANS: Left-handed pitcher Andrew Miller (knee) threw a bullpen session before Friday's game. He is likely to throw again during Cleveland's series in Chicago next week.

TIGERS: Right-handed pitcher Franklin Perez, generally considered Detroit's No. 1 prospect, is expected to throw off a mound Tuesday. Perez, acquired from Houston in last year's Justin Verlander trade, has been sidelined since spring training with a lat strain.

Up next

The teams play the second game in the weekend series today, with Cleveland's Mike Clevinger (4-2, 3.36) facing Mike Fiers (5-3, 4.33).

Covering the Bases: Game 61

by Jordan Bastian

FIRST: Trevor Bauer wants to live in a world without pitch counts.

Actually, let's make a slight amendment to that statement. Trevor Bauer wants to live in a world where his average pitch count is the highest in all of baseball. He doesn't want restrictions, because he fully believes that his year-round training allows him to operate without any.

After Friday's game, Bauer was informed that he leads all Major League starters in pitches per game. The Tribe starter leads the pack with 109.3 pitches on average. Nationals ace Max Scherzer is second in that category at 106.2

"What's my lead?" Bauer replied.

The reporter informed him it was around three on average.

"Not enough," Bauer said with a smirk. "I'll have to bump that up."

When Bauer was at 106 pitches through seven strong innings, there was little question that he would be back on the mound for the eighth. He was indeed and the right-hander disposed of Miguel Cabrera, Jeimer Candelario and Victor Martinez on seven pitches.

At 113 pitches, it was fair to wonder if Bauer would be back out again for the ninth. Two outings ago, he logged 127. In two other starts, Bauer topped 113, too. After Jason Kipnis' three-run homer in the ninth, the ninth went to closer Cody Allen.

"That was big," Kipnis said of grabbing the late lead to back Bauer's outing. "We knew he was there [in the ninth], probably pacing back and forth in the dugout."

Now, not all pitch counts are created equal.

Bauer's pitches per game rate has jumped to 109.3 from 101.3 last season, but the pitcher is averaging 16.5 pitches per inning this year vs. 17.9 per inning in '17. Much of that deals with Bauer allowing fewer balls in play to this point this season.

Hitters currently have a 72.1% contact rate vs. Bauer—down from 78.2% in 2017. They are swinging and missing 11.8% of the time—up from 9.2% in '17. Bauer's walk rate is nearly identical (8.0 BB% in '18 vs. 8.1 BB% in '17), but his strikeout rate has climbed to 30.3% (up from 26.2% in '17). His WHIP has subsequently declined to 1.15 this year from 1.37 in '18.

Against the Tigers, Bauer also continued his recent trend of gaining velo throughout the outing and holding steady. Here are his average four-seam velos by inning on Friday:

1: 94.6
2: 95.1
3: 95.7
4: 95.4
5: 95.6
6: 97.0
7: 95.1
8: 95.1

"I tend to feel better as the game goes along," Bauer said. "My velo stays consistent or it gets better as I find a feel for all my pitches as the game goes along. Changeup was good. Cutter was good. Probably one of the best sliders I threw all night was one of the last ones I threw, maybe in the end of the seventh or something like that.

"But, yeah, I feel great. I recover really well and I'm glad I can get deep in the game for the team."

Bauer felt strong enough to pile up 12 strikeouts, issue just one walk and allow only one run on the evening. He fanned 10-plus for the third straight game and for the fourth time in five turns.

On the season, Bauer now has a 2.62 ERA with 11.4 K/9, 0.5 HR/9, a 2.49 FIP and 2.9 fWAR (6th in MLB).

And that average of 109.3 pitches per start? It's currently the highest rate for an Indians starter since 2002, when Bartolo Colon averaged 110.8 over 16 outings prior to being traded to Montreal.

"If I can lead the league in that every year," Bauer said, "I think that'd be pretty cool."

SECOND: Indians hitting coach Ty Van Burkleo had a great quote recently when discussing the mental battle Kipnis has been waging with himself throughout this season's struggles.

"Sometimes when you're struggling," Van Burkleo said, "you get so many thoughts in your head that it's like you're having a conference call when you're trying to hit. It doesn't work."

On Friday night, more and more callers began to beep into Kipnis' head as the game wore on.

First inning: Groundout.

Beep!

Fifth inning: Strikeout swinging.

Beep. Beep.

Seventh inning: Strikeout looking.

Beep. Beep. Beep.

Ninth inning...

"I'm in the on-deck circle," Kipnis said, "and I'm mentally trying to prepare myself for the last at-bat and I'm saying, 'Hey, whatever's happened so far this game, forget it. Meet the challenge head-on.'"

Ignore the numbers on the scoreboard. Tune out the hecklers behind home plate. Leave the conference call.

With a Yonder Alonso on second, Jose Ramirez on third and the game caught in a 1-1 knot, Kipnis received this 1-0 curveball from Shane Greene:

That looks like a pitch that a Major League hitter should send a long way. Well, Kipnis did. He sent it towering over right-center field—one of the deepest parts of Comerica Park—and into the stands. How was that trip around the bases?

"It's therapeutic," Kipnis said.

Over his past 18 games, Kipnis has hit .290/.347/.478 for the Indians. Right before that stretch, his season slash was .171/.259/.250. What he has done lately is more in line with expectations—even if the overall season statistics still don't align with his career track record.

"You hope something like this really kind of gets him going," Indians manager Terry Francona said. "When Kip hits, we've got a little different gear. And he's shown some really good signs lately. Hopefully something like this really gets him going."

Kipnis felt good enough to wave at someone in the seats behind home after crossing the plate. Family? Friends? Nope. Hecklers who had been wearing him out leading up to the go-ahead blast in the ninth.

"Detroit fans," Kipnis said. "There are a lot of people who feel the need to remind me how my season's going, like I don't already know. It was good to actually get one on my side."

THIRD: Much has been made of slugger Edwin Encarnacion's recent statistical climb, but the Tribe's other first baseman also appears to be heating up.

Back on May 8, Yonder Alonso was hitting .208/.267/.425 on the season for the Indians. In the 24 games since that date, he's posted a .313/.396/.500 slash line in 80 at-bats. In the win over the Tigers, Alonso played a role in the Tribe's two rallies.

In the fourth, Alonso doubled to the wall in right-center with Encarnacion on first. Alonso got caught in an 8-6-5 run-down for the inning's final out, but that baserunning also ensured that Encarnacion crossed the plate in time to pull the game into the 1-1 tie.

In the ninth, Alonso found the right-center gap again for a single that moved Ramirez up to third with two outs. On the play, Ramirez drew a throw to the plate by over-running third, and that opened the door for Alonso to sprint up 90 feet to second.

Two pitches later, Kipnis let everyone jog home.

HOME: This won't surprise you, but...

"I wanted to go back out for the ninth," Bauer said.

That wasn't going to happen, even if the game had remained tied heading to the bottom of the ninth inning. Once Allen was up warming in the bullpen, the closer was going to be entering the game.

