

Lone blemish costs Bauer as bats stay frigid

By Jordan Bastian MLB.com @MLBastian

CLEVELAND -- When the ball left Jason Kipnis' bat in the eighth inning on Saturday evening, the Indians' second baseman thought he had a double off the left-field wall. After all, he knows the feel of his swing and how Progressive Field plays.

Instead of heading to second, Kipnis watched his line drive die in the cold, swirling wind and drop into the glove of a leaping Jon Jay. That was how things went for the Tribe's frigid lineup throughout a 1-0 loss to the Royals, who broke through only once, which was plenty to derail Trevor Bauer's stellar start.

"It's not ideal. It's not an ideal situation to be playing in 30-degree weather," Kipnis said. "But, they're playing in it, too. Neither offense did great, but they did enough. It just stinks to waste such a good pitching effort by Trevor."

Bauer was strong over eight innings in which the right-hander struck out seven, walked two and scattered three hits. Bauer's only blemish arrived in the seventh, when the pitcher was struggling to get warm in the allotted time. His first pitch of the inning was an elevated 91-mph fastball that Lucas Duda yanked over the wall in right for a home run.

It was a frustrating turn of events for Bauer.

"I tried to get loose," Bauer said. "We have only a certain amount of time between innings, it's hard to get loose sometimes, especially in conditions like that. It's not safe, but, whatever."

Saturday's game came with an announced temperature of 34 degrees, which fell one degree shy of setting the record for the coldest regular-season game in Progressive Field history. Before the game even began, it was a safe bet that the teams -- with players wearing ski masks and hand warmers -- would be in for a low-scoring affair.

Bauer and Royals starter Ian Kennedy capitalized on the environment.

Bauer held Kansas City without a hit through the first four innings and limited its lineup to a 1-for-19 showing leading up to Duda's home run. Kennedy lowered his season ERA to 0.75 with his six shutout innings, which included eight strikeouts, no walks and four hits allowed.

Cleveland only had one runner move into scoring position against Kennedy -- Francisco Lindor doubled and stole third in the sixth -- but Kennedy sidestepped damage en route to his first win of the year.

"I thought [Kennedy] worked quick," Indians manager Terry Francona said. "He pounded the zone again, he changed speeds really well and it's obviously not conducive to hitting weather, right now -- for both teams. The pitcher is probably the only one moving around and feeling decent about himself."

The Indians are hitting .161 with a .530 OPS through eight games. With six hits on Saturday, it marked the first time the Indians have started a season with eight games of seven hits or fewer.

"It's hard, man," Indians catcher Roberto Perez said of hitting in the cold climate. "Especially because we got some hard-hit balls that the wind was blowing in. We've just got to continue to be aggressive and take great at-bats. I'm not worried about our team. We've just got to come in day in, day out and compete."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Bauer bests Butera: Alcides Escobar snapped Kansas City's 0-for-14 start to the evening with a two-out single into right field in the fifth, igniting a brief rally for the Royals. Bauer wound up with runners on second and third against Drew Butera, who fought back from an 0-2 hole to work the count full. Bauer then fired a low-and-outside two-seamer with late run and Perez presented the pitch well enough to net a called third strike from home-plate umpire Will Little. Butera argued the call to no avail, and Bauer walked off the mound with a great escape.

"Man, I take a lot of pride in my receiving behind the plate," Perez said. "That probably could've changed the whole game. It was tough to see by the way -- with those shadows. So, that was really game-changing. It could've been bases loaded with [Jon] Jay coming up, but I got that pitch and we were able to get out of the inning."

Boyer holds off Tribe: The Indians threatened to tie it in the seventh off Royals reliever Blaine Boyer. After two quick outs, Boyer got Rajai Davis down 0-2, but gave up a single to right. After a stolen base and a throwing error put Davis on third, Boyer walked Perez on a close 3-2 call. Bradley Zimmer followed with a liner right to first baseman Cheslor Cuthbert to preserve Kansas City's lead.

"Pitched him right where we were playing him," Boyer said with a smile.

QUOTABLE

"You can see when guys are scuffling. It's not a huge scuffle right now. Guys are hitting some balls hard. They're not swinging at pitches in the dirt. Their having good at-bats. It's just stuff's not falling or they're just getting under some stuff, so I think it won't be too long before you see a bunch of guys putting it together." -- Kipnis, on the Tribe offense

SOUND SMART WITH YOUR FRIENDS

- When Bauer struck out Whit Merrifield in the fourth inning, it was Merrifield's first strikeout since Sept. 25, a span of 50 plate appearances -- it had been the longest active streak in the Major Leagues.

- Perez made a throwing error while trying to nab Escobar on a steal of second in the fifth inning, marking the first error of the year for the Indians. It marked the first time since at least 1908 that Cleveland opened a season with seven straight error-free games.

MITEL REPLAY OF THE DAY

In the home half of the fifth, Davis sent a chopper to second baseman Ryan Goins, who fielded and flipped the ball to first in one motion with his glove. The speedy Davis was called out on the bang-bang play, but the Indians challenged the ruling. After a replay review lasting one minute and 41 seconds, the out call stood.

CHISENHALL EXITS

Indians right fielder Lonnie Chisenhall made three catches in the outfield in the first two innings, but then left the game before batting in the second. He was replaced by Davis. Chisenhall departed with a right calf injury and is likely headed to the disabled list, according to Francona.

More >>

WHAT'S NEXT

Right-hander Mike Clevinger is scheduled to take the mound at 1:10 p.m. ET Sunday, when the Indians host the Royals in a divisional contest at Progressive Field. In his 2018 debut on Monday, Clevinger held the Angels scoreless over 5 1/3 innings. For the Royals, right-hander Jason Hammel takes the mound after giving up seven hits and five runs over five innings in a 6-1 loss to Detroit on Monday.

Chisenhall likely needs DL stint for calf injury

By Jordan Bastian MLB.com @MLBastian

CLEVELAND -- Lonnie Chisenhall ran off the field in the second inning on Saturday afternoon, and now the Indians' right fielder is likely heading to the disabled list.

During Cleveland's 1-0 loss to the Royals, Chisenhall injured his right calf while running down a fly off the bat of Cheslor Cuthbert for the second out in the second. Chisenhall remained in the game for the remainder of the top of the inning, but alerted the Indians' medical staff of the issue and was removed and taken for an MRI.

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"We don't have any results yet," Indians manager Terry Francona said after the loss. "We'll hopefully get them read in a little bit and more than likely it's probably a DL [situation]."

Francona hinted that outfielder Tyler Naquin -- optioned to Triple-A Columbus on Friday due to the activation of left fielder Michael Brantley -- would likely be recalled. With Chisenhall out, Naquin could split time with Brandon Guyer in right field, with Brantley in left, Bradley Zimmer in center and Rajai Davis as a backup for all three spots.

Chisenhall, who was responsible for three of the first six outs behind Tribe starter Trevor Bauer, missed a few games in Spring Training with an injury to the same calf. Last season, the outfielder also spent roughly seven weeks on the disabled list between July and August with a strain of the same muscle.

Davis entered as a pinch-hitter for Chisenhall in the second inning and remained in right field.

The Indians and Royals were playing in unusually cold conditions in Saturday's game, which had an announced first-pitch temperature of 34 degrees. That fell one degree shy of setting the coldest temperature on record for a regular-season contest at Progressive Field. In seven games played this season, Chisenhall has hit .235 with a .675 OPS in 17 at-bats as Cleveland's primary right fielder. Last season, he was limited to 82 games due to health woes but had a strong showing, batting .288 with 12 homers and 53 RBIs with an .881 OPS for the Tribe.

"We're probably not going to have him for a while," Francona said of Chisenhall. "But, Tyler Naquin is certainly capable of helping a Major League team win. Between he and Raj and Guyer, we'll figure it out."

Indians injury notes: Salazar, Urshela on mend

By Jordan Bastian MLB.com @MLBastian

CLEVELAND -- The Indians currently have several players on the disabled list who are working through their respective rehab programs at the team's headquarters in Goodyear, Ariz. Prior to Saturday's game against the Royals, manager Terry Francona provided an update about their ongoing comebacks.

RHP Danny Salazar

Salazar (10-day DL, right rotator cuff tendinitis) developed shoulder inflammation in January and embarked on a gradual throwing program throughout Spring Training. The pitcher continued to throw long-toss and has logged a handful of bullpen sessions in the past couple of weeks. Francona noted that Salazar is still not able to throw off a mound with full intensity. It could be a few weeks before the righty is cleared for game activity.

INF Gio Urshela

Urshela, who is on the 10-day DL with a right hamstring strain, continues to work through a baserunning program. Francona said the infielder -- a contender for the Major League utility job this spring -- is roughly a week away from possibly starting a Minor League rehab assignment. Cleveland prefers to keep Urshela in the warmer climate to do his running work right now.

LHP Ryan Merritt

Merritt is out of Minor League options and was vying for a spot on the pitching staff this spring, but a left knee sprain landed the left-hander on the 10-day DL to start the season. Merritt has resumed throwing bullpen sessions and is scheduled to pitch in an extended spring game on Wednesday, per Francona.

RHP Cody Anderson

Anderson underwent Tommy John surgery on his right elbow in March 2017 and is currently on the 60-day disabled list. The big right-hander is back to throwing regularly off a mound, but he remains several weeks from potential game activity.

Anatomy of a Trevor Bauer postgame news conference

Zack Meisel Apr 8, 2018 14

Trevor Bauer typically sits on the carpet in the hallway and scrolls through his phone. Reporters file into the interview room and inquire about the game's events with Terry Francona.

Once the manager exits, it's Bauer's turn. And when the hurler parks himself on the tall chair and faces the media, there's no knowing what will happen.

In the past, Bauer has vented frustrations, offered biting commentary and griped about reporters' questions after games. He has also provided rare, candid insights into his process on the mound, with in-depth explanations that few of his peers offer after a game.

