

Inbox: What's behind Tribe's 'pen struggles?

The Indians' bullpen is on Tribe fans' minds after its recent issues, and this week's Inbox reflects that.

Let's get right to the questions.

@sarafeh5

To what do you attribute the bullpen's issues? Over-use? New coach? Less use of mound visits? Just Miller being out? Everyone hitting their rough spot at the same time? #IndiansInbox

There is never just one culprit behind a rough stretch like the one currently being endured by the Indians' bullpen. Beginning with Andrew Miller injuring his left hamstring on April 25, there have been a series of factors that have contributed to the relief corps' issues, which have been exacerbated by a lack of execution by the pitchers.

The first domino has been the starting rotation. Prior to losing Miller to the disabled list, Cleveland's starters posted a 2.78 ERA over 22 games. That number has climbed to 4.91 over the past 12 games, putting a little more strain on the relievers. In the 12-game stretch sans Miller, the bullpen has averaged 56.7 pitches per game, which is slightly up from the 51.7 averaged in the first 22 games.

That may not seem like much, but consider that those first 22 games included four off-days and two rainouts. The past dozen games without Miller had zero days off and came within an 11-day span, including a doubleheader on May 3 against Toronto. So it's been an average of 61.8 pitches per day for the bullpen in this recent stretch. That's about an extra inning's worth of work each day.

There were also a pair of extra-inning games between last Tuesday and Thursday, including a grueling 11-inning loss in Game 1 of the twin bill against the Blue Jays. The bullpen threw 174 pitches in the doubleheader, following 98 pitches on May 1 and 104 pitches on April 28.

Over the past 12 games, Cody Allen (+9.1), Zach McAllister (+6.8), Tyler Olson (+4.0) and Nick Goody (+3.4) saw their average pitches per appearance jump from the rates they posted prior to Miller landing on the shelf as manager Terry Francona has tried to squeeze a little extra out of each of the relievers. On top of the bloated numbers, Goody injured his right elbow on May 3, joining Miller on the DL.

These are not excuses for the poor performances by Cleveland's relievers, but rather a way to show how a few small things can quickly add up to one big mess. And the Indians have tried to summon fresh arms to help. The team made a transaction related to its bullpen each day from Wednesday through Sunday. That included acquiring righty Oliver Drake, who will join the team Tuesday in Milwaukee.

Before Miller was placed on the DL, the relief corps had a 2.97 ERA across 60 2/3 innings and ranked as one of the best groups in baseball. The beleaguered bullpen has posted a 10.06 ERA in 34 innings without the lefty available. The good news is that Miller is slated to throw off a mound Tuesday, there are two off-days this week and he might be cleared for activation as soon as Friday. Cleveland is hoping some order returns with him.

@clayds89

Who are some realistic people the Indians could pursue via trade to bolster their bullpen? And is everyone just hitting rock bottom at the same time or are weaknesses being exposed that were hidden behind Miller and Allen? #IndiansInbox

The Indians did not address their bullpen with any Major League additions over the offseason, while Bryan Shaw and Joe Smith left and found lucrative contracts in free agency. It seems clear now that targeting relief help needs to be a priority, but other chips need to fall around the league before teams start making their stud relievers available. For now, Cleveland needs to see what it might have in guys like Drake and Evan Marshall, and then use the non-waiver Trade Deadline to its advantage. Life without Miller exposed a glaring weakness.

@DreamingBasebl

#IndiansInbox Some people have speculated that Callaway was active in the management of the bullpen and that part of the Indians' struggles in relief this year are due to Francona missing Callaway's advice. I say Francona has always been directing bullpen moves. What say you?

Francona is very good at creating a collaborative environment with his coaches. Everyone is involved. While it's fair to second-guess some of the usage during this rough stretch -- when the team's options have been notably limited -- I don't think you can pin this whole mess on Francona, pitching coach Carl Willis, bullpen coach Scott Atchison or Mickey Callaway now being with the Mets. Remember, Atchison was on the staff last year and was even in the Tribe's bullpen with some of these pitchers before going into coaching. He knows them as well as anyone. Again, there is never one thing to blame in a situation like this.