"We were bringing him in anyway," Francona explained, "just because he had thrown so much the last two games, and we didn't want him to be up and down, because we're on the road. So, he was going to pitch either way."

The Indians had the off-day on Thursday, but Allen closed back-to-back games on Tuesday and Wednesday, logging 40 total pitches over 2.1 innings. Against the Tigers, Allen issued a leadoff walk, but then set down the next three batters (two via strikeout).

The groundout in-between the punchouts was a painful one, too. Jose Iglesias sent a chopper back to the mound, where it struck Allen on the top of the foot. The pitcher completed the out at first base and then—after throwing a couple warmup tosses in front of Francona and a medical staffer—he finished the inning.

“It hit him pretty good,” Francona said. “He’ll be OK. He might not pitch tomorrow. He’s been up a lot.”

**Tito’s pregame minutiae: June 8
by Jordan Bastian**

Q: We saw Andrew Miller throwing a bullpen?

TF: “He threw a 30-pitch bullpen today. The fact that he threw 30 pitches—that’s a lot. Where it goes from here, I don’t think we know. Obviously, he’s going to have to throw more. One, we just want to see how he bounced back, first of all, because that’s one of the huge challenges. And then, if he’s bouncing back, then you can start to think, OK, working on his pitches, locating, things like that that are kind of fun to talk about, as opposed to just health.”

Q: Miller didn’t have a Minor League rehab assignment last time. Will he have one this time around?

TF: “You know what we’ll do this time, like we did last time, we’ll get together as a group when it’s ready and he’ll be a part of that, because I mean, shoot man, he knows his body better than we do. You guys are around him. He’s about as conscientious as they come, so he will be a part of that decision.”

Q: Has the medical staff found a good way to support his knee?

TF: “I know that they were talking about getting some braces in. I don’t know if they’ve come yet or if he’s worn them, but the fact that he’s throwing the bullpen without it, I think, is a good sign. Long-term, they’ve talked about a few different things. I don’t think they’ve gotten to that yet. They’re trying to feel like he can do it without it, which is a good thing.”

Q: Miller has mentioned getting the knee taped...

TF: “They’ve been doing that in the past. That’s a possibility. Again, that’s not my business. I obviously care, but they do a pretty good job of being on top of stuff and I know, like I throw my two cents on probably more than they like, but we all just want to see him able to pitch.”

Q: Will he throw off the mound again Sunday?

TF: “I don’t know yet what he’s going to do. Thirty is a lot. We’ll see. We’ll see.”

Q: What’s the latest on Brandon Guyer?

TF: “Chris [Antonetti, president of baseball operations] talked to him again and, because we’re facing three righties, and I think we still have until... Thursday I think is his last day where we’d have to do something. It’s just, he hasn’t really been swinging it real well. I think it’s kind of—I know it is—a mutual thing. He’s been really good about it. He knows he needs the at-bats and, since we’re not facing lefties... So, hopefully, it can help him, because shoot, when we get him back, I don’t know how many times I’ve said it, we’ve got to have him do some damage when he’s facing lefties. Now, he hasn’t faced very many in his rehab, but he’s struggling to find some timing.”

Q: Do you know who will start Tuesday against the White Sox?

TF: “Plutko.”

Q: Plutko was lined up for that day...

TF: “They kind of both were. [Shane] Bieber was on an extra day. And we talked through it. Well, we’ve been talking through it, but Chris did a good thing. He does a lot of good things. He asked like—and I don’t think it’s bad for me to share this—he asked like [Triple-A pitching coach Steve] Karsay, Ruben [Niebla, Minor League pitching coordinator], Belch [Tim Belcher, special assistant to baseball operations], there was like five guys—to just give [their thoughts]. Shoot, I don’t think it’s bad to have a split camp when you’ve got two guys you think are pretty good. And they really did a good job of laying it out, how they felt. And, I think that after reading that, it seemed like Plutko was the right choice for various reasons. And I understand it and I really kind of respected the way that they went about it. It wasn’t just like, ‘Hey, he’s pitching. Deal with it.’ I think there’s a lot of times I get proud around here, but I love that about the way Chris and Cherney [GM Mike Chernoff] do that.”

Q: And it must feel nice to have two pitchers doing well enough to create that kind of debate...

TF: “Yes, because we’ve been a little thin. We’ve kind of admitted our bullpen, we haven’t been where we want to. But then, all of a sudden you get two starters that kind of look like they’re pretty good, that makes the glass look a lot fuller. Because, if you’re searching for starting pitching, it’s hard, man. It’s hard. They’re at different parts of their career. Plutko’s been there for a while and because of injuries last year it kind of hurt his season last year, but now he’s coming back. And Bieber’s young and coming. So, it gets kind of exciting.”

Q: What’s the latest on Tyler Naquin?

TF: “He’s going to play five innings today. Best-case is probably a week, but I hate to even say that. Some of it’s probably going to be where we are and things like that. But, right now, we’re just going to get him to the point where he’s ready to play nine and then we’ll see where he’s at and see where we’re at.”

Q: You said Naquin will play some center, too?

TF: “Yes, yes. Probably every other game. He’ll probably play center, right and I’m sure he’ll probably DH a game, just because getting his at-bats is important and you don’t have to run a guy into the ground that way.”

Q: Have you noticed a difference in Detroit’s style of play with Ron Gardenhire at the helm?

TF: “I think anytime you have change, you’re always going to get the new guy’s personality. That’s why so often it’s like a polar opposite. It seems like that. Back in Philly, they went from me to [Larry] Bowa. It seems like Gardy, just from watching and reading, I think Gardy’s enjoying his second time and some of the younger guys they have and it seems like they’re feeding off that a little bit. I’ve always thought Gardy is really good. When his teams in Minnesota were good enough, they’d play good enough. Sometimes they weren’t.”

Q: When you send someone like Bradley Zimmer down to the Minors and you tell him he needs to improve his strikeout rate, what do you tell him he needs to change?

TF: “We didn’t just say it like that, because the last thing we want him to do is just swing at 60 percent to try to hit the ball in the infield. So, what we did was we asked him what he thought. Because, one, the message when a kid’s going down—they can hear one thing, other than ‘I’m going down’ and you don’t want them going down there thinking just what you said: ‘I’ve got to put this ball in play.’ Well, that might not make him a very good hitter. I just said to him, after he explained, he said, ‘I think I need to make some adjustments’ and one was make more contact, and I said, ‘When a guy strikes out 40 percent of the time, those are the guys, someone like [Joey] Gallo’—I gave a couple names—‘they’re hitting the ball out of the ballpark. If you’re going to be a high-strikeout guy, you have to really do some damage. Nobody’s trying to get you to just be [a singles hitter].’ But, I also told him, ‘With your speed, when you get to two strikes...’ The other day in Minnesota, with two strikes, he slapped the ball past short, which I thought was great, because with his speed, it’s going to give him a chance. We’ve all seen it, you get a couple of hits, and even if you don’t hit them hard, your confidence grows a little bit. It’s hitting. When guys get results, they start doing things better. I was the same way. You line out six times... The only hitter I’ve ever seen [not lose confidence] is Manny Ramirez. He just knew how good he was. I can remember managers telling me, ‘Hey, stay with that.’ I’d be like, ‘[Expletive], if I stayed with that, I wouldn’t be—I can’t, man, I only have so many good swings.’ But Manny always knew. He never [got flustered], because he knew he was good. The better hitters, they normally hit into more hard outs anyway. Like [Michael] Brantley, I bet you if you looked, it might not be scalded, but he hits the ball on the barrel so many times.”