He has called for the media to write about the offense's production instead of his pitching. Last September, he provided a compelling, step-by-step account of his spat with White Sox outfielder Avisail García. In 2014, he engaged in the following nails-on-a-chalkboard exchange with a Kansas City TV reporter at Kauffman Stadium.

The reporter asked what bothered him most about the loss.

Bauer: "That we lost."

The reporter then asked for his perspective on said loss.

Bauer: "The team lost."

Reporter: "Can you elaborate?"

Bauer: "We lost, 4-1."

Reporter: "Further?"

Bauer: "Next question."

Bauer never raised his voice or altered his inflection. He fielded a handful of generic, mindless questions, minutes after his team fell short on the diamond.

There are a couple of things to note:

1. Postgame interviews are often formulaic and sometimes senseless. Beat writers who script traditional game stories need filler quotes to plug into their pieces. In reality, reporters usually don't enjoy postgame scrums. Players certainly detest them, especially after a rough outing or a loss. (It's often more beneficial to follow up with a player the next day, though that doesn't always cater to writing deadlines.)

2. Bauer doesn't mind explaining his thought process behind a pitching sequence or his perspective on a particular play. But he doesn't care for questions that reflect a lack of effort or substance. He has never shied away from speaking his mind, and though that can occasionally result in an uncomfortable conversation, it sure beats the predictable, vanilla responses that others supply.

Let's take a ride through the latest adventure, which came on the heels of his eight-inning performance Saturday in the 1-0 loss to the Royals.

In (frigid) elements like that, what's the key for you — grip can be a problem sometimes, but just dealing with what you were today, what was the key to that?

Since I don't cheat like a lot of guys and put stuff on my hand, just grab the ball and throw it, honestly. My pitches were somewhat inconsistent. I didn't feel like I could spin the curveball very well and the slider movement was a little bit all over the place, just because I was having trouble gripping the ball. It's like a cue ball. It slips out of your hand. But, it is what it is. It's worse for the hitters. I was looking forward to it. I thought I pitched pretty well overall.

Earlier in the day, Bauer teased Francisco Lindor that the shortstop was in for a bunch of long innings on defense in the bitter cold. Bauer joked that he was going to walk a lot of hitters.

Ten seconds of awkward silence elapsed before the second question.

What was the plan with (Lucas) Duda there on the home run?

Throw elevated fastballs. Couldn't expect to throw it 90 (mph). First pitch of the inning, coming out, I tried to get loose, but with the new Rob Manfred time BS that we have only a certain amount of time between innings, it's hard to get loose sometimes, especially in conditions like that. It's not safe, but, whatever.

The league shortened the time between innings to 2 minutes, 5 seconds in its tireless bid to speed up the pace of play. That gave Bauer less time to get loose, and Lucas Duda socked a high fastball — which clocked in at 90.5 mph — into the right-field seats on his first pitch of the seventh.

How have you had to try to change your warmup routine then to be within the guidelines?

Rush. And then don't get to throw as much to be loose. So, every inning you basically start off not loose. I told the umpire today one time — he was trying to tell me to speed up. I was like, "Look, I'll take the fine if I need to, but I'm not going to put myself at risk and I'm not going to put the team at risk of me having exactly what happened happen." Throw a pitch that you're not ready to compete on because you're still trying to get loose and it gets hit over the fence and we lose because of it — not because of it, but it was a contributing factor.

Considering the conditions, is that something they need to look at, maybe waive that? They have to have your safety in mind as well, right?

Yeah, you'd hope that player safety was considered.

Can you go in the batting cages and throw a ball when there's maybe two outs?

Yeah, that's a good idea. The problem is, in between innings, you're trying to get your body to rest and recover a little bit. I use a Marc Pro machine in between innings, so it's hard for me to go throw. I never really know when the inning's going to end. Man on first, one out, or whatever, there could be a double play and the inning's over. It's a fine balance between trying to recover and trying to throw enough to stay loose. Today it was just poor conditions. It's tough to play baseball in that. We'll see how it plays out over the year.

Marc Pro bills itself as a tool that aids muscle recovery, prevents injuries and relieves pain.

Did you think you needed more pitches in between innings?

No, I don't think I needed them. It's hard, when you're being rushed, to get your warmup pitches in. I think they took a total of 40 seconds away from us in between innings this year by shortening the clock and making us be ready to throw a pitch at five seconds on the clock, or whatever the rule is. I just know a lot of people have felt rushed in between innings this year, which hasn't been the case in the past. But again, that's not the reason we lost, so that's neither here nor there, really.

So, overall, you have to be happy with the way you pitched, I assume.

Yeah, I'm happy with how I pitched. We lost, though, so it's hard to be happy in general. A starting pitcher's job is to go out and give the team a chance, and we had a chance.

Bauer limited the Royals to three hits and two walks, but the Indians couldn't scratch across a run against Ian Kennedy & Co.

You had a called third strike on a two-seamer to end the inning —

Two of 'em.

It was a great framing job by Roberto (Pérez) on one of them. How much does it help when you have a guy who can really present the pitch in that situation?

Yeah, it's huge. The one in the fifth, which is the one I assume you're talking about — to (Drew) Butera — 'Berto actually thought I was going to throw a four-seamer and I threw a two-seamer and he was really surprised by it and I don't know how he caught it the way he did. That's a testament to his ability back there. I don't think it was a strike. I haven't looked at it yet. I think it was a little bit off. It's a huge situation. That's a game-changer, that one pitch. If I walk him or give up a hit, it's now 2-0, in weather like that. More pitches, etc., etc. Throwing to someone who can catch like that is huge.

The three-pitch at-bat to (Ryan) Goins (fastball, curve and then the slider) is that the ideal — they were all in a similar location and it seemed like the last one, he was kind of confused by it.

Any strikeout sequence is ideal. I think there are a lot of different ones, like the strikeout in the eighth inning to (Whit) Merrifield, I believe, I threw a slider just off the plate, which was a good pitch. He took it and then I came back the next pitch with the comeback two-seam, so that's a good combination to play off of. I know lefties — Goins in particular hit a home run off me last year on an 0-2 front-end two-seam, so to throw something in there that looks like it might come back over the plate and goes the opposite way is very beneficial. So you can't just sit on one movement profile or one speed.

Cold weather, colder bats: Indians hoping warmer days are on the horizon

By T.J. Zuppe 7h ago

If Francisco Lindor expressed the slightest desire to smile Saturday afternoon, you wouldn't know it. His well-known pearly whites were tucked beneath the hood and mask that covered most of his head.

But when you add the frigid temperature to the Indians' continued struggles on offense, smiles were probably scarce, anyhow.

Who could blame him? Wind chills were in the mid-20s by the time the first pitch was fired. That certainly isn't baseball weather.

Hell, it's barely football weather.

On a night where the degree of the average launch angle rivaled the falling temperatures, the Indians failed to offer any support of their starter, Trevor Bauer, and the frustration over a lack of consistent results in the first eight games continued to build.

"It just sucks to waste such a good pitching effort by Trevor," Jason Kipnis said after the 1-0 loss to the Royals.

But those frustrations stem from a belief that they're maintaining the right approach. Unfortunately, the outcomes haven't reflected what they believe are good swings and solid contact. And the batting averages on the scoreboard aren't making anyone feel better.

.212

.133

.067

.125

.222

.167

.235

.000

.167

Oof.

Small sample size? Sure.

It's still painful. And it's certainly below expectations for a club this talented.

"You can see when guys are scuffling," Kipnis said. "It's not a huge scuffle right now. Guys are hitting some balls hard. They're not swinging at pitches in the dirt. They're having good at-bats. It's just stuff's not falling or they're just getting under some stuff. I think it won't be too long before you see a bunch of guys putting it together."

That thought was one The Athletic dug into prior to the club's home opener Friday. Upon deeper analysis, there appears to be some validity to Kipnis' gripe. Bad luck doesn't account for all of their struggles, but they have certainly seen some solid contact wasted by good (or well-placed) defense. And the cold temperatures haven't lent much of a helping hand.

Entering the game Saturday, Indians hitters ranked 18th in baseball in expected weighted on-base average, a Statcast metric that combines quality and frequency of contact, but currently hold baseball's second-worst run-creation rate (wRC+) in the majors.

Only one team is worse than the Tribe — the Royals, who managed to eke by because of Lucas Duda's seventh-inning homer off Bauer.

While Duda's drive cut through the cold to find the seats, the only other ball deemed to be barreled by Statcast on Saturday was Yonder Alonso's line out in the fourth inning. The solid contact became his majors-leading sixth barrel of the season, but it was his second screamer in the past two days to look as harmless as a pop out in the box score.

As a team, the Indians finished with six of the top eight exit velocities in the loss Saturday — they actually doubled the Royals' hit output — and topped 100 mph on seven swings but failed to push across any tangible offense against Ian Kennedy and the Royals bullpen.

At the end of the game, all of the red attached to the Tribe's exit velocities failed to match the same warmth that a steady diet of hits and runs can offer.

"The hope (on a cold day like today) is maybe Yonder gets under one — and he squared up a couple," Francona said. "Kip hit a ball to left field that on a lot of days it hits the wall, but not in this kind of weather."

Despite any feeling of the contrary, the stiff wind that has wreaked havoc on fly balls isn't playing favorites. And while things probably aren't as bad as their current situation seems, at some point, something's got to give.

"It's the same wind for their team, too," Kipnis said.

Other notes on the Tribe

Lonnie Chisenhall left the game before his at-bat in the bottom of the second. He was later diagnosed with a right calf injury, the same calf that caused him to miss time last year and was briefly an issue this spring.

He was in the process of receiving an MRI when Francona spoke with reporters after the game, but it sounded as if the manager expects Chisenhall to be out a while: "More than likely, it's probably a DL (situation). But we'll get some results tonight."

If a DL stint becomes reality, look for Tyler Naquin to earn the recall. Naquin was just sent back to Triple-A on Friday to make room for the returning Michael Brantley.

The original plan for Brantley was to play two of the three games in their series against the Royals, but it sounds as if the left-handed hitter might be back in the starting lineup again Sunday.