@JimSullivan92

With Naquin hitting well and playing a decent right field, any chance he stays on the club when Melky Cabrera is ready? If so, who is the odd man out? #IndiansInbox

I have loved what we've seen out of Tyler Naquin in right field since Lonnie Chisenhall's trip to the DL opened the door for him to get regular playing time. Heading into Monday, Naquin ranked second among MLB right fielders with five Defensive Runs Saved, while ranking 27th in innings (139 1/3). He has held his own at the plate with a .319 average, .356 on-base percentage and 42 percent hard-hit rate. Melky Cabrera (signed to a Minor League deal and playing at Triple-A Columbus) needs to get innings and games under his belt and will be under evaluation. It's possible he could be given a complementary role, if the Indians believe he presents an upgrade over one of Rajai Davis or Brandon Guyer.

@TaylorTodd609

@MLBastian what is our sac bunt success rate this year? Why is Tito forward thinking enough to help revolutionize bullpens in baseball and insistent on giving away an out 2-3 times a week.

The hitters are typically on their own when it comes to sacrifice bunts. Francona has said multiple times that he doesn't mind the idea, especially if one of his batters isn't feeling comfortable against a certain pitcher, or if runs are proving hard to come by in a particular game. That said, the success rate has been subpar so far. Entering Monday, Cleveland led MLB with three bunt popouts in eight plate appearances ending in a sacrifice-bunt attempt. Per Statcast™, Cleveland's 16 missed bunts or fouled bunts were tied for the third most in the American League. Jason Kipnis (the No. 2 hitter) led the way with four and Francisco Lindor (a top-five MVP Award candidate last year) was tied for second on the team with three.

@MLBastian With the news of Salazar going to the 60 day DL & Miller still on the DL. How is Merritt progressing? Thanks and have a great Ryan Merritt began a Minor League rehab outing with Triple-A Columbus this past weekend. According to Francona, Merritt's velocity is not back to its usual level, meaning the lefty still needs time to build up arm strength. He can be on a Minor League rehab for a maximum of 30 days.

@HankManScott

@MLBastian Q: Yandy hasn't played in a week. What's up with Yandy?

Francona noted that Yandy Diaz has not played for Triple-A Columbus since April 30 due to a minor ankle injury, which he sustained while running down a fouled popup. The Indians manager indicated that the issue was not believed to be serious.

Lindor, Pollock named Players of the Week

By Daniel Kramer MLB.com @DKramer_

Francisco Lindor is maintaining his elite level of consistency, and A.J. Pollock continues to generate early MVP hype. For their efforts, Lindor and Pollock on Monday were respectively named the American League and National League Players of the Week presented by W.B. Mason.

It's the first time Lindor has been recognized, and the fourth for Pollock.

Lindor clubbed four homers and notched 10 RBIs while hitting .425/.439/.825 last week for an Indians club that went 3-5. Cleveland still maintains a two-game lead in the AL Central over Minnesota, at 17-17.

Pollock, the D-backs' star center fielder, hit .423 with an NL-high 1.000 slugging percentage last week, thanks in part to his four homers, which brought his season total to 10, a team high. Pollock also propelled the D-backs to a 3-1 win over the Astros on Sunday with a one-out triple off Justin Verlander that he scored on due to obstruction by third baseman Alex Bregman.

Pollock, who is a free agent at season's end, leads the NL in slugging percentage (.669) and OPS (1.032) and is tied for first in RBIs (29), while hitting .306. Twenty-two of his 38 hits have gone for extra bases. For a club loaded with talent, Pollock -- who has missed significant time due to injuries each of the past two seasons -- has been the D-backs' catalyst thus far. He's healthy, producing in his new cleanup role and relishing the opportunity with first-place Arizona, which entered Monday with a 3 1/2-game lead for first place in the NL West. Last week, Pollock was named the NL Player of the Month for April.

A Trip Around the Farm: Will Benson the behemoth; Sam Hentges rises

By Michael Hattery 4h ago

Those fortunate enough to access Classic Park in Eastlake, Ohio, before the gates open and watch Will Benson are treated to herculean displays of power. While the power has made it into games for Benson as demonstrated by his .227 ISO, scouting the box score does not do him justice.

Benson is constructed like a Greek god at 6-foot-5, 225 pounds. There simply are not a lot of big-league baseball players with such sculpted and imposing figures. Of course, this sounds like the sort of "looks good in a pair of jeans" scouting that Michael Lewis' "Moneyball" critiques. Yet, the raw physicality is as striking as Benson's production to this point in his career.

Benson is perhaps known best in prospect circles for his raw power and its translation into game power, and despite how others may describe him as a launch angle dream prospect, it is much simpler.

"To be honest I am just trying to drive the ball hard," he said.

While this has a delightful simplicity, it is deceiving as to Benson's thoughtfulness as a hitter.