Q: Can it be tough for a younger player like Zimmer—a guy with a unique build that lends itself both to speed and power—to figure out who he is as a hitter?

TF: “That’s why we say all the time, we never try to make somebody [something they’re not]. Because, yeah, he’s got long levers, so it’s always going to be a fight for him to be short to the ball. That’s just the way it is. I think we can get caught up in too many points, like, ‘I have to be here, here, here,’ and then the ball is up on you. I know VanBo [hitting coach Ty Van Burkleo] says this to him a lot of times: ‘Hey, if you’re making contact here, if you can think about making it out here a little further,’ that may take care of four of the things they’re talking about, just by doing that. And he understood that. Now, doing it, that’s why he’s at Triple-A. We’ve seen him hit. It probably would’ve been surprising if there weren’t ups and downs. But damn, he’s so good in center field. We’ve seen, when you watch his BP, how far he hits the ball. Guys have been sent back. Most guys do. The guys like Frankie [Lindor] that don’t, they’re more rare than the guys that do.”

Q: Jose Ramirez was sent down at one point...

TF: “Twice, wasn’t it? Three times. [Corey] Kluber. It happens. We think this guy is our center fielder for, we hope, a long time. And that’s not taking anything away from Greg [Allen]. We can play Greg somewhere else. If we have a problem where we have too many good players, we’ll really be happy.”

Q: It seems like Allen is having a lot more competitive at-bats lately. Even if they wind up being outs, he’s fighting off pitchers and getting back into at-bats...

TF: “I’d say much more competitive at-bats. For a while there, he was making some quicker outs. He’s earning more pitches to hit. That’s what it is a lot of times. If you go up there and swing at balls in the dirt, you’re not going to get a lot of strikes. When you start laying off pitches and you’re earning good pitches to hit, then you’re going to be a better hitter.”

Triston McKenzie solid in Akron RubberDucks debut: Cleveland Indians Minors (video)

By Elton Alexander, The Plain Dealer

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- That big exhale comes from Cleveland Indians fans now that Triston McKenzie's return to the mound has proven to be a success with the Akron RubberDucks. The No. 2 prospect in the organization pitched for the first time Thursday night after being on the disabled list at extended spring training in Arizona for forearm stiffness.

Against New Hampshire and a roster of highly regarded national prospects, McKenzie, 20, pitched five one-hit shutout innings. He worked four hitless innings before a lead-off single in the fifth. McKenzie had four strikeouts with two walks and hit a batter. Of his 63 pitches, 43 were strikes.

A good look: McKenzie is scheduled to get his second start when Akron hosts the same Fisher Cats on Thursday at 7 p.m. in Canal Park.

While McKenzie did not face Vladimir Guerrero Jr., arguably the top hitter in the minor leagues, he will likely get that chance next week.

Guerrero is hitting .407 on the season with 11 homers and 18 doubles. He is one of three sons of famous baseball fathers with New Hampshire, including Bo Bichette and Cavan Biggio.

The anchor: Joe Sever continues to be the anchor piece for the RubberDucks. Now 27, he is still a hitting (.292) presence, along with his ability to play both corner infield and outfield spots as well as catcher. In his last 10 games he is hitting .273 with five RBI.

A pleasant surprise: Outfielder Andrew Calica (11/2016) has been a steady presence at the plate for the RubberDucks. The Cal-Santa Barbara product is hitting .321 with three homers and 24 RBI. Calica is the only regular hitting above .300. He also has 11 stolen bases while being caught only twice.

Adam Plutko throws no-hitter in return to Columbus Clippers: Cleveland Indians minors

By Branson Wright, The Plain Dealer

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Righthander Adam Plutko didn't seem bothered by his latest return to the Columbus Clippers. In his first start after being sent back to Class AAA by the Cleveland Indians, Plutko carried a perfect game into the ninth inning last weekend before allowing a walk.

He regrouped and finished the game with a no-hitter to beat Syracuse. Plutko threw a season-high 112 pitches -- 80 for strikes. He finished with eight strikeouts and just the one walk.

Plutko made three starts in two stints for the Indians in May and had a 3-0 record with a 3.93 ERA.

He followed up his no-hitter by allowing one earned run on six hits Thursday, getting a no-decision in a loss to Norfolk. With the Clippers this season, Plutko is 5-3 with a 1.83 ERA in nine starts covering 59 innings. He's allowed just 30 hits and has 48 strikeouts with just 10 walks.

Plutko's no-hitter was the second in nine days for the Clippers after Shane Bieber's rain-shortened, seven-inning no-no on May 25. Overall, it was the ninth no-hitter in franchise history.

Bieber was impressive in one spot start with the Indians on May 31, allowing four runs and eight hits with six strikeouts and one walk in 5.2 innings against the Minnesota Twins.

Cool off: Bradley Zimmer's 10-game hit streak with the Clippers recently came to an end but he did draw a walk to bump his minor league on-base streak to 15 games (.456 OBP), dating to May 3 of 2017. His career best is 19 in 2014 with Mahoning Valley.

The Indians sent Zimmer back to Columbus this week to work on cutting down his strikeouts. He had spent two weeks on the disabled list with the Indians after crashing into the outfield wall making a catch.

Cool off II: Catcher Eric Haase has been in a five-week slump, hitting .140 (15-of-107) over his last 29 games. He had no walks in the first 22 games of that stretch, but has drawn four walks in his last seven games. Haase has not taken his struggles into the field with him, however, as he leads the IL in runners caught stealing (14) and ranks second in percentage (.412; Norfolk leads IL with .833 success rate).

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 06.09.2018

Dillon Persinger continues hot streak for Lynchburg Hillcats: Cleveland Indians minors

By Branson Wright, The Plain Dealer

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Infielder Dillon Persinger has been on an offensive roll for the Cleveland Indians Advanced-A Lynchburg Hillcats.

Persinger, 22, has hit safely in 13 of his last 14 games (reached base in all 14), and is batting .392 over that span. Persinger is the third Hillcats player to reach base in 14-plus consecutive games, joining Conner Capel (14) and Mitch Longo (26).

Persinger has raised his batting average from .231 to .299 during the streak. The Fountain Valley, Calif. native has played shortstop and second base for Lynchburg this season, and has seen consistent playing time after beginning the season with the Class A Lake County Captains.

The Tribe selected Persinger in the eighth-round of the 2017 draft.

More streaks: Anthony Miller is also on a tear. Over his last 11 games, the first baseman is batting .351 (13-for-37) with three home runs and eight RBI. Miller has back-to-back three-hit games during that span, and also had a four RBI game against Frederick during that stretch. He has raised his batting average 73 points since May 7.