"I want to make sure the Tigers' pitchers are (who) they say," Francona said. "If it's a lefty on Monday, he'll sit on Monday."

Left-hander Francisco Liriano is scheduled to pitch Monday for the Tigers. Meanwhile, Brantley is 1-for-8 since his activation.

Seconds after reporters began to file into the Indians clubhouse Saturday morning, the sound of a solo trumpet began to fill the hallways outside the locker room. Seconds later, the strum of guitars accompanied the incoming music, as a four-man mariachi band strolled through the clubhouse doors.

You're prone to see just about everything in a major-league clubhouse — good and bad — but this was a first.

The occasion? It's Alonso's birthday Sunday, and his agent and family had apparently arranged for Mariachi Santa Cecilia to come play a medley of songs before the game Saturday. The musical quartet drew a crowd, as players gathered in a large circle to film the events and join Alonso in a healthy laugh.

With phone in hand, Lindor recorded his new teammate, while Edwin Encarnacion sat back in his chair and chuckled like an evil mastermind.

"(Encarnacion has) been all over me all day," Alonso said. "And then he started videotaping me about 10 minutes ago, asking me about my birthday. And I was like, 'What're you talking about?'"

"Yeah, I'm going to get him back. I'm going to get him back."

While it would've been easy to suspect he felt a little pressure to dance along with the music, Alonso said the decision to show off his moves was all his.

"I just can't help it," he said with a smile. "You've just got to dance. I'm from Miami. I'm a Cuban guy. So, it's just kind of in the blood."

Alonso later displayed some more fancy footwork by diving toward the first-base line, robbing Mike Moustakas of a potential extra-base hit in the top of the fourth inning. While the impressive grab required no soundtrack, the cheers from the crowd were music to his ears.

Royals 1, Indians 0: Indians hitters remain ice cold in loss to Royals; Trevor Bauer questions pace-of-play rule change

Ryan Lewis

CLEVELAND: Even during one of the coldest games in Progressive Field history, the frigid weather still wasn't enough to match the Indians' icy hitting.

The Indians' lineup continued to sink further into a collective batting average that better represents a January dip in Lake Erie than the beginning of spring, and one big swing by Lucas Duda was enough to waste a terrific outing by Trevor Bauer in a 1-0 loss to the Kansas City Royals on Saturday at Progressive Field.

Bauer blanked the Royals over the first six innings, allowing only one hit and striking out six. It was one of the better starts he's had, but it was spoiled on his first pitch of the seventh inning.

That pitch was a 90 mph fastball at the top of the zone, and Duda belted it for a solo home run to right field. Bauer went out of the zone, but it didn't matter — the Royals led 1-0, and the Indians never responded.

After the game, Bauer discussed Major League Baseball's revised rule changes aimed at speeding up the pace of play. Specifically, that commercial breaks were shortened for regular-season games from 2:25 to 2:05. That not only cut away 20 seconds for pitchers to throw warm-up pitches, but also the league no longer guarantees that a pitcher will get eight tosses to the plate. Bauer didn't blame those changes for the home run, but he did say he was rushed.

"First pitch of the inning, coming out, I tried to get loose, but with the new Rob Manfred time BS that we have only a certain amount of time between innings, it's hard to get loose sometimes, especially in conditions like that," Bauer said. "It's not safe, but, whatever."

Home-plate umpire Will Little at one point tried to tell Bauer that he needed to speed up during his warm-up tosses.

"I was like, 'Look, I'll take the fine if I need to, but I'm not going to put myself at risk and I'm not going to put the team at risk of me having exactly what happened happen,'" Bauer said. "Throw a pitch that you're not ready to compete on because you're still trying to get loose and it gets hit over the fence and we lose because of it — not because of it, but it was a contributing factor."

Overall, Bauer turned in a tremendous outing, allowing only three hits and striking out seven in eight innings.

"I thought he was outstanding," Indians manager Terry Francona said. "I mean, he worked quick, he pounded the zone. You know the one run he gave up was a head-high fastball that Duda tomahawked. I thought he was tremendous."

The Indians did have their chances. Francisco Lindor led off the sixth inning with a double and with one out stole third while starting pitcher Ian Kennedy was taking the rubber and looking down at his feet. But Jose Ramirez struck out and Michael Brantley lined out to center field to end the inning.

In the seventh, Rajai Davis singled, stole second and then advanced to third on a throwing error on Royals catcher Drew Butera. After Roberto Perez walked, Bradley Zimmer lined a ball to the right side but it was right at first baseman Cheslor Cuthbert for the third out.

"It's not an ideal situation to be playing in 30-degree weather, but they're playing in it, too," said Jason Kipnis, who went 0-for-4 and watched his batting average drop to .133 this season. "And neither offense did great, but they did enough.

"It just sucks to waste such a good pitching effort by Trevor. You can see when guys are scuffling. It's not a huge scuffle right now. Guys are hitting some balls hard. They're not swinging at pitches in the dirt. They're having good at-bats. It's just stuff's not falling or they're just getting under some stuff, so I think it won't be too long before you see a bunch of guys putting it together."

Lonnie Chisenhall left the game with a right calf injury and was replaced by Davis in the second inning. According to Francona, the team hadn't yet seen the MRI results but a move to the disabled list was possible. Chisenhall's right calf forced a trip to the disabled list season, and he had it flare up again this spring.

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Indians notebook: Yonder Alonso gets mariachi band surprise in clubhouse; injury updates on Giovanny Urshela, Danny Salazar

Ryan Lewis

CLEVELAND: Who couldn't use a little salsa dancing to warm up a 34-degree day?

Yonder Alonso received a musical surprise in the clubhouse before Saturday's game, which was one of the coldest to ever be played at Progressive Field. Breaking up the quiet of an early afternoon clubhouse, a mariachi band — Mariachi Santa Cecilia, to be precise — barged into the room and began serenading Alonso with renditions of Happy Birthday and a few other songs.

It was a special, but goofy, surprise, and it was executed perfectly. The whole thing supposedly was orchestrated by Alonso's agent and members of his family.

They received some help from Edwin Encarnacion to pull off the secret operation — or at least, he was aware of it. Encarnacion began filming Alonso before the band showed up and took over the clubhouse.

"[I had] no idea. It's pretty cool," Alonso said. "[Encarnacion] has been all over me all day. And then he started videotaping me about 10 minutes ago, asking me about my birthday. And I was like, 'What are you talking about?' Yeah, I'm going to get him back. I'm going to get him back."

Alonso got into it, pulling out some dance moves. He couldn't fight it. Alonso loved the music to begin with, and moving around before playing three hours in 34-degree weather can't be a bad thing.

"They didn't make me dance, but I just can't help it," Alonso said. "You've just got to dance. I'm from Miami. I'm a Cuban guy. So, it's just kind of in the blood."

Alonso is a veteran who has been shipped off to a new clubhouse previously in his career, so blending in with a new group isn't anything new. Still, accepting "the new guy" is a process always ongoing with someone.

"It's been fun, man," Alonso said. "It's been fun. Since spring training, since Day 1, it's been fun. Something like this, you don't see every day and I'm definitely thankful for that."

After all, even though it can be forgotten, there is a human element to the game. And because of that, well, sometimes you just need a mariachi band at 12:30 p.m. on a Saturday.

"You know what? It's not a bad thing ever, whether you like the music or whether you don't," Indians manager Terry Francona said. "I mean, these guys are here so much and it's such a big part of the day that, my goodness sakes, you want them to enjoy being here .

"Shoot, it works so much better that way. They're good at getting their work done, but it would be tough if you just had to sit in front of your locker and stare at your locker and you weren't doing something, everyone would be miserable."

Progress by Urshela

Third baseman Giovanny Urshela, on the 10-day disabled list, is still running the bases while attempting to rehab from a hamstring injury sustained near the end of camp. According to Francona, it is believed his progression to being able to play in a game could be roughly a week away.

"As happens with hamstrings and things like that, I think they're trying to make sure he's OK," Francona said.

That injury delayed a tough decision for the Indians relating to Urshela and Erik Gonzalez, two utility infielders who are both out of options. Whoever didn't make the roster would have to be exposed to waivers in order to be sent down to the minors. That is, if they weren't traded first. Considering that and the fickle nature of hamstring injuries, the Indians can be cautious with Urshela and allow him time to get back to full speed.

Danny Salazar, who had the beginning of his season delayed because of shoulder inflammation, is expected to remain in Arizona for a few more weeks. According to Francona, he still isn't able to throw his bullpen sessions at 100 percent or "let it loose" yet. Salazar's injury essentially cemented Mike Clevinger earning his spot in the starting rotation.

Ryan Merritt tried to pitch through a knee injury this spring but ended up being placed on the disabled list to start the season. He is expected to pitch an extended game on April 11.

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Royals 1, Indians 0: 14 Walk-Off Thoughts on Trevor Bauer not being happy with a pace-of-play rule and a nonexistent offense on the brink of expected regression

Ryan Lewis

Here are 14 Walk-Off Thoughts after the Indians' 1-0 loss to the Kansas City Royals on Saturday.