The separate components of hitting, including plate discipline and contact skills, are all interrelated.

"Essentially, it is just trying to dominate the vague middle part of the zone," Benson said.

He has seen the largest strides in 2018 in his walk rate, which was already impressive in his previous seasons considering age and level, and is now sitting at a robust 18.9 percent. The continued skill and improvement in this area are actually a reflection of aggression.

"It is funny how when you are more aggressive, it is easier to take pitches that are not in the zone ... really just being aggressive in an area and taking pitches that are not there," Benson said.

The key area of development for Benson is his strikeout rate, which in both 2016 and 2017 eclipsed 32 percent.

"I told myself going into the season that we were going to cut that down a pretty good amount," Benson said.

As for how to attack his contact rate concerns, experience is a big part of it.

"Just being in the game has helped the last two years, learning how guys are going to try to work," he said.

But more, Benson's plan to remedy the contact problem is related to his overarching offensive game plan.

"It goes to the same mindset of attacking early on in the count, attack a pitch in the zone I am looking for, and it has taken care of itself so far," he said. So far, Benson has had some success his diminishing strikeout rate, sitting at 27.4 percent, a 6 percent reduction over 2017, but the sample is small enough that this should be taken with a grain of salt.

Benson is just 19, and certainly some refinement is necessary, but the early returns on his ability to tap into enormous tools have been positive.

Blue chip production

(updates on former first-/second-round picks and major international signees)

Nolan Jones: The unavoidable reality is that Jones has struggled for the first month of the season, but with fewer than 75 plate appearances due to a short trip to the disabled list, concern at this point is likely an overreaction. Jones continues to walk at an absurd rate, more than 20 percent, and work on tightening his defense at third. Once Jones' batting average on balls in play stabilizes near career/expected levels, the bad-to-look-at sub-.200 batting average will be easier to view. For Jones, a continued reduction in strikeouts, as well as improved ability to use his raw power, are important to monitor as the season progresses.

Quentin Holmes: The 2017 second-round pick remains stationed in Arizona and will likely spend some time in Mahoning Valley this summer.

Brady Aiken: The Indians' risk-heavy 2015 first-round pick has been assigned to Mahoning Valley, the Indians' short-season team whose first game is June 15. As The Athletic's Zack Meisel has noted, Aiken remained in Arizona for extended spring training. He has yet to be assigned to a full-season team.

Helium watch (A mid-tier prospect who might be making the leap): Sam Hentges is the latest Indians pitching prospect to post breakout numbers with Eli Morgan, and Aaron Civale also is leaping forward this season behind the Indians top pitching prospects Triston McKenzie and Shane Bieber. Hentges is 21 years old, pitching in High Class A with an ERA of 2.45 and a K/9 of 10.74. Hentges is 6-foot-6 and uses his height well to create a downward plane sitting at 91-94 with the fastball and flashing 96 with good extension. Hentges right now has an average curveball that flashes above average.

While the changeup is fringe-average, more work and developmental time will make it a useful third pitch. Hentges' only early flaw has been an elevated walk rate, but he is entering his first full season after Tommy John surgery. Further, Hentges was a Minnesota prep arm, which can add developmental time due to the limited game time northern prep prospects often get due to the gnarly weather. It is easy to see Hentges slowly tightening his command/control as he ascends through the minor-league system.

Hot three hitters

| Name | Level | AVG | OBP | ISO | K% | |
|-----------------|-----------------|------|------|------|--------|--|
| Mitch Longo | Lynchburg (A+) | .325 | .387 | .096 | 17.20% | |
| Ernie Clement | Lake County (A) | .341 | .423 | .110 | 8.70% | |
| Connor Marabell | Akron (AA) | .309 | .415 | .182 | 20.00% | |

Hot three pitchers

| Name | Level | IP | ERA | K/9 | BB/9 | |
|--------------|-----------------|------|------|-------|------|--|
| Mitch Brown* | Akron (AA) | 12.1 | 0.73 | 12.00 | 3.00 | |
| Aaron Civale | Akron (AA) | 32.1 | 2.51 | 8.90 | 1.10 | |
| Eli Morgan | Lake County (A) | 33.1 | 1.89 | 11.30 | 1.60 | |

*Indicates relief prospect

Photo: Will Benson (Alex Trautwig/Getty Images)

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All statistics used in this report were accurate as of Monday morning.

Meisel's Musings: A messy bullpen, a fearsome foursome and a chamber of secrets

Zack Meisel 4h ago 1

NEW YORK — When you travel, you pack your essentials.