Fire starter: Shortstop Luke Wakamatsu is starting to heat up. The switch-hitter is batting .302 (23-for-76) over his last 21 games with five extra-base hits and six RBIs, including his first home run of the season on May 22. On May 8, Wakamatsu's batting average was .162, and he has since raised that to .209 (47 points). He has also hit safely in 15 of his past games.

Rise: James Karinchak has been nearly perfect since being called up to the Hillcats on May 3. The righthander recorded the save in Wednesday's win over Carolina to give him 9.0 innings without allowing a run. He has struck out 15, while allowing just 10 baserunners. Combined with his time in Lake County this season, Karinchak has recorded 35 strikeouts in 20.1 innings, while opponents are hitting just .186 against him. A ninth-round pick out of Bryant in 2017, Karinchak boasts an ERA of 0.44.

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 06.09.2018

Lake County Captains see Will Benson's power: Cleveland Indians Minors

By Elton Alexander, The Plain Dealer

EASTLAKE, Ohio - It's both a thing of beauty and a weapon of destruction -- Louisville Slugger J145, 31 ounces in the hands of Will Benson, Lake County Captains.

Caramel brown stain covers the barrel exposing the definitive maple grain. But the pencil neck handle is natural and unvarnished. It is a distinctive look. Resting alone it's practically a piece of furniture. In Benson's hands, it is a joy to behold.

The Indians top pick (1/2016) from Atlanta, Ga. has slammed 11 home runs with it this season, tied for first the Class A Midwest League. Yet Benson, 19, is only hitting .200 for average on the season.

Still the signs are there, as 38 walks show a discerning eye and that Benson might be on the verge of breaking out. And when that happens, the long ball will come a lot more often than not.

"When I touch it, I touch it pretty well," Benson said after an early Tuesday afternoon workout in the batting cage. "When I make contact, I make good, hard contact. I feel comfortable where I am."

It showed Wednesday night when the 6-5, 225-pound Benson and his J145 jacked a pair of homers, one a grand slam, in a Captains victory at Classic Stadium. Even before that, Benson had hit some rockets, albeit right at a defender that had to barely move to catch it.

But the box score also showed the dark side. Along with his two homers were a pair of strikeouts. And while after that game he had a 10-game run with two hits in a game three times, and eight hits overall, he also had 16 Ks.

Still, it is forward improvement for Benson. Part of that comfort zone is that bat, which like most players he keeps in his hands, if not close by. "I didn't get it until after spring training," Benson said. "Nolan Jones (third base) had one first. I used to have an ash bat just like this when I was a boy."

Benson also said the recently improved weather, "makes a lot of difference. You feel loose, not tight."

With his power being a given in his impressive frame, Benson said part of his focus now is to be a dangerous hitter to all fields. "Homers the other way, that's what I want to feel, what I want to produce, hard hit balls up the middle and the other way," he said.

"Most of my production the last two years were to my pull side, so I went to work in the off-season trying to spray the field a little bit."

Stars are shining: Benson is one of three Captains picked to play in the 2018 MWL All-Star Game. He will be joined by lefty Kyle Nelson and Tommy DeJuneas, a pair of relief pitchers. The All-Stars were nominated and selected by the managers of the Midwest League.

Benson, 19, is tied for the league lead in homers with 11 and is fifth in the league in walks with 38. Nelson, 21, has given up just one earned run in 20.1 innings for a 0.44 ERA. Nelson has struck out 26 batters and walked just two.

DeJuneas, 22, has whiffed 34 in 26.1 innings and walked just six with a 3.76 ERA. The 54th MWL Classic will take place on June 19 at Cooley Law School Stadium in Lansing, Michigan, home of the Lansing Lugnuts.

Trevor Bauer strikes out 12, Jason Kipnis' 9th-inning HR fuels Cleveland Indians' 4-1 win over Tigers

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

DETROIT - Two batters into Friday night's game Trevor Bauer had already allowed two doubles and a run. It looked like a load of trouble was headed his way, but that was not the case.

It was the only run Bauer allowed in eight sparkling innings as the Indians beat the Tigers, 4-1, on a three-run homer in the ninth by Jason Kipnis. The Indians have won three straight and nine of their last 12.

Kipnis, with two out and two on, drove a long homer to right center off Shane Greene. Jose Ramirez started the rally with a one-out walk. Yonder Alonso singled him to third and Kipnis, hitting just .218 with runners in scoring position, put the Tribe in front to stay with his fourth homer of the season.

Bauer (5-4, 2.62) and Michael Fulmer matched each other almost pitch for pitch through seven innings. When Fulmer left after seven, Bauer stuck around for one more as he retired the middle of Detroit's lineup in order.

In two starts at Comerica Park this year, Bauer is 2-0, allowing one run in 16 innings. In three starts against Detroit this year, he's 3-0 and has allowed three earned runs in 23 innings with 29 strikeouts.

"Trevor started the game off double, double, but from there he dug in and pitched his rear end off," said manager Terry Francona. "He got out of the first and just gave up one and then he had to pitch seven innings and really pitched well."

"He used all his pitches and on a night when our offense wasn't doing much, he gave us a chance. Then Kip comes through with the big hit with a lot of good stuff before that. Yonder with a real good piece of hitting and we get out of here with a win."

Bauer ended the night with 12 strikeouts and one walk. It was the fifth time Bauer has struck out 10 or more batters this season and the 14th time he's done it in his career. In his last two starts, he's struck out 23 batters in 13 2/3 innings.

The Tigers started the game with consecutive doubles by Leonys Martin and Nicholas Castellanos to take a 1-0 lead.

Terry Francona on Trevor Bauer: "He pitched his rear end off"

"The two doubles were right in the middle of the plate," said Bauer. "You've got to be ready from pitch one. I was happy to limit the damage in the first there. And then I cruised from there."

The Indians couldn't do anything against Fulmer until the fourth. He retired 11 of 12 batters before Edwin Encarnacion singled with two out and scored on Alonso's long double to the wall in center field.

Encarnacion had already crossed the plate when Alonso made the turn at second and was caught in a rundown to end the inning.

It was the only scoring chance the Indians had against Fulmer. He allowed one run on five hits in seven innings. He struck out seven and didn't walk a batter.

Fulmer has not pitched well in his career against the Tribe. On April 12 he allowed nine runs, six earned, in three innings in a 9-3 loss against the Indians. He came into Friday's game with a career ERA of 7.31 against them.

He was a different pitcher on Friday. Bauer was not and that meant good things for the Tribe.

Cody Allen pitched the ninth for his 12th save.

Bauer has thrown 100 or more pitches in 13 straight starts. It is the longest streak by an Indians' pitcher since Bartolo Colon had 14 straight games of 100 or more pitches from April 11 through June 22, 2002.

Bauer threw 113 pitches, 86 (76 percent) for strikes. Fulmer threw 108 pitches, 71 (66 percent) for strikes.