1. Trevor Bauer didn't hold back in his post-game comments on Saturday. He isn't a fan of one of Major League Baseball's rule changes aimed to speeding up the pace-of-play, which shortened the time between innings from 2:25 to 2:05 for regular-season games. The league also no longer guarantees pitchers that they will be able to throw at least eight warmup tosses. Furthermore, the umpire is supposed to tell the pitcher to throw his last warmup pitch at the 25-second mark to ensure everyone is ready to go once the networks return from commercials.
2. Bauer, who put together a terrific outing on Saturday, didn't put the loss or the home run he allowed to Lucas Duda on the fact that pitchers have less time to warm up. But he did bring up the commissioner and potential risks, the option to take a fine and player safety in response to the rule change. They were comments that will surely at least get the league's attention.
3. Here are Bauer's full comments on the issue after Saturday's game: Couldn't expect to throw it 90. First pitch of the inning, coming out, I tried to get loose, but with the new Rob Manfred time BS that we have only a certain amount of time between innings, it's hard to get loose sometimes, especially in conditions like that. It's not safe, but, whatever. ... Rush. And then don't get to throw as much to be loose. So, every inning you basically start off not loose. I told the umpire today one time—he was trying to tell me to speed up. I was like, 'Look, I'll take the fine if I need to, but I'm not going to put myself at risk and I'm not going to put the team at risk of me having exactly what happened happen.' Throw a pitch that you're not ready to compete on because you're still trying to get loose and it gets hit over the fence and we lose because of it — not because of it, but it was a contributing factor. ... Yeah, you'd hope that player safety was considered."
4. Bauer went on to say that he knows other pitchers have felt rushed in-between innings this season as well before repeating that he wasn't putting the loss on this issue.
5. His bigger point isn't that he threw X pitch because he only had X seconds to warm up prior to that seventh inning. It was that the league has pushed pitchers into a situation of feeling rushed, and there are then bigger issues at hand than one game. How widespread of a problem this is already is still unknown, as not many have yet spoken out about it. Bauer certainly is already fed up.
6. It also brings up the question of how much effect on the game should the league have in their ongoing crusade to speed up the pace of play. A handful of changes have already been implemented, like the clocks installed in each park that play a role in the rule Bauer with which Bauer had an issue, not allowing hitters to leave the box in certain situations and recently, limiting the number of mound visits a team can make in a game. The league has also toyed with some more extreme ideas, like a pitch clock and putting a runner on second to start extra innings. At this point, it has become a defining obsession. Some rules might not really have an impact. Most will probably just blend into the game like so many changes before them in every sport. If pitchers are actually bothered and either feel like they aren't ready to start an inning or aren't properly warmed to avoid an injury, then it does become a bigger issue. Surely, additional dialogue on these rule changes will continue.
7. Bauer also eluded to other pitchers "cheating" to get a grip on the baseball in the cold weather. Said Bauer: "Since I don't cheat like a lot of guys and put stuff on my hand, just grab the ball and throw it, honestly. My pitches were somewhat inconsistent. I didn't feel like I could spin the curveball very well and the slider movement was a little bit all over the place, just because I was having trouble gripping the ball. It's like a cueball. It slips out of your hand. But, it is what it is. It's worse for the hitters. I was looking forward to it. I thought I pitched pretty well overall."
8. As for his performance, it was one of Bauer's best in an Indians uniform. Eight innings, seven strikeouts, only three hits, two walks and one earned run allowed. The lone Royals run, and the difference in the game, came when Lucas Duda belted a ball that was high above the strike zone for a home run. Coming off his strong second-half to last season and his mad-scientist ways of developing a slider, Bauer could be poised for a big year—and it would boost an already stellar rotation as the No. 3.
9. Said Indians manager Terry Francona: "I thought he was outstanding. I mean, he worked quick. He pounded the zone, you know the one run he gave up was a head-high fastball than Duda tomahawked. I thought he was tremendous."
10. It seems as though the offense decided it would stay warm in Arizona. The Indians' have had one of the worst offenses in baseball thus far, with Saturday being the most frustrating loss to waste Bauer's terrific performance.
11. As of this typing, the Indians are 23rd in the league with 24 runs. The Royals, coincidentally, are last with 15. The Indians' .161 average ranks last in baseball. Their .253 on-base percentage is second-to-last, in front of only the Royals. Their .277 slugging percentage is 28th, besting only—guess what—the Royals, along with the Tampa Bay Rays.
12. With the way those two offenses have been performing along with the game being played in 34-degree temperatures? A 1-0 loss could have been seen coming. But for the Tribe, much of baseball is regression to the mean. There are ebbs and flows during a long, 162-game season, especially early in the season. Whether guys have above- or below-average years compared to their career norms, it can often be relied on that extremes will at least begin to sway the other way, good or bad.
13. And right now, the Indians look to have a ridiculous amount of regression in a positive way. According to Statcast (and hat-tip to MLB.com's Jordan Bastian for looking this up), the Indians' collected exit velocity on balls put into play last year was 87.5 mph. This year, coming into Saturday, it has actually been higher, at 88 mph.
14. Said Jason Kipnis, who went 0-for-4 and has watched his average drop to .133: "Yeah, it's not ideal. It's not an ideal situation to be playing in 30-degree weather, but they're playing in it, too. Neither offense did great, but they did enough. It just sucks to waste such a good pitching effort by Trevor. You can see when guys are scuffling. It's not a huge scuffle right now. Guys are hitting some balls hard. They're not swinging at pitches in the dirt. They're having good at-bats. It's just stuff's not falling or they're just getting under some stuff, so I think it won't be too long before you see a bunch of guys putting it together."

Cleveland Indians fall to Kansas City, 1-0, on Lucas Dudas' homer in the seventh inning

Paul Hoynes

CLEVELAND, Ohio - It was so cold at Progressive Field on Saturday afternoon that it felt like one run would decide the game.

One run was the allotted number because the conditions were such that it was too painful for the Indians or Royals to put forth the extra effort to score more.

In the seventh inning Lucas Dudas delivered that one run, a leadoff, first-pitch homer off Trevor Bauer to give the Royals a 1-0 victory over the Indians. Dudas drove a pitch high in the strike zone 408 feet into the right field seats for his second homer.

The 34-degree temperature made it a day for starting pitchers and quick at-bats. Bauer (0-1, 2.08) and Ian Kennedy (2-0, 0.75) took advantage of it.

Bauer had a no-hitter through 4 2/3 and a shutout through six. Kennedy threw six scoreless innings, striking out eight and allowing four hits.

In eight innings, Bauer struck out seven, walked two and allowed three hits. The game lasted 2 hours and 29 minutes.

The Tribe's best scoring chance came in the sixth when Francisco Lindor hit a leadoff double. Jason Kipnis tried twice to bunt him to third but failed. Then he struck out. Lindor, with Jose Ramirez batting, stole third, but the Indians still couldn't get him home.

Ramirez struck out and Michael Brantley flied out to center.

In the seventh, the Indians' Rajai Davis singled with two out. He stole second and went to third on catcher Drew Butera's throwing error. The inning ended when Bradley Zimmer lined out to first.

Lindor started the eighth with a single. Kipnis sent a long drive to left that was caught by Jon Jay. Lindor was then thrown out trying to steal second and Jose Ramirez grounded out.

Bauer, in his second start of the season, retired 14 of the first 15 batters he faced. Butera was the Royals' only baserunner in that span, drawing a two-out walk in the third.

Alcides Escobar ended the no-hit bid with a single to right with two out in the fifth. Escobar came into the game hitting .320 (8-for-25) against Bauer.

Chisenhall leaves game

Right fielder Lonnie Chisenhall left Saturday's game with a right calf injury. Davis pinch hit for him in the fifth inning.

The calf injury knocked Chisenhall out of most of the second half last season. It also resurfaced briefly late in spring training.

The pitches

Kennedy threw 101 pitches, 75 (74 percent) for strikes. Bauer threw 100 pitches, 67 (67 percent) for strikes.

Thanks for coming

The Royals and Indians drew 17,362 fans to Progressive Field on a frosty Saturday. First pitch was at 4:10 p.m. with a temperature of 34 degrees. It matched the coldest start at Progressive Field since the 2016 home opener against Boston.

The coldest first-pitch, regular-season temperature in Progressive Field history is 33 degrees. It happened twice against Toronto on April 5 and April 7, 1996.

Next

Mike Clevinger (1-0, 0.00) will face the Royals and RHP Jason Hammel (0-1, 9.00) on Sunday at 1:10 p.m. at Progressive Field. SportsTime Ohio, WTAM and WMMS will carry the game.

Clevinger is coming off his win over the Angels on Monday. He threw 5 1/3 scoreless innings with five strikeouts. He is 3-0 with a 2.42 ERA in four starts against the Royals. Sunday's forecast calls for partly cloudy skies and a high of 36.

Hammel lost his first start of the season, 6-1, to Detroit. He allowed five runs on seven hits in five innings. Hammel was 3-2 in five starts against the Tribe last year. He is 0-4 in his career at Progressive Field.

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 04.08.2018

Tito at The Stick and 4 other things we learned about the Cleveland Indians on Saturday

CLEVELAND, Ohio - Progressive Field has not been a place over the last few days for those averse to the icy grip of a winter than will not quit. But it's April in Cleveland and these kind of days are common.

The Indians players who call it home know that temperatures will eventually warm.

Such was not the case at Candlestick Park in San Francisco. Candlestick Park, the original home of the Giants after they left New York, looked pleasant in the afternoon, but the winds roared and temperatures dropped during the night.

When Tribe catcher Yan Gomes said he was almost knocked over by high winds at Friday's home opener, it brought back memories of Stu Miller getting blown off the mound at Candlestick during the 1961 All-Star Game.

Indians manager Terry Francona was more than a little familiar with The Stick. When he played for the Cubs in 1986, he said he always seemed to end up in the starting lineup when they traveled to Candlestick because many of the regulars were not fond of the playing conditions there.

"We were talking about that today," said Francona, before the Indians lost to the Royals, 1-0, on Saturday. "You could go out for batting practice and it would be gorgeous. You go in to change into your game uniform and it went to hell. I mean, like went to hell in 45 minutes."

Terry Francona on the horrendous weather conditions during Tribe home opener

"You can't understand how it could be that nasty. And then in the visitor's dugout you'd sit there and the hot dog wrappers would be hitting you in the face. And there was nowhere to go get loose. There was nowhere to go. We were laughing about that this morning."

Francona, testing his memory, said he started 12 games for the Cubs in 1986 and eight of them were at Candlestick.

"I bet I'm real close on that," he said. "Guys would somehow not feel like playing there."

Francona's memory was on the right track. He started 16 games for the Cubs in 1986, including all six of the games they played at Candlestick. That included two 10 inning games.

No. 1: Where's the offense?