Your toothbrush. A book. A few changes of clothing. A hyperbaric chamber.

Huh?

As his teammates moved through the clubhouse like the Walking Dead on Friday afternoon, Brandon Guyer grabbed a bat and scanned the pregame schedule. Hitting coach Ty Van Burkleo ultimately informed him that the Indians weren't taking batting practice. After all, they arrived at their hotel in Midtown at 3:30 a.m. after a grueling doubleheader against the Blue Jays.

"Aren't you supposed to be tired?" I asked Guyer.

"No, I feel great," he replied. "I brought my hyperbaric chamber with me."

If only everyone had done so.

I asked Terry Francona if he had ever slept in one, designed to maximize oxygen flow and help athletes heal. Anthony Gonzalez, the former St. Ignatius and Ohio State receiver, received attention for using one during college.

"That would be a negative," Francona said. "At least, not to my knowledge. ... It looks like a mini-coffin. One of my goals is to stay out of those for as long as I can. I know J.D. Drew used to do that."

Francona, a man who has remained motionless inside many MRI machines, saw Guyer's chamber, "and I was like, 'Ehh, that's all right. I'll just feel shitty.'"

"I don't know if I could do that. When I'm dead, I don't want to know it. I don't want to lie there and think, 'Boy, this is what it's like.' I want to make sure I'm gone."

Here are a handful of thoughts and observations after a weekend that made the Indians want to crawl inside a coffin.

Cleveland's very own: Oliver Drake didn't have to go far to join his new team, since the Indians opted not to add him to the active roster over the weekend. The Brewers designated the right-hander for assignment last week before they sent him to the Indians for cash considerations.

Milwaukee primarily used him against left-handed hitters last season, and for good measure.

Lefties vs. Drake in 2017: .247/.308/.377 slash line

Righties vs. Drake in '17: .351/.435/.608 slash line

In 102 career relief appearances, the 31-year-old has registered 4.3 walks and 10.1 strikeouts per nine innings, both high rates. He owns a 4.49 ERA and 3.48 FIP in his career. Drake joins a cast of unknown commodities in the Indians' bullpen.

Fun fact: He's one of three major-leaguers to have played at Navy, along with Mitch Harris, a reliever with the Cardinals in 2015, and, of course, Nemo Gaines, who appeared in four games for the Washington Senators in 1921 and who has a haunting headshot on Baseball Reference.

Josh's plan: The Indians don't need a fifth starter until May 15, so Josh Tomlin will serve as a bullpen safety net for the next week. What happens after that remains to be seen.

If you promise there are no children under the age of 18 nearby, I'll share with you some of Tomlin's obscene numbers.

OK, ready?

- Tomlin has served up a league-leading 13 home runs in only 25 2/3 innings. No one else has allowed more than 10, and the two hurlers who rank behind Tomlin have each logged nearly twice as many innings.
- Opposing hitters have composed a .339/.386/.729 (1.115 OPS) slash line against Tomlin. In other words, Tomlin has turned the average opposing hitter into a slightly better version of 1995 Albert Belle, the guy who socked 50 homers and 52 doubles and posted a .317/.401/.690 clip.
- Tomlin hasn't exactly stymied righties (.286/.328/.683 clip), but lefties have produced Beer League Softball numbers against him (.400/.450/.782 clip).

The Indians liked what they saw last week from Adam Plutko, who offered a vintage Tomlin start. He allowed three solo home runs, but little else, and his efficiency carried him into the eighth inning when the Indians desperately needed to offer their relievers a reprieve.

Shane Bieber limited Charlotte to one run on two hits (and an uncharacteristic two walks) in six innings in his first start for Class AAA Columbus. He has pitched himself into the conversation.

Ryan Merritt made a rocky start for Columbus on Friday as he begins a rehab assignment that can last a maximum of 30 days. Eventually, the Indians will have to make a decision on Merritt, just as they did with Gio Urshela, who was designated for assignment Friday.

Underground kings: Pop quiz — Identify the four Cleveland starting pitchers by their stat lines.

Pitcher A: 2.41 ERA, 3.63 FIP, 1.6 BB/9, 9.1 K/9

Pitcher B: 2.53 ERA, 3.15 FIP, 3.7 BB/9, 10.5 K/9

Pitcher C: 2.76 ERA, 2.94 FIP, 2.8 BB/9, 7.7 K/9

Pitcher D: 3.95 ERA, 3.92 FIP, 2.1 BB/9, 8.1 K/9

["Jeopardy!" theme plays]

Time's up.