The Indians and Tigers drew 21,766 fans to Comerica Park on Friday night. First pitch was at 7:10 p.m. with a temperature of 79 degrees.

Indians right-hander Mike Clevinger (4-2, 3.36) will face the Tigers and right-hander Mike Fiers (5-3, 4.33) on Saturday at 4:10 p.m. SportsTime Ohio, WTAM and WMMS will carry the game.

Clevinger, after going 4-0 against the Tigers last year, will be facing them for the first time this year. He is coming off a no-decision against the Twins on June 3.

Fiers is coming off a win against the Yankees on Monday. Fiers is 3-1 with a 2.22 ERA in his career against the Indians. He beat them on May 14, allowing one run in six innings.

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Tyronn Lue and Terry Francona are friends, but they didn't talk about coming back from 3-0

By Joe Vardon, Cleveland.com jvardon@cleveland.com

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Tyronn Lue and Terry Francona, the respective skippers of the Cavaliers and Indians, both had off days Thursday.

Lue was at The Q for practice ahead of Game 4 of the NBA Finals; Francona in his office at Progressive Field, preparing for the Indians' road trip. The two are friends, dating to their days coaching in Boston, and Francona's done something Lue has to do now if he wants to win a championship.

Come back from a 3-0 deficit.

"I didn't want to bother him," Lue said, when asked if he asked Francona for any advice on the matter. "He has a lot of things going on as well."

Francona managed the Red Sox to a 4-3 series win over the New York Yankees in the 2004 American League Championship Series.

The Cavs are down 3-0 to the Warriors in the Finals, and no NBA team has ever done what Francona's Red Sox did.

"No team has ever come back from 3-1, and we did it," Lue said. "So our main focus is on tonight, our Game 4, not winning four, but winning Game 4, so that's all we're going to focus on."

Lue's Cavs trailed the Warriors 3-1 in the 2016 Finals, before LeBron James and Kyrie Irving led a historic comeback and pushed Cleveland to its first NBA championship.

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 06.09.2018

Eric Stamets rounding into form after injury

By Mark Znidar

If it were elementary school, Eric Stamets would have been a couple of chapters behind the other kids in each textbook when he was activated from the disabled list May 3.

The Clippers middle infielder had missed the final 2½ weeks of spring training and the first 25 games of the International League season with a lower back injury.

Stamets isn't exactly running in the fast lane yet, but with every game he's showing signs of being the player Cleveland hopes can become a utility infielder in the major leagues. He was an all-star last season.

"You grind because it's another day," he said. "There is another battle against another pitcher. Every at-bat is another one-on-one battle, and you can't carry them from one to another. You can feel good one day and not so good the next, and that's why hitting is so hard to do."

Stamets, who graduated from Dublin Scioto, was 4-for-38 (.105) in his first 11 games. In the next 20 at-bats, he had 10 hits.

Yandy Diaz led off the ninth inning with home run and Drew Maggi drove in Francisco Mejia with a single to left to lead Columbus to a 6-5 victory over Buffalo on Friday night at Huntington Park.

Before going 0-for-4, Stamets was batting .239 with three home runs and five RBI.

Manager Chris Tremie said Stamets handled the difficult start like he expected. Stamets is a man of few words and never shows bad body language.

"That's challenging for a player when you miss 100 to 150 at-bats at the beginning of the season and have got to come in and compete against guys who have been doing this for five and six weeks," Tremie said. "He is putting together good at-bats and he's looking strong."

Defense is why Cleveland traded outfielder Daniel Murphy to the Los Angeles Angels for Stamets near the trade deadline in 2015. Two years earlier, he was voted that organization's minor league defensive player of the year.

"He's a solid player and always plays hard," Tremie said. "He has good field awareness on defense as well as the bases. It's fun to watch him play defense."

The Indians invited Stamets to major-league camp for a second straight season, but he didn't get to show much.

"I got about 30 to 40 at-bats and then didn't do anything," he said. "It stinks, but I was fortunate that it didn't happen in the middle of the season."

Stamets, 26, has used the experience of 622 professional games and 2,212 at-bats to fight to respectability in the batter's box.

"I've been through multiple slumps and you learn from them," he said. "I've been 4-for-4 and 0-for-4 with four K's, and you learn about the importance of grinding."

Stark: Useless Info Dept., Mad Max edition

By Jayson Stark Jun 8, 2018 13

An extra-inning pinch hit by, wait, who? ... Another dramatic long ball by Mr. Walkoff? ... Zero strikes = three home runs?

We've seen it all this week, friends. So join us now for another edition of the Useless Information Department.

ALL MAXED OUT

Max Scherzer just spun off an "immaculate inning" — but it wasn't even his most historic feat of the week! And that, of course, is what makes him the distinguished American he is.

But more important, for those of us who write columns entitled "The Useless Information Department," it's what keeps us in business. So for that, we're deeply indebted. Which is why we're rounding up all the astounding Max Scherzer nuggets we can find this week. And here they come...

MAXIE MOTA — Last Saturday in Atlanta, the Nationals found themselves in a tie game in the 14th inning — and with no position players left to hit. So what happened next? The only thing that could possibly happen next. They sent Scherzer up to hit. And he took care of everything.

Pinch single. Sprinted home from first to score the winning run on a Wilmer Difo triple. Drive home safely.

So perhaps you're wondering: How often do you see a Cy Young winner pinch-hit in extra innings, get a hit and then come around to score the winning run? Hahaha. You don't ever see that, naturally. We know because we checked. And the Elias Sports Bureau confirmed it. First. Time. Ever. But we're talking Max Scherzer here. So what's the big surprise?

"I knew he'd do that," the dulcet color man for the Nationals, F.P. Santangelo, told Useless Info. "I mean, did I really know? No. But I know Max. And he just wills stuff to happen...."

"I even said on TV the inning before, 'You know Max Scherzer is bugging his manager to let him hit.' Then our producer got in my ear and said, 'We can't find him in the dugout.' I said, 'That's because he's hitting in the cage.' I know the guy. I knew he wanted to win that game. And sure enough — next inning, he walks out in the on-deck circle....That's just Max being Max."

MAX HORNSBY — Once he'd finished circling the bases that day, the coolest entry in the box score wasn't even Scherzer's spectacular 1-1-1-0 batting line. It was his batting average — for the season — at the end of that line.

Which stood at a spectacular .310!

Alas, an 0-for-3 in his next start has since dropped it to .280. But perhaps you're wondering again: How many starting pitchers in history have ever hit .300 and won a Cy Young in the same season?

Gee, thanks for asking. Exactly one, as a matter of fact! And that would be the great Bob Gibson — nearly half a century ago.

In 1970, Gibson went 23-7 in his day job — and hit .303 in his spare time. And now Mad Max has him directly in his sights.

Asked if just hearing he has a shot at Gibson might rev Scherzer's engines, Santangelo laughed.

"He'll definitely want to do it now," Santangelo said. "And do I think he can? We're talking about Max Scherzer. He pretty much makes things happen. So hitting .300 — I think that's actually the harder part than winning the Cy Young."