The Indians are hitting .161 as a team. They're averaging three runs a game (24 runs in eight games), which means they're fortunate to be 3-5. In Saturday's 1-0 loss, they were shut out for the first time since July 14, 2017 against Oakland.

Six of the eight games they've played have been decided by one run. They have yet to get 10 or more hits in a game.

Last year they had 10 or more hits in 59 games and went 51-8.

"It's not an ideal situation to be playing in 30-degree weather, but Kansas City is playing in it too," said Jason Kipnis. "It's just too bad we wasted such a great pitching effort by Trevor (Bauer).

"You can see guys are scuffling. It's not a huge scuffle right now. Guys are hitting some balls hard. They're not swinging at pitches in the dirt. They're having good at-bats. . . I think it won't be too long before you see a bunch of guys putting it together."

Bauer allowed one run in eight innings against the Royals. He struck out seven and walked two.

No. 2: Injury report from Goodyear, Ariz.

Utility man Giovanny Urshela is still a week or so away from playing in a game. He's recovering from a right hamstring injury late in spring training. He was scheduled to run the bases on Sunday at the Tribe's spring training site in Goodyear, Ariz.

Danny Salazar (right shoulder) is throwing bullpen sessions, but still isn't ready to throw hard, said Francona. He reported to camp in February with inflammation in his rotator cuff.

Ryan Merritt (left knee, left shoulder) will reportedly throw a game in extended spring on Wednesday, while Cody Anderson (right elbow) continues to throw bullpen sessions.

No. 3: End of the line

When catcher Roberto Perez made a throwing error in the fifth inning Saturday, it ended a seven-game errorless streak by the Indians. It was the team's longest errorless streak to open a season since 1908, according to baseball-reference.com.

"I think our defense as a team has been very good," said Francona. "Frankie (Lindor) has been outstanding. He's made the really good plays. He's made all the routine plays. He makes some of those plays look routine that aren't."

.@YonderalonsoU flashed the leather at first for the @Indians pic.twitter.com/IXSaYYsCOj

-- SportsTime Ohio (@SportsTimeOhio) April 8, 2018

No.4: Oh, no you don't

The Royals, working with a 1-0 lead in the seventh, were looking for an insurance run.

Ryan Goins singled with one out. He stole second, but had to return to first when Alcides Escobar bent over the plate and interfered with Perez's throw to second. Escobar was called out for interference by plate umpire Will Little.

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 04.08.2018

Cleveland Indians' Trevor Bauer says he felt 'rushed,' takes shot at MLB's pace-of-play rules

Paul Hoynes

CLEVELAND, Ohio - Trevor Bauer threw eight good innings Saturday afternoon in the cold against Kansas City. He allowed one run, a leadoff homer to Lucas Duda in the seventh inning, and it made him and the Indians a 1-0 loser.

There were plenty of extenuating circumstances for both teams to deal with at Progressive Field, the top one being a first-pitch temperature of 34 degrees. Not to mention a cold wind that knocked down most fly balls to the outfield.

Bauer, however, added another unexpected element: MLB's new pace-of-play rules. Commissioner Rob Manfred pushed for the new rules and the players association eventually agreed to them before the start of the season.

But Bauer said the shortened time between innings led to him not being loose when Duda hit his first pitch of the seventh into the right field seats for the only run of the game.

Goodbye, baseball! [?] pic.twitter.com/heZ0jyQuDS

-- Kansas City Royals (@Royals) April 7, 2018

Bauer's plan of attack was to throw Duda elevated fastballs. He first pitch crossed the plate, high in the strike zone, at 90 mph and Dudas didn't miss it.

"First pitch of the inning, coming out, I tried to get loose, but with the new Rob Manfred BS that we have only a certain amount of time between innings, it's hard to get loose sometimes, especially in conditions like that. It's not safe, but, whatever."

On local telecasts, teams have 2:05 between innings. The clock starts when the last out of the inning is made. A pitcher can throw as many warm up pitches as he wants as long as the last one leaves his hand with 20 seconds left on the clock. A pitcher must be in his windup to throw the first pitch of the inning with five second left on the clock.

Bauer says he feels rushed by the new rules and doesn't get to throw enough to get loose.

"So, every inning you basically start off not loose," he said. "I told the umpire today one time - he was trying to tell me to speed up - I said, 'Look I'll take the fine if I need to, but I'm not going to put myself at risk, and I'm not going to put the team at risk of me having exactly what happened happen. . . throw a pitch that you're not ready to compete on because you're still trying to get loose and it gets hit over the fence and we lose because of it.'"

Bauer said the home run wasn't the sole reason the Indians lost, but it was a contributing factor.

Asked if the rules should be changed because of the threat of injury, Bauer said, "Yeah, you'd hope that player safety was considered."

Bauer said he could throw in the batting cages to stay loose between innings but logistically that could be a problem because of the varying lengths of innings. He added that pitchers are always trying to balance getting a rest between innings and staying loose.

"It's hard when you're being rushed, to get your warmup pitches in," said Bauer. "I think they took a total of 40 seconds away from us in between innings this year and making us be ready to throw a pitch at five second on the clock, or whatever the rule is. I just know a lot of people have felt rushed between innings this year, which hasn't been the case in the past. But again, that's not the reason we lost, so that's neither here nor there, really."

Bauer's line for the day was eight innings, one run, three hits, two walks and seven strikeouts.

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 04.08.2018

Francisco Lindor got a heads-up steal vs. Kansas City when he saw everybody's head down

Joe Noga

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Francisco Lindor kept his head up after he doubled in the bottom of the sixth inning Saturday. And when the Kansas City Royals dropped their heads, Lindor took off for third base.

Lindor stole third off Royals starting pitcher Ian Kennedy and catcher Drew Butera, getting a walking lead and never breaking stride once Kennedy's right foot touched the pitching rubber.

It was Lindor's fourth career steal of third base in six attempts.

"Everybody was looking down," Lindor said. "The pitcher was looking down, the catcher was looking down, Hosey (Jose Ramirez) was looking down, third base was looking down. So I just left."

Butera immediately tried to stand up and signal timeout, but Lindor was already into his slide and home plate umpire Will Little (rightly) did not stop the play.

#Royals @ #Indians

With Jose Ramirez at the plate, Francisco Lindor takes off for third and reaches safely with a stolen base without a throw (00:38)

MLB Gameday: <https://t.co/NRloeApvnc> pic.twitter.com/afYXbafxO9

-- Ballpark Videos (@BallparkVids) April 7, 2018

Lindor now has three steals on the season, which ties him for second in the American League behind Chicago's Tim Anderson (4). He was later thrown out trying to steal second base in the eighth inning for his first caught stealing of 2018. The Indians lead the American League in steals as a team with eight.

Kennedy recovered to strike out Ramirez and retired Michael Brantley on a fly ball to left field to escape the inning unscathed. Lucas Duda then led off the seventh with a solo home run to right off Trevor Bauer, scoring Kansas City's only run in a 1-0 Royals win.

Manager Terry Francona praised Lindor's awareness and readiness to make things happen on the bases.

"That was a really good play," Francona said. "I mean that's not something you can put on, or tell a guy to go, but it was good."

Lindor said he did not think Saturday's frigid temperatures played a part in Kansas City's defense losing track of him. And he refused to blame the weather for Cleveland's sluggish start on offense.

"It's part of the game," Lindor said. "I'm not perfect. None of us are perfect. Everyone here is trying their best. We're all competing. Which is the best thing we can do. Continue to compete and continue to have fun. It will come around."

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 04.08.2018

Francona: Lonnie Chisenhall likely headed to DL for Cleveland Indians, Tyler Naquin could return

Joe Noga

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Cleveland Indians right fielder Lonnie Chisenhall could be heading to the disabled list after injuring his right calf early in Saturday's 1-0 loss to Kansas City.

It's a place that's become all too familiar for the 29-year-old Chisenhall, who spent three stints on the DL in 2017, including missing 45 games while rehabbing the same right calf injury in July and August.

Chisenhall re-injured his calf making a running catch on a line drive hit by Royals first baseman Cheslor Cuthbert for the second out in the top of the second inning.

"We didn't notice it," Indians manager Terry Francona said. "Actually, he stayed out there for the third out and he came in and said something to the trainers."

Chisenhall was hitting .235 with a double and four strikeouts in 17 at-bats this season. Last year, he was on his way to posting career numbers in hits and home runs before injuries limited him to 82 games.

Chisenhall had images taken of the injury, and the team was awaiting results before making a roster move. But Francona confirmed after the game that Chisenhall was likely headed to the DL.

"We're probably not going to have him for a while," Francona told reporters.

Outfielder Tyler Naquin, who was optioned before Friday's home opener to Class AAA Columbus, could be returning to take Chisenhall's spot on the roster Sunday.

Rajai Davis stepped in to pinch hit for Chisenhall in the second inning and collected a hit against Royals reliever Blaine Boyer.

Davis was batting .391 with a home run and three RBI in his career against K.C. starter Ian Kennedy, but went 0-for-2 with a strikeout in two plate appearances against the righty on Saturday.

"We were looking at the numbers and Raj had had so much success against Kennedy that we were trying to figure out a way to play him," Francona said. "But we didn't want it to happen like that."

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 04.08.2018

**Indians Notes: Andrew Miller is his own personal reliever, and he's been good at it
Chris Assenheimer** ByChris Assenheimer | The Chronicle-TelegramPublished on April 7, 2018 | Updated 1:02 a. m.

CLEVELAND — After watching Andrew Miller wiggle out of a self-inflicted jam in the eighth inning of a 3-2 win in the home opener Friday, manager Terry Francona called the left-hander his own reliever.

"I'd rather not be. I'd like to come out and fire strikes. I haven't done that the last couple times," said Miller, who allowed the first two hitters he faced to reach base Friday before striking out the next three to preserve a one-run lead. "It's nice to be able to make a pitch and get out of it. We have a great defense. You can trust them when you need to get back in the zone, you can start firing over the middle of the plate.