Pitcher A: Corey Kluber, of course, looking as Cy Young-like as ever

Pitcher B: Trevor Bauer, who has eliminated the uncertainty that used to accompany him to the mound every five days

Pitcher C: Mike Clevinger, who has, to this point, lived out his preseason aim of pitching like a front-end starter

Pitcher D: Carlos Carrasco, who has been ineffective in his last two starts, but still boasts solid numbers

The four have, collectively, pitched incredibly well, which makes you wonder about the state of the team in an alternate universe where the contrary unfolded.

Houstatlantavegas: Monday was the first of four off days for the Indians in the next two weeks. That not only grants the bullpen some much-needed breathers, but it also allows the team to reconfigure its rotation in an optimal manner.

The Indians have a stretch of seven games in 10 days against the reigning champion Astros later this month. It'll be interesting to see whether Bauer encounters the team he not-so-subtly linked to using pine tar on the mound. The way it appears to set up at the moment, Bauer would not pitch in the series at Minute Maid Park on May 18-20, but he stands a good chance of facing the Astros in Cleveland the following weekend, when the teams play a four-game set.

Jumpman: For years, Grady Sizemore sacrificed his body as he plunged into outfield walls or the outfield grass. Eventually, the reckless manner of play stalled his career, as he battled injuries to every bone, joint, muscle and piece of cartilage.

Bradley Zimmer hasn't demonstrated a fear of walls. He hasn't shied away from diving or sliding in a bid to complete a highlight-reel catch. The all-out style doesn't bother his manager, but the center fielder hasn't been immune from harm. Zimmer broke his hand sliding into first base last season and missed the ALDS. He nearly plowed through Monument Park as he banged into the blue fence at Yankee Stadium on Saturday. He woke up with a sore shoulder and hip Sunday, forcing the Indians to summon Greg Allen from Class AAA Columbus.

How do you regulate that sort of effort, though?

"I love it," Francona said. "I think there's a right way and a wrong way to play. I think that's the way you play the game. Obviously, you don't want guys to get hurt, but I don't know where you draw the line. Like, we say to a guy, 'Well, just try to catch these balls.' It just doesn't work that way. You just let guys play. Over the course of playing the game right, sometimes guys are going to get nicked up."

We'll be fine: José Ramírez and Francisco Lindor rank fifth and seventh, respectively, among major-league position players in WAR, even though both players struggled at the onset of the season.

Ramírez boasts a .285/.376/.562 slash line, a 151 wRC+ and, perhaps most impressive, a 12.1 percent walk rate with only a 9.4 percent strikeout rate. He's on the short list of hitters a pitcher never wants to face, especially in a high-leverage situation. Among the sport's qualified hitters, only Andrelton Simmons and Nick Markakis have proved more difficult to strike out this season. He has produced those numbers despite a .262 batting average on balls in play, well beneath the league average of .294.

As for Lindor, the American League Player of the Week has compiled a 1.225 OPS with five home runs over his last 11 games. His glove work, though, left much to be desired.

Started from the bottom: On the other end of the spectrum, Jason Kipnis has totaled minus-0.3 WAR this season. Edwin Encarnacion has totaled minus-0.2 WAR. At some point, if Kipnis continues to boast a sub-.600 OPS, Francona must drop him lower in the order. Michael Brantley's high-contact approach would fit much better in the No. 2 spot.

Trust issues: One noticeable advantage the Indians have over the Yankees: defense behind the plate. Cody Allen bounced a handful of curveballs in the dirt Friday night, but Yan Gomes smothered each pitch. The Yankees don't have that sort of confidence in Gary Sánchez. When Aroldis Chapman is erratic, as was the case Friday, that combination creates quite an adventure.

RubberDucks 6, Flying Squirrels 3: Ducks ground Squirrels for sixth consecutive win

The RubberDucks won their sixth game in a row and maintained their hold on first place in the Eastern League's West Division.

Shao-Ching Chiang (3-0) started and allowed six hits, two runs, two walks and struck out five in five innings. He didn't need to be perfect, as the Ducks scored one run in the first inning and three more in the second.

Todd Hankins put the Ducks up 1-0, scoring on a wild pitch by Garrett Williams. It could have been worse for Richmond (16-13) as the Ducks left the bases loaded.

In the second, two walks, three singles and a sacrifice fly gave the Ducks (19-11) a 4-0 lead.

The Ducks gave up single runs to the Squirrels in the third, fifth and sixth innings before scoring twice in the seventh to pull away again.