Right. Good point. He wins that every year. Nevertheless, he's well on his way, because...

MAX SMOLTZ — The National League Pitcher of the Month in April was a fellow named Max Scherzer. The National League Pitcher of the Month in May was also a fellow named Max Scherzer. Well, you don't see that much!

In the 40 seasons since baseball started handing out Pitcher of the Month awards in both leagues, only four other pitchers have won that award in both April and May. Scherzer will like where this is heading:

1996 John Smoltz — started ASG, won Cy Young
1999 Pedro Martínez — started ASG, won Cy Young
2010 Ubaldo Jiménez — started ASG, 3rd in Cy Young
2015 Dallas Keuchel — started ASG, won Cy Young

Scherzer has now won five Pitcher of the Month awards just in the last 19 months. "He probably takes those and throws them in the back seat of his car," Santangelo quipped. "But starting the All-Star Game in his home park? That would be amazing. He really feeds off the crowd's energy. So for him to stand on that mound in his home park would be one of his greatest moments. He'll probably want to go throw a CG and strike out 15!"

MAX THE STRIKE MACHINE — And now for one of Scherzer's most incredible feats of all. In his start Tuesday against the Rays, this man threw 99 pitches — 81 of which were strikes. If you're subtracting along at home, you know that means he threw just 18 pitches all night, in eight innings, that weren't strikes. That isn't quite impossible. But it's still pretty awe-inspiring. Here's why:

— We have three decades worth of pitch-count data we can sift through at times like this. Want to guess how many other pitchers have thrown that many strikes (81) in an outing of fewer than 100 pitches? Right you are. That would be none.

— Or let's put this another way. How many pitchers have thrown 99 pitches or more in a start and finished their day with fewer than 20 that failed to hit the strike zone? That would be exactly two: Roy Halladay (19 of 105) on Aug. 25, 2012, and David Wells (19 of 100) on April 19, 2001.

— Finally, let's turn this thing totally upside-down. Did you know Dellin Betances once threw 20 balls in two-thirds of an inning (and just 27 pitches) on Sept. 22, 2011? Or that Mitch Williams once threw 22 balls in one-third of an inning (and 29 pitches) on May 6, 1988? But Max Scherzer threw just 18 balls out of 99 pitches Tuesday night. That is absolutely crazy.

MAX KEARNS GOODWIN — But of course that's still not all — because Max Scherzer is a human history museum. So here's even more that caught our eye:

— His immaculate inning Tuesday (3 up, 3 down, 3 strikeouts, 3 pitches each) was the second of his career. You should know there are no accurate records that list everyone who has done that. But here are the only four pitchers known to have done it twice: Randy Johnson, Nolan Ryan, Sandy Koufax, Lefty Grove ... and Max Scherzer. Whew. Can we just chisel this guy's plaque in Cooperstown right now?

— Or how about his season so far, coming off two straight Cy Youngs. He's on pace for this mind-boggling collection of insane stats:

27-3, 1.95 ERA, 359 K and 146 H in 235 2/3 IP, plus 308 more K than BB!

Most of that will never happen, of course. But FYI, the only two pitchers since 1900 with 300 more whiffs than walks in any season are Sandy Koufax (1965) and Randy Johnson (2001). Can we put this past Max Scherzer? Not around here we can't.

And to top it all off, in photo-op form, Scherzer and Ryan Zimmerman showed up at the Caps' Stanley Cup game Monday in full uniform, complete with helmet and visor.

"For Zim, that's so out of character," Santangelo said. "But to see Max [in that get-up] didn't surprise me at all. That's Max. I'm pretty sure that's how he wakes up in the morning and eats a bowl of cereal — in full uniform with his helmet on."

Max Scherzer, ladies and gentlemen. If he doesn't win the Cy Young award this year, we promise he'll definitely win the Cy Useless Info award.

MEET MR. WALKOFF

Did you know that J.D. Martinez has never hit a walk-off home run? Neither has José Bautista. Neither has Troy Tulowitzki.

But Charlie Culberson, on the other hand? That's about the only kind of home run he bothers with.

The trusty Braves utility wiz has hit two home runs this season. Yep, they're both walk offs – one off Seth Lugo on May 28, the other off Tanner Roark last Sunday.

And over the last three seasons, Charlie Culberson has hit a total of three home runs. Naturally, every one is a walk off.

The last one he hit before this year? An extra-inning game-winner off Boone Logan on Sept. 25, 2016, which will go down as the very last play ever called by the great Vin Scully at Dodger Stadium. What else?

Of all the niches a guy could have in this sport, this one might be the coolest. So we did a little delving into Mr. Walkoff's crazy numbers. Here's what we uncovered:

THREE STRAIGHT WALKOFFS – So how many other players, in the history of baseball, have hit three consecutive home runs — over any period of time — that were all walk offs? Amazingly, that answer is zero, according to the Elias Sports Bureau. Wow.

HALF AND HALF – Over his six-year career, Culberson has hit a total of four walk-off homers. (He also hit one as a Rockie, off Kyle Farnsworth, on May 3, 2014. So his career home run breakdown looks like this:

Walk offs – 4

All other kinds of HR – 4

Seriously? And how many other men in history have hit at least eight career homers — half of them walk offs? Right you are. That would also be none, Elias tells us.

STARS WHO WON'T WANT TO READ THIS PART – Just for our own amusement, we compiled a list of just some of the active players with fewer career regular-season walk-off homers than Charlie Culberson. We advise all of them to skip to the next section. But for the rest of you, here goes:

Mike Trout (3)

Giancarlo Stanton (3)

Chase Utley (3)

Robinson Canó (1)

Yoenis Céspedes (2)

Adrián González (2)

Carlos González (2)

Adam Jones (2)

If we count the three Zero Heroes we mentioned earlier, that group has hit a combined 2,997 career homers. But not one of them has hit as many walkoffs as Charlie Culberson. Who has hit eight.

Baseball!

BARTOLO-MANIA OF THE WEEK

This week in Bartolo Colon-ization, we have more Bartolo history — via the victory (No. 243) that allowed him to tie Juan Marichal for the most wins ever by a pitcher born in the Dominican Republic. But there's also this:

Albert Pujols hit a home run off Bartolo last weekend. And you know what makes that notable? Pujols also hit a home run off Bartolo in 2007! Which inspired us to compile this all-important list of men who went deep off Bartolo Colon 11 years apart (or more)!

17 years – Carlos Beltrán (2000-17)

13 years – Raúl Ibañez (2001-14)

13 years – Paul Konerko (1999-2012)

11 years – Pujols (2007-18)

11 years – A.J. Pierzynski (2001-12)

Any list that gives us an A.J. Pierzynski sighting is well worth unfurling. Don't you think?

RUSH TO JUDGE-MENT

We can only assume Aaron Judge ate a bowl of Special K for breakfast Monday — because once he put on his uniform, the K's just kept on coming.