"Yeah, that's not how I want to do it or write it up, but the job is still 'put up a zero.' I've been fortunate the last few times out to be able to do that."

The turnaround was quick in the home opener.

"I think I made a nice adjustment," he said. "Again, it's not how I'd want to do it. I'd rather go out and have a clean inning, but at the end of the day, a zero is a zero."

Miller spent two stints on the disabled list last year with tendinitis in his right knee, but still made the All-Star team for the second straight season. He posted a 1.44 ERA in 57 appearances, striking out 95 over 62 2/3 innings.

He has pitched in three games this season, allowing four hits, three walks and hitting a batter. He hasn't allowed a run while striking out seven over 3 1/3 innings.

Injury updates

Right-hander Danny Salazar (shoulder inflammation) remains on the disabled list and at extended spring training in Goodyear, Ariz. He played long toss Saturday but has yet to begin throwing from the mound.

** Third baseman Giovanny Urshela (right hamstring strain) was scheduled to run the bases Saturday and could begin playing in rehab games in a week.

** Left-hander Ryan Merritt (left knee sprain) is scheduled to pitch a simulated game Wednesday.

** Right-hander Cody Anderson is still going through his bullpen progression after missing all of last season and undergoing Tommy John surgery.

Brantley bit

Rehabbing a surgically repaired right ankle was a much smoother ride for left fielder Michael Brantley than recovering from right shoulder issues he dealt with in 2016.

"I think the shoulder was tougher than my ankle because of the unknown, I guess, what I was coming back from," said Brantley, who was activated from the disabled list prior to the home opener and delivered the winning hit on his first pitch of the season. "At the same time, it's just a lot of hard work the trainers and doctors put in. I can't thank them enough. I just want to always keep pressing on with what I'm doing to do whatever I can to get back out on the field and join this great group of guys."

Brantley was asked what he learned from his latest recovery from injury.

"Be patient," he said. "Understand that I'm listening to my body and understand exactly what's going on and how I feel every day and make sure I'm being honest with myself and with this team."

"I said it before, I wasn't going to come back if I wasn't 100 percent because I wouldn't be helping this team. I'm feeling good right now. I'll wake up tomorrow and we get to do it again. That's all I'm looking forward to, one day at a time, playing as many games as I can."

At least for now, Brantley is not expected to play every day. He was in the lineup Saturday, batting fourth in front of Edwin Encarnacion, but Francona said Brantley wouldn't play in the series finale against Kansas City today.

Pregame festivities

A mariachi band played in the clubhouse prior to Saturday's game in honor of Yonder Alonso's 31st birthday today — another sign that his new teammates have welcomed the first baseman.

"You know what, it's not a bad thing ever, whether you like the music or whether you don't," Francona said. "I mean, these guys are here so much and it's such a big part of the day that my goodness sakes, you want them to enjoy being here. Shoot, it works so much better that way.

"They're good at getting their work done, but it would be tough if you just had to sit in front of your locker and stare at your locker and you weren't doing something, everyone would be miserable."

Tito on his dad

A tribute to Francona's father, Tito, was held prior to the home opener. Francona, who died in late February, played for Cleveland from 1959-64.

"The Indians have always been unbelievable when it comes to my dad," Francona said. "In Seattle (on opening day), they did a really nice (tribute) and it really caught me off-guard. And it is hard, but you also know that people are doing it for the right reasons and I appreciate that a lot."

Minor detail

Triple-A Columbus opened the season Friday with an 11-4 victory at Indianapolis. The Clippers scored six times in the sixth inning, punctuated by a grand slam from Mike Napoli.

Roundin' third

Jose Ramirez needs one hit to reach 500 for his career.

** Cody Allen recorded his 124th career save Friday, tying him with Chris Perez for third in franchise history.

** The Indians are 16-5 against Central Division opponents dating to last year, allowing two runs or fewer in 16 of the games.

Royals 1, Indians 0: KC beats Tribe on Lucas Duda homer, and Trevor Bauer blames MLB commissioner Rob Manfred **Chris Assenheimer** | **The Chronicle-Telegram** | **Published on April 7, 2018** | **Updated 1:37 a. m.**

CLEVELAND — Right-hander Trevor Bauer allowed a solo home run to Lucas Duda on his first pitch of the seventh inning Saturday afternoon at Progressive Field, a blast over the right-field wall that wound up lifting the Royals past the Indians 1-0.

Bauer didn't blame the pitch — an elevated fastball out of the strike zone — or credit Duda's ability to catch up with the high heater. No, most of the blame was reserved for MLB Commissioner Rob Manfred and his latest pace-of-play measure instituted this year that limits the time pitchers have to warm up between innings.

Bauer said he felt rushed on the first pitch to Duda, wasn't loose thanks to temperatures in the low 30s and wind chill at 25 degrees for much of the day and wasn't able to get enough on the fastball.

"I tried to get loose, but with the new Rob Manfred time BS that we have only a certain amount of time between innings, it's hard to get loose sometimes, especially in conditions like that," Bauer said. "It's not safe, but, whatever. So every inning you basically start off not loose."

The time to warm up has been cut from 2:25 to 2:05 for regular games and 2:45 to 2:25 for those nationally televised.

"I told the umpire today one time — he was trying to tell me to speed up," Bauer said. "I was like, 'Look, I'll take the fine if I need to, but I'm not going to put myself at risk and I'm not going to put the team at risk of me having exactly what happened happen.' Throw a pitch that you're not ready to compete on because you're still trying to get loose and it gets hit over the fence and we lose because of it — not because of it, but it was a contributing factor."

Bauer said the ball was tough to grip in the cold.

"Since I don't cheat like a lot of guys and put stuff on my hand, (I) just grab the ball and throw it, honestly. My pitches were somewhat inconsistent," he said. "I didn't feel like I could spin the curveball very well and the slider movement was a little bit all over the place, just because I was having trouble gripping the ball. It's like a cue ball. It slips out of your hand."

"But it is what it is. It's worse for the hitters. I was looking forward to it. I thought I pitched pretty well overall."

That was an understatement.

Bauer didn't allow a hit and only one baserunner through the first four innings of his second start. He surrendered only three hits and two walks while striking out seven over eight innings.

"I thought he was outstanding," manager Terry Francona said. "I mean, he worked quick. He pounded the zone. You know the one run he gave up was a head-high fastball that Duda tomahawked. I thought he was tremendous."

The same can't be said for Indians hitters, who have struggled mightily through the first eight games, scoring only 24 runs and batting just .161 as a team.

Kansas City starter Ian Kennedy and three relievers shut out the Indians on six hits to extend Cleveland's scoreless streak to 17 innings.

"It's obviously not conducive-to-hitting weather right now," Francona said. "The pitcher is probably the only one moving around and feeling decent about himself."

The Indians only threatened twice, in back-to-back innings.

Francisco Lindor started the sixth with a double, but Jason Kipnis and Jose Ramirez struck out before Michael Brantley flied out to end the inning.

Rajai Davis singled with two outs in the seventh, then stole second and advanced to third on the catcher's throwing error before Roberto Perez drew a walk.

Bradley Zimmer lined out sharply to keep Cleveland scoreless.

The Indians suffered what could be a substantial blow when right fielder Lonnie Chisenhall left the game prior to his first at-bat in the second with a right calf strain sustained while running down a fly ball in the top of the inning.

According to Francona, Chisenhall is likely headed to the disabled list, with Tyler Naquin expected to take his place on the 25-man roster.

It is the same injury that sidelined Chisenhall for nearly two months in the second half last season and limited him to a bench role in the postseason.

JIM INGRAHAM Commentary: Michael Brantley's return from the disabled list should come with a warning

Jim Ingraham | The Chronicle-Telegram Published on April 8, 2018

Michael Brantley is back, but for how long?

That is the awkward, uncomfortable question Indians officials must ask themselves, even as they celebrate the latest return to the lineup of one of the most respected, revered players in recent Tribe history.

Brantley, who will turn 31 next month, can become a free agent after this season. When healthy, he's an all-star-caliber player, a model citizen and teammate, a low-maintenance, team-first team leader whom manager Terry Francona can point to and tell rookies, "Just follow him around and do what he does."

He's a pro's pro.

All that said, good luck to Indians officials as they wrestle with one of the thorniest roster decisions looming on the horizon.

The Brantley Decision.

It's a decision that doesn't have to be made now, but it's coming. It's looming after the season, and it will be shaped by all the events of this season, as the Indians stalk another World Series ... and Brantley stalks a healthy season.

For Brantley, staying productive isn't the issue. Staying healthy is.

He's been on the disabled list five times in the last three years, and this year isn't even two weeks old.

Brantley was activated off the disabled list prior to the home opener Friday, and he said hello to Tribe fans with a first-inning single that produced two of the three runs the Indians scored in the game.

Brantley can drive in some runs. In 2014 he drove in 97. He can hit some home runs: 20 in 2014. He can steal some bases: 23 in 2014.

And he can hit some doubles. Lots and lots of doubles. He had back-to-back 45-double seasons in 2014 and '15.

Not coincidentally, those were the last two years Brantley was healthy. More or less. Because even in his "healthy" seasons, Brantley isn't. Not completely. In 2015 he missed six games early in the season with lower back stiffness and missed 10 of the last 12 games with a sore shoulder.

In 2012 he missed eight of the last nine games of the season due to a strained right groin, and after the season he underwent surgery to repair a sports hernia.

In 2011, his season ended on Aug. 22 due to right hand and wrist injuries that resulted in him undergoing season-ending surgery.

In 2008, while playing for Double-A Huntsville in Milwaukee's system, Brantley missed July due to an ankle injury.

In 2006, he spent time on the DL with a strained shoulder.

Ten years ago, on July 7, 2008, the Indians traded CC Sabathia to the Brewers for three players, and a player to be named later. That player was finally named Oct. 3, 2008. That player was Brantley, who turned out to be the best player, by far, that the Indians got in the trade.

Still, the injuries kept coming.

In 2016 he only appeared in 11 major league games due to shoulder surgery.