Leandro Linares earned his first save for the Ducks.

Cleveland Indians, Milwaukee Brewers series preview, pitching matchups

By Paul Hoynes

MILWAUKEE - Here is the preview and pitching matchups for the Indians series against the Brewers.

Where: Miller Park, Tuesday and Wednesday.

TV/radio: SportsTime Ohio, WTAM/1100 and WMMS/FM 100.7 will carry the series.

Pitching matchups and start times: RHP Corey Kluber (5-1, 2.41) vs. LHP Wade Miley (1-0, 1.50) Tuesday at 7:40 p.m. and RHP Carlos Carrasco (4-1, 3.95) vs. RHP Junior Guerra (2-1, 0.82) Wednesday at 1:10 p.m.

Series: The Indians and Brewers play for the first time since 2015 when the Indians won three out of four games. Milwaukee leads, 206-204, overall.

Tuesday: Kluber, who has won five straight starts, will be facing the Brewers for the first time in his career. Travis Shaw is hitting .364 (4-for-11) against Kluber.

Miley, injured in spring training, has made just one start for the Brewers this season. Miley is 1-3 with a 5.33 ERA against the Indians. Edwin Encarnacion is hitting .438 (7-for-16) with three homers and six RBI against Miley.

Wednesday: Carrasco, coming off a loss against Toronto, has never faced the Brewers. Lorenzo Cain is hitting .344 (11-for-32) against him.

Guerra, who has lost his last two starts, has never faced the Indians. Yonder Alonso is 1-for-3 against him.

Team updates: The Indians, reeling for the first time this season, are coming off a three-game sweep by the Yankees in which their bullpen allowed eight runs on nine hits in 4 2/3 innings (15.42 ERA). The Brewers, 9-8 at home, have lost six of their last 10 games and are averaging just 3.28 runs per game.

Disabled list: Indians - RHP Nick Goody (right elbow), LHP Andrew Miller (left hamstring), OF Lonnie Chisenhall (right calf), INF Giovanni Urshela (right hamstring), LHP Ryan Merritt (left shoulder), RHP Danny Salazar (right shoulder) and RHP Cody Anderson (right elbow) are on the disabled list. CF Bradley Zimmer (left shoulder, left hip) is day to day. Brewers -- LHP Boone Logan (left triceps), RHP Zach Davies (right rotator cuff), RHP Corey Knebel (left hamstring), RHP Jimmy Nelson (right shoulder), 1B Eric Thames (left thumb) and C Stephen Vogt (right shoulder) are on the disabled list.

Next: Indians return to Progressive Field for brief three-game weekend series against Kansas City starting Friday night.

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 05.08.2018

Akron RubberDucks top Richmond for 6th straight win

By Cliff Pinckard,

RICHMOND, Virginia -- Right-hander Shao-Ching Chiang improved to 3-0 and Bobby Bradley had two RBI, leading the Akron RubberDucks to a 6-3 victory Monday over the Flying Squirrels.

It is the sixth straight win for the RubberDucks (19-11), who lead the Class AA Eastern League Western Conference by 2.5 games over Richmond.

Akron built a 4-0 lead with a run in the first inning and three in the second. A wild pitch by Squirrels starter Garrett Williams allowed the first run, while Tyler Krieger and Bradley had RBI singles in the second and Joe Sever brought in a run with a sacrifice fly.

Richmond closed to 4-3 by the sixth inning and Akron responded with two runs in the seventh. Bradley had an RBI single and Andrew Calica brought in a run on a groundout.

Chang (3-0, 1.64 ERA) gave up two runs on six hits in five innings, striking out five. Left-hander David Speer pitched three innings of relief, striking out four and allowing one run on two hits.

Right-hander Leandro Linares had runners on first and third with one out in the ninth but got Jerry Sands to ground into a double-play to end the game and earn the save.

Bradley finished with two hits and two RBI, while Sever had two hits and one RBI.

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 05.08.2018

Cleveland Indians continue ticket program to honor military service members

By Joe Noga,

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- The Indians announced Monday that the club's special discount program for military members and their families is back for the 2018 season.

The discount, military and their families to save up to 20 percent on tickets to select games.

Offered exclusively online for a variety of spots at Progressive Field, qualifying fans can purchase discounted seats for the family deck, upper box and outfield club.

Military discount details and military verification powered by ID.me are available at Indians.com/military.

"Military members and their families have made incredible sacrifices for our country, and this is a small way of thanking them for that sacrifice," Tribe Senior Vice