He struck out three times in Game 1 of the Yankees' doubleheader in Detroit. He whiffed five times in Game 2. And that made him the first man in history to punch out eight times in any doubleheader ever played. But that's not all. There is also this on The Judge Beat:

CRAZY EIGHT DEPT. — Even if we leave the whole doubleheader thing out of this, Judge was only the fourth player in the live-ball era to strike out eight times over any stretch of back-to-back nine-inning games. But the amazing part of that note is this:

He's actually the second member of his own team to do that just this year. The Yankees' other Twin Tower, Giancarlo Stanton, did it back on April 3 and 4. So now think about what that means.

— Over the first 98 seasons of the live-ball era, just two men struck out eight times in back-to-back nine-inning games: Ruppert Jones (on July 16-17, 1982) and a pitcher, Wayne Twitchell (on May 16 and 22, 1973).

— And now it's happened twice on the same team in the last nine weeks, because of course it has!

But hang on. There's more.

WHO NEEDS FIELDERS — At his current rate, Judge is going to pile up an incredible 367 plate appearances this season in which the baseball never leaves the batter's box! His pace: 235 K, 126 BB, 6 HBP.

But if you've been paying attention, you probably know that Judge already holds the record for that sort of thing, with 340. He set that one last year, pushing the great Adam Dunn (328, in 2012) out of the books. So how about this...

CAN HE HIT 400 — Now let's add Judge's home-run pace (47) to that mix. And if he keeps that up, he would make an unfathomable 414 trips to home plate this year in which the ball never lands on the field!

And yessiree, that would be a record, too. No one in history has ever had 400 plate appearances like that in the same season. The all-time leaderboard:

393 Mark McGwire 1998

392 Aaron Judge 2017

369 Adam Dunn 2012

358 Ryan Howard 2007

We are looking at the ultimate symbol of baseball in 2018. And every team would be thrilled to run him out there — no matter how irrelevant he renders a concept once known as "fielders."

USELESS INFO HIGHLIGHTS OF THE WEEK

— What better way to celebrate draft week than to have one former No. 1 pick in the country (Dansby Swanson) homer off another former No. 1 (Stephen Strasburg) last weekend?

If Dansby is wondering — and if he's not, why the heck isn't he? — Elias reports that the record for most homers by one No. 1 overall pick off another is five, by Ken Griffey Jr. (off Andy Benes) and B.J. Surhoff (off Ben McDonald).

— Has there ever been a three-homer game quite like Eddie Rosario's trifecta for the Twins last Sunday? One to left. One to center. One to right. A walk-off for the grand finale. And home runs bashed off three pitches that weren't even in the strike zone!

We asked MLB's pitch-tracking department to look into that part. And they couldn't find any other games, in the eight seasons they've been tracking detailed pitch location, in which a player hit three home runs on pitches that weren't strikes.

— The Orioles swept the Mets in New York this week. So somehow or other, the Orioles are now 4-1 in New York this season... and 4-22 in all the other cities they've visited!

— One more on the Orioles' uplifting visit to Queens. They beat the Mets, 1-0, Wednesday. And kudos to our friend, Doug (Kernels) Kern for noticing that it was the Orioles' first 1-0 win in an interleague game since ... the fourth and final game of the 1966 World Series (Dave McNally over Don Drysdale) ... Which was their first 1-0 interleague win since ... the day before (Wally Bunker over Claude Osteen).

— The good news for Matt Joyce this month was he was one of three different guys named Matt (Chapman, Olson, Joyce) to homer for the A's in the same game. They've done that three times now. And only one other team has ever had a game in which three Matts homered — the 2013 Cardinals (Holliday, Carpenter, Adams).

But the bad news was Joyce is now 1 for 42 this season when he hits a ground ball, according to Sports Info Solutions! And the hit was a squibber up the first-base line on Opening Day. Since then he's 0-for-his-last-41 when he doesn't get a ball airborne.

Memo to Players Association: No need to poll Matt Joyce on where he stands on banning the shift.

— We regret to report that the captain of our Useless Info All-Name Team, Seranthony Domínguez, finally gave up a run Wednesday. But the first 50 hitters faced by the Phillies' secret bullpen weapon might find that hard to believe, because here's how they fared:

50 batters, 2 hits, 1 walk, 1 HBP (and 16 strikeouts).

Our friends at Elias report that in the 50 seasons since the mound was lowered after 1968, Domínguez is just the second pitcher to allow a mere four (or fewer) of the first 50 hitters he faced in his career to reach base, via a hit, walk or HBP.

The only other? Would you believe Jeff Calhoun, a September call-up of the Astros in 1984 (50 BF, 4 hits, 0 BB, 0 HBP).

5 STRANGE BUT TRUE FEATS OF THE WEEK

— Eric Hosmer in nine weeks as a Padre: three four-strikeout games.

Eric Hosmer in seven years as a Royal: two four-strikeout games.

Must be the fish tacos.

— Box-score Déjà vu Department: How about Rick Porcello's last two starts?

May 29 vs. Toronto: 6 2/3 5-3-2-2-5, 2 HBP, 1 HR

June 3 at Houston: 6 1/3 5-3-2-2-5, 2 HBP, 1 HR

Spooky.

— Another Strange But True Box Score Classic, from Phillies reliever Héctor Neris, last weekend in San Francisco:

3 outs, 3 hits, 3 strikeouts, 3 wild pitches

Ever seen a line like that before? Of course you haven't! According to Baseball-Reference.com's awesome Play Index, it's the only 3-3-3-3 outing of the last 100 years.

— Who loves working overtime more than Javier Báez? As NBC Sports Chicago's Christopher Kamka keeps updating us, Báez just hit the fifth home run of his career in the 12th inning or later – out of 61 career homers.

Hank Aaron hit one — out of 755 homers.

Barry Bonds hit none — out of 762 homers.

You can't make this stuff up.

— Finally, poor Mitch Walding. He's about to go down as the Moonlight Graham (kind of) of the 21st century.

He got called up by the Phillies last week after seven years in the minor leagues — but that feel-good story kind of went downhill from there.

In his debut, he became the first position player to put up a sombrero (0 for 4, 4 whiffs) in the first game of his big-league career since Ken Gerhart on Sept. 14, 1986.

But life never did get any better. Walding then struck out in two pinch-hit appearances and headed back to the minors Wednesday with this career batting line:

0-for-6, 6 strikeouts.

So how many other position players in history have had a career with that many at-bats — and strikeouts in every one of them? Yep. That would be none, according to Lee Sinins' Complete Baseball Encyclopedia.

If Walding never makes it back, he's a major motion picture waiting to happen. But at least he missed tying the record for this sort of thing if we include pitchers. Former Reds pitcher Logan Ondrusek had an 0-for-7, 7-punchout career. But after consulting with Stephen Spielberg, we can report that we will not be casting the role of Logan Ondrusek in the Mitch Walding Story!

(Top photo of Max Scherzer: Jennif

Kipnis' winning bomb in the 9th spoils bounce-back start by Tigers' Fulmer

Chris McCosky, The Detroit News Published 10:05 p.m. ET June 8, 2018 | Updated 12:19 a.m. ET June 9, 2018

Detroit — Manager Ron Gardenhire was talking about the pitch Shane Greene threw to Jason Kipnis with two outs and a base open in the top of the ninth inning of a 1-1 game Friday night.