In 2017 he missed most of the second half of the season due to an ankle injury that required surgery after the season, which resulted in him starting this season on the DL.

It's a testament to Brantley's character, professionalism and production (when healthy) that, despite all that time missed due to injuries, he's still held in such high regard by his teammates and management.

Francona is the president of the Michael Brantley fan club.

"He's the heart and soul of our team," Francona said.

He's also about to turn 31 years old, and over the last two-plus years, counting the postseason, he's only played in 106 of the Indians' 360 games.

How much is that worth on the open market? How much is Brantley's all-star-caliber production when healthy, balanced against his extensive history of not being healthy, worth to any team?

Here's what it's worth to the Indians this year: \$11.5 million. That's Brantley's salary. He's the third-highest-paid player on the team, behind Edwin Encarnacion (\$18.67 million) and Jason Kipnis (\$13.67 million).

The easy part for Indians officials is to enjoy what Brantley does when he's in the lineup. The hard part for Indians officials is when he's not in the lineup. That, and figuring out what they are going to do after the World Series, when Brantley becomes a free agent and they have to put a number on how much they value him.

Or not.

Maybe they let him walk.

They let Jay Bruce walk. Bruce, who is one month older than Brantley, signed a three-year, \$39 million contract with the Mets as a free agent, after the Indians apparently chose not to get in on the bidding.

Will Brantley's value fall in Bruce's ballpark?

Indians officials will worry about that later. Because for now, Brantley is back.

But for how long?

Indians' Trevor Bauer no fan of fast-paced baseball | Jeff Schudel
By Jeff Schudel, The News-Herald & The Morning Journal

Robert Manfred doesn't have many friends among those who follow the Indians these days.

The commissioner of Major League Baseball is responsible for pressuring the Indians to remove Chief Wahoo from uniforms beginning in 2019 — a plan many fans disagree with — and now he has a sworn enemy in Indians starting pitcher Trevor Bauer.

Bauer took the loss on April 7 when his first pitch in the top of the seventh inning was clubbed by Lucas Duda over the fence in right field for the only run of the game.

Bauer pitched masterfully in frigid conditions at Progressive Field, as did Royals starter and winner Ian Kennedy, but as far as Bauer is concerned Manfred's penchant for faster pace forced him to throw the pitch to Duda before he warmed up sufficiently.

A new rule this year, agreed to in February by MLB and the players' union, cuts the time between innings for a locally televised game from two minutes, 25 seconds to two minutes, five seconds. Bauer could have used those 20 seconds lost for one or two more warm-up tosses — especially with the temperature 34 degrees and the wind chill 25.

"I couldn't expect to throw it 90," Bauer grumbled after the game. "First pitch of the inning, coming out, I tried to get loose, but with the new Rob Manfred time (baloney) that we have only a certain amount of time between innings, it's hard to get loose sometimes, especially in conditions like that. It's not safe, but, whatever.

"I told the umpire today one time — he was trying to tell me to speed up. I was like, 'Look, I'll take the fine if I need to,' but I'm not going to put myself at risk and I'm not going to put the team at risk of me having exactly what happened happen. Throw a pitch that you're not ready to compete on because you're still trying to get loose and it gets hit over the fence and we lose because of it — not because of it, but it was a contributing factor."

Bauer, never afraid to speak his mind, basically accused most of his pitching fraternity of bending the rules in bad weather conditions when assessing how he pitched.

"Since I don't cheat like a lot of guys and put stuff on my hand, just grab the ball and throw it, honestly, my pitches were somewhat inconsistent," Bauer said. "I didn't feel like I could spin the curveball very well and the slider movement was a little bit all over the place, just because I was having trouble gripping the ball. It's like a cue ball. It slips out of your hand. But, it is what it is. It's worse for the hitters. I was looking forward to it. I thought I pitched pretty well overall."

Bauer allowed three hits over eight innings. He is 0-1 in 2018 with a 2.08 ERA.

Right fielder Lonnie Chisenhall, leading the Indians in hitting with an anemic .235 batting average, is likely headed to the disabled list with a calf injury.

Chisenhall was injured running down a line out by Cheslor Cuthbert for the second out in the second inning. Chisenhall was scheduled to bat fourth in the bottom of the second, but Rajai Davis took his spot.

"We didn't notice (Chisenhall was hurt)," manager Terry Francona said. "Actually, he stayed out there for the third out and he came in and said something to the trainers, so he just got (an MRI). He literally just got out and we don't have any results yet. We'll hopefully get them read in a little bit and more than likely it's probably a DL. But we'll get some results tonight."

Francona is trying to downplay the injury, and maybe Chisenhall will be out only 10 days. But a calf injury at the All-Star break last year limited him to 82 games. He was leading the Indians with 51 RBI at the time.

"That was last year," Francona said. "We'll find out because we're probably not going to have him for a while, but Tyler Naquin is certainly capable of helping a major league team win. Between him and Raj and (Brandon) Guyer, we'll figure it out."

Naquin was optioned to Columbus on April 6 when Michael Brantley was activated from the disabled list after being deemed recovered from ankle surgery. Francona originally planned to rest Brantley on April 8 when the Indians conclude their series with the Royals. Now the day off could be pushed back to April 9 when the Indians open a four-game series with the Tigers at Progressive Field.

Indians 10, Clippers 0 | Adam Plutko sees progress after hip surgery

By Mark Znidar

INDIANAPOLIS — Adam Plutko can attest that a baseball player goes through emotions ranging from pure ecstasy to deep discouragement as his career plays out.

Life couldn't have been much finer for Plutko when he broke spring training last April coming off his first major-league promotion and having an opportunity to become the Clippers' No. 2 starter behind Ryan Merritt.

In that first start, though, the right hip began bothering him to the point where the pain affected his mechanics. The result was a 7-12 record, 5.90 ERA and 24 home runs allowed in 24 games.

Last October, Plutko underwent surgery to repair a torn labrum and impingement. A bone was shaved because it had been misshapen.

Plutko made the first step in his comeback by giving up four runs and six hits in five innings in the Clippers' 10-0 loss to Indianapolis on Saturday night at Victory Field. He struck out three and walked three.

"There were some ups and downs and there was some progress," Plutko said. "As a command guy, it probably wasn't so great with three walks. I couldn't keep my team in the ballgame today. All three of the walks scored. The walks killed me."

Indianapolis scored two runs in the second on a single by Kevin Newman and two in the fourth on consecutive doubles by Jacob Stallings and Eric Wood.

Reliever Preston Claiborne gave up five runs in the sixth.

Columbus manager Chris Tremie saw mostly positives from Plutko.

"At times, he threw the ball real well," he said. "He left a few pitches up in a few innings. I'm just giving him a lot of credit. A lot of balls weren't hit hard. Overall, for the first start I thought it was a strong outing because he battled through a lot of things last year."

Plutko, 26, said the injury threw him off last season. In 2016, he was 6-5 with a 4.10 ERA in 15 starts, and that earned a promotion to Cleveland in September.

The surgery kept him out of baseball activities until January. He threw 11 innings in spring training, including once with the Indians.

"I'm better now and am excited to get started with the new season," Plutko said. "I received a lot of live action (in minor-league camp). I don't feel like I'm behind. I'm pretty much on schedule."

Credit, he said, goes to his doctors for telling him exactly what the surgery entailed and what he would be facing during rehabilitation.

"I was given good advice and it wasn't scary," Plutko said. "You are a professional athlete and sometimes your body is going to break. This is what a lot of us go through. It's something you just have to deal with."

Nick Cafardo / SUNDAY BASEBALL NOTES - What can we expect from the rejuvenated Red Sox-Yankees rivalry?

By Nick Cafardo

Get the latest Boston Globe sports news alerts right in your inbox.

The junior varsity part of the Red Sox schedule is just about over for now. The Red Sox open a three-game series against the Yankees on Tuesday, the first three of 19 games against their archrivals, culminating with three games to end the season. Think Major League Baseball knew what it was doing to create such a potentially dramatic ending?

So what can we expect in this rejuvenated rivalry, complete with new managers — Alex Cora, Aaron Boone — and big-time sluggers in Giancarlo Stanton, Aaron Judge, Gary Sanchez, and J.D. Martinez; big-time players in Mookie Betts and Didi Gregorius; big-time closers in Aroldis Chapman and Craig Kimbrel.

There weren't many preseason prognostications that had the Red Sox finishing ahead of the Yankees. On paper, the Yankees are Goliath, Hercules, and King Kong rolled into one. The Red Sox are also an elite team, and injuries will certainly play a part.

The Red Sox have started the season with Eduardo Rodriguez, Drew Pomeranz, and Steven Wright on the disabled list. The Yankees have had a major loss in slugging first baseman Greg Bird, who will miss the first two months of the season after foot surgery. Bird's sweet lefthanded swing at Yankee Stadium will be missed for likely half the season, but the Yankees have enough thump in their lineup to absorb this loss. CC Sabathia is on the DL with a hip injury.

Everything baseball every Monday-Friday during baseball season, and weekly in the offseason.

Stanton already has been booed in New York during a five-strikeout game, but he's also had a two-homer game. Stanton was trying to break out of a bad six-game streak (through Thursday), during which he was 2 for 22 (.091) with a homer and 12 strikeouts. He was also 1 for 13 at Yankee Stadium entering Friday, but went 2 for 6 against the Orioles that night.

Sanchez is off to a slow start with the bat, but his defense has improved immeasurably over last season. He once had problems blocking balls, but he has been proficient in that area so far this season.

The perceived weakness of the team — starting pitching — has been very good (2.49 ERA). The perceived strength of the team — bullpen (1-3, 5.40 ERA, two blown saves) — has been an issue. Dellin Betances (5.40 ERA) remains an enigma. What's wrong with him? We already have seen Toronto's Kevin Pillar stealing second, third, and then home against Betances.

Chad Green was always the underrated, underpublicized major piece of the Yankees' bullpen. He earned the respect of everyone around the league last season because he consistently got people out. But Green has struggled out of the gate.

The Yankees have been pleased with third baseman Brandon Drury, but he is now on the DL with migraines. They also have had to survive outfield injuries to Clint Frazier, Jacoby Ellsbury, Aaron Hicks, and Billy McKinney. Judge wound up playing center field in one game.

Boone already has been second-guessed on New York talk shows. He made the decision in one game to have David Robertson walk Josh Donaldson to pitch to Justin Smoak. Robertson was given the choice of who to face and Smoak had been 0 for 5 against him. Smoak hit a grand slam in a 7-4 Toronto victory.

Then there's the rivalry on the executive level. There's no doubt that Yankees general manager Brian Cashman was annoyed with the Red Sox for stealing signs last season. The Red Sox were not penalized, although it was determined by the league they were cheating. No electronic devices can be used to acquire or relay signs. The commissioner's office indicated the next time it occurred the violating team would be punished. But the Red Sox got off scot-free.

"Not from my end," Red Sox president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski said when asked if there are lingering bad feelings over the incident. Cashman also said there were no hard feelings. After all, it was last year and last year is gone.

The Red Sox have been able to defeat the Rays and Marlins on a regular basis to start the season, as most predicted they would when the schedule was released. While the games against the Rays have been surprisingly competitive, the Red Sox have emerged with a dominant early-season record.

The Yankees have had to play more competitive teams in Toronto and Baltimore (as well as two games with the Rays) and have emerged slightly over .500.

The Red Sox' offense, save for some late-inning heroics by Hanley Ramirez, has not yet hit its stride. We have yet to see a power streak from Martinez. Xander Bogaerts has looked more comfortable and confident at the plate, at least countering the tremendous start of Gregorius, who had eight RBI in a game last week against Tampa Bay.

We are looking at two teams trying to find their identities. We don't think the Red Sox will continue to be this good when they face elite teams. And we fully expect the Yankees to break through their relatively slow start to show their might.

What we can conclude from statistics is that Chris Sale and David Price handle Stanton and Judge fairly well.

Here are some tidbits to consider as we await Red Sox-Yankees, Part 1:

- No pitcher has dominated Judge more than Sale. In 15 plate appearances, Judge is 0 for 12 with three walks and 10 strikeouts. Judge is 1 for 6 against Price, and 1 for 10 against Rick Porcello (his only home run against the Red Sox). Judge's .151 batting average against Red Sox pitching is his lowest vs. any American League club.
- In his career, Sanchez is 5 for 11 (.455) against Price with four homers. He is 3 for 17 (.176) against Sale and 1 for 8 against Porcello.
- Stanton is 1 for 8 against Kimbrel and 3 for 10 vs. Price. In his only at-bat against Porcello, he hit a three-run double.
- Since 2013, the Red Sox are 47-48 against the Yankees — 23-23 at home and 24-25 at Yankee Stadium. In 2013, Boston won the series, 13-6; in 2014, the Yankees won it, 12-7; in 2015, the Yankees prevailed, 11-8; in 2016, the Red Sox won the series, 11-8; and in 2017, the Yankees took it, 11-8.
- The most productive hitter against the Red Sox has been Sanchez, who has hit six homers and driven in 17 runs with a .265 average in 17 games. He also has struck out 20 times in 74 plate appearances. On the flip side, Judge's .151 average against the Sox includes 30 strikeouts in 88 plate appearances.
- In the Kimbrel vs. Chapman closer battle last season, Kimbrel struck out 18 in eight innings, converting four of five save chances against the Yankees with a 1.13 ERA. Chapman walked 11 in 8⅓ innings against the Red Sox, with a 7.27 ERA and two blown saves in three chances.

Apropos of nothing

1. Commissioner Rob Manfred's pace of play rule with regard to mound visits has certainly been felt early in the season. Catchers, in particular, have been hesitant to make mound visits with the new rule in place. You're entitled to six visits per game, and you've already seen catchers starting out to the mound and then pulling back and perhaps shouting out a secret word or code to change the signs.
2. Alex Cora hasn't been a big fan of the new buzz phrase "launch angle." He basically dismissed it when speaking about the Red Sox' offense recently, bringing it up out of the blue. He emphasized that his team needs to swing at strikes, which in his mind is the most important thing for a hitter to do.
3. Not a big fan of exit-velocity numbers, but for those of you who are, the top three through Thursday's games on "average" exit velocity were 92.7 (m.p.h.) by Elvis Andrus, 92.1 by Xander Bogaerts, and 91.0 by Starlin Castro. The highest exit velocity was Giancarlo Stanton's 117.9 off an 88-mp.h. pitch by Blake Snell.
4. To this day Mitch Moreland, a teammate of Josh Hamilton for a while in Texas, remains in awe of the pure talent Hamilton had on the field. "He hit a ball at Fenway that almost got to that red seat," Moreland recalled. "What he could do was just amazing. He could run, throw, play defense. He had five tools. The way he could run for a big man. He was a freak that way. I could talk about Josh's abilities all day." Hamilton will be 37 soon and hasn't yet called it a career, at least not publicly. He has had 12 knee surgeries, and of course, his addiction demons will always be a life challenge.
5. Jorge Posada spends a lot of time with Derek Jeter at Marlins games. Wonder if Posada could be a future manager in Miami.
6. Yes, the same Charlie Blackmon who signed a six-year, \$108 million extension this past week is a former Red Sox pick in the 20th round of the 2005 June draft. Blackmon was taken out of Young Harris (Ga.) College but didn't sign that year. Blackmon, drafted three years later by the Rockies, has become one of the premier leadoff men in the game.
7. If you thought the Red Sox started slowly with the bat, how about Terry Francona's Indians? In their first six games they batted .161, though they hit eight home runs. There was nobody worse. Too early to say whether the Indians didn't adequately replace Carlos Santana and Jay Bruce, but so far it's looking that way.

Updates on nine

1. Jose Bautista, OF/DH, free agent — The 37-year-old former Blue Jays slugger awaits the possibility some team will call his name. "All I can worry about is what I can control, which is to stay ready to go when that moment arrives. Hopefully, a club with the desire to win a championship decides to bring me aboard," Bautista said. Bautista admitted he turned down offers from teams during the offseason, either because of what was being offered or because he didn't want to join a team that couldn't win.

2. Danny Duffy, LHP, Royals — Despite a poor first start, Duffy remains on the radar of scouts eyeing a starting pitcher to add at the trade deadline. Yes, that informational process has already begun. Duffy is said to be available for the right package of prospects. With a small pool of top starters available at the deadline, the competition for his services could yield a good haul for the rebuilding Royals.
3. Clay Buchholz, RHP, Royals — He's still getting ready in extended spring training, but reports have been encouraging, according to a team source. Buchholz, who has a May 1 opt-out on his Kansas City contract, could earn \$1.5 million if he makes the major league roster with some built-in incentives for number of starts. He had forearm surgery last year, which limited him to two starts with the Phillies. Philadelphia had acquired Buchholz from the Red Sox for switch-hitting second baseman Josh Tobias, 25, who hit a combined .284 between Single A Greenville and Double A Portland last season.
4. Nick Gordon, 2B, Twins — The son of Tom Gordon and brother of Dee Gordon, he is on a fast track to the majors. The 22-year-old shortstop is likely to be Brian Dozier's replacement at second base next season after Dozier becomes a free agent. Gordon hit .417 with two triples and a double in spring training, and is currently at Double A Chattanooga, where he collected four hits in his first game. Gordon is expected to get to Triple A at midseason, if not sooner. Can you imagine being Tom Gordon and having two sons in the majors? The former Red Sox closer still holds the franchise's season saves record — 46 in 1998.
5. Adrian Beltre, 3B, Rangers — Beltre, who played for the Red Sox for one season, became the all-time leader in hits by a player from Latin America. Beltre's 3,054th hit surpassed Rod Carew (Panama) for the honor. Beltre, who is a native of the Dominican Republic, hasn't yet discussed when he might retire, but five years after that happens he will be in Cooperstown for his induction.
6. Evan Longoria and Andrew McCutchen, Giants — The Giants' major acquisitions started the season 1 for 19 and 2 for 24, respectively. "It just appears both guys are trying to do too much," said one scout who has followed the Giants. "Both guys know they were acquired to reboot the Giants' offense and it hasn't happened yet. Once they relax, both are professional hitters. A lot of guys in the league have started slowly."
7. Melky Cabrera, OF, free agent — Cabrera, a 33-year-old switch-hitter, leads a worthy list of free agents yet to be signed. Cabrera hit a combined .285 with 17 homers and 85 RBIs (.746 OPS) last season between the White Sox and Royals, but he remains unemployed. There are a few teams looking into the possibility of signing him to a minor league deal if he'll accept one.
8. Tim Lincecum, OF, Mets — Now at Double A Binghamton, he homered in his first at-bat of the season, just as he did last year. Lincecum continues to try to defy the odds of a Heisman Trophy winner making it in a different sport. He hit just .226 in Single A last year. The three-run homer came on the first pitch he'd seen at Double A.
9. Shohei Ohtani, RHP/DH, Angels — After a slow start in spring training, he is showing signs why there was so much fuss about him coming out of Japan. Scheduled to pitch Sunday, Ohtani won his first game as a pitcher and has hit homers in three straight games as a designated hitter. He's 7 for 18 with three homers and seven RBIs in four starts at DH. The Angels are now thinking he should pitch every seven days, like he did in Japan. This has always been the preference for Japanese pitchers. When they make the transition to major league baseball, they are forced into a five-man rotation and it winds up being taxing for many of them. This would be a smart approach by the Angels.

Extra innings

From the Bill Chuck files — "There were 133 grand slams hit in 2017 — the Reds and Dodgers led the majors with eight apiece, while the Red Sox were the only team not to hit one." . . . Also, "Formula for a Cy Young Award: Nationals righthander Max Scherzer had the lowest batting average against (.179) from the 50th pitch on in a game. The second lowest was .183 and it belonged to Indians righty Corey Kluber." . . . Happy birthday, Kason Gabbard (36).

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