The pitch, on a 1-0 count, was a spinning slider over the middle of the plate that Kipnis walloped 410 feet into the seats in right-center field, giving the Cleveland Indians a 4-1 win and spoiling a break-through night for Tigers' ace Michael Fulmer.

"We can all sit there and say this and that, but it was a 1-0 count and the change-up or slider — I couldn't tell because the pitch didn't do anything," Gardenhire said. "Sometimes, if they are going to beat you they probably have to hit you the other way. It can't be a situation where you throw something up and they can pull it.

"But that's just me saying what-if. There were a lot of what-ifs tonight."

Start with what if the Tigers had been able to score more than one run for Fulmer, who pitched seven strong innings, allowing a run and five hits with seven strikeouts. Fulmer, who threw 71 fastballs (two-seam and four-seam) with a velocity range between 95 and 99 mph, struck out all three batters he faced in the seventh before departing.

"That's what we talked about," Gardenhire said. "Locate fastballs and throw it down in the zone. That's what he said he needed to do better and you saw it tonight against a really good baseball team,

"Unfortunately, their guy was as good if not better."

Trevor Bauer went eight innings and struck out 12 for the Indians. He gave up back-to-back doubles to the first two batters he faced — Leonys Martin and Nick Castellanos — and then put up zeros through the eighth.

But what-if, before Kipnis hit his home run in the ninth, the Tigers had executed a relay and nabbed Jose Ramirez off third base. The inning would have been over and the game still tied.

"It always comes down to something like that," Gardenhire said. "We missed a play. I am not sure what should have happened on that relay, but if we throw the ball to third base, we probably get the guy."

Greene had walked Ramirez with one out. With two outs, Yonder Alonso singled on a 3-2 pitch. Ramirez was running on the pitch. He breezed by second base and took a wide turn around third.

Second baseman Dixon Machado had a chance to freeze Ramirez between third and home, but he threw home right away and Ramirez scampered back to third safely and Alonso dashed to second.

"The worst thing that should have happened is to keep the runners at first and third," Gardenhire said. "Not at second and third — that was the worst thing. If we run the ball in, we stop the guy. Maybe we make a play at third base."

Catcher James McCann thought he might have had a chance to throw out Alonso at second.

"The only way to go about that play is to get it in as soon as you can," he said. "By the time I got the ball — I just watched the relay of it — I potentially could have thrown to second. But you risk overthrowing the ball or bouncing it.

"In that moment, I thought the best play was to eat it and find a way to get the next guy. Unfortunately, it didn't work."

First base was open and Roberto Perez, a right-handed hitter batting .139, was on deck. But looming on the bench was longtime Tigers nemesis Melky Cabrera. Kipnis came in hitting .205 and had struck out in his two previous at-bats.

"We had a base open, but we were facing the right guy," Gardenhire said. "The slider didn't do anything and he hit a three-run home run."

It was the sixth home run allowed this season by Greene in 30.1 innings. He gave up six dingers last season in 71 games, 67.2 innings. Joe Jimenez, meanwhile, pitched another scoreless eighth inning, his 14th in his last 15 outings.

"Jimenez did his job in the eighth inning; Greene is the closer," Gardenhire said. "In a tie ballgame at home, Greene will pitch the ninth. That will always be the case."

Detroit Tigers' Shane Greene on home run: 'Can't throw it there'

Chris Nelsen, Special to Detroit Free Press Published 1:27 a.m. ET June 9, 2018

Detroit Tigers closer Shane Greene kept it simple after Friday night's 4-1 loss to the Cleveland Indians at Comerica Park.

With the score tied 1-1 in the top of the ninth, Greene allowed a Jason Kipnis three-run homer, breaking a 1-1 tie and giving the AL Central-leading Indians a series-opening win. Cleveland (33-28) now has a five-game cushion over the Tigers (30-35) in the standings.

"Can't throw it there," Greene said of his slider that Kipnis blasted to right field. "I don't know, man, he hit it over everything. Ball game's over."

Greene (2-3) was trying to keep the game tied after starter Michael Fulmer pitched seven strong innings, allowing one run on five hits and no walks. It was the sixth home run off Greene this season — only starters Mike Fiers (12), Fulmer (9) and Francisco Liriano (8) have allowed more on the Tigers' staff.

"It's pretty unsettling," said Greene, who walked Jose Ramirez with one out in the ninth and then allowed a two-out single to Yonder Alonso, setting up Kipnis' long ball.

Tigers manager Ron Gardenhire gave no thought to having set-up man Joe Jimenez pitch the ninth after throwing a perfect eighth, striking out Roberto Perez and Francisco Lindor.

"Greeny is a closer, and in a tie ball game at home, Greeny will pitch," Gardenhire said. "That will always be the case. We can sit there and say this and that; there's a lot of what-ifs. He made a bad pitch and the guy hit it out."

It was a disappointing end for the Tigers, who wasted a gem from their starter. Fulmer, whose fastball touched 99 MPH on the Comerica Park radar in the fourth inning, struck out seven. He allowed an RBI double to Alonso in the fourth inning, tying the game.

"He threw the ball really, really well," Gardenhire said. "That's what we needed to see. Mentally, that's going to help him down the road. He gave us a great opportunity, but unfortunately, their guy (starter Trevor Bauer) was as good, if not better."

Fulmer said he feels healthy again and hopes to build off the outing. He remains 2-5 this season, but lowered his earned-run average to 4.40.

"You're just trying to throw quality strikes," Fulmer said. "The funny thing about pitching is, the less you do, the easier it comes out. I've got it in the tank ... and everything felt good tonight. That's all I'm concerned about right now is being healthy and taking it into my next start."

The Tigers came out with a bang, getting consecutive doubles from Leonys Martin and Nicolas Castellanos in the first inning. Martin scored on Castellanos' hit, giving the Tigers an early 1-0 lead. But that proved all the Tigers could muster off Bauer (5-4), who went eight solid innings and struck out 12.

"It's very tough because he knows how to pitch," said Tigers first baseman Miguel Cabrera, who lined singles in the third and sixth innings off Bauer. "He can move your eyes everywhere at home plate. He can pitch down and up. He can pitch both sides of the plate. He has really good command."

Niko Goodrum, who finished 0 for 3 with two strikeouts and a walk, added: "With Bauer, he made some good pitches in key spots. He's throwing 97, then has a 90-mph slider. You got the curve, occasionally he'll hit you with a changeup, plus he has a cutter. That's a lot of pitches."

Cabrera, who missed time with a right hamstring strain, is feeling more confident at the plate.

"I was more aggressive today," he said. "I was swinging more at the first pitch. Before, I always try to take some pitches and get my mechanics and timing down. I feel more comfortable at home plate. Right now, I'm starting to be more aggressive and hopefully I swing at more strikes."

Cabrera is batting .312 this season with three home runs and 22 RBIs.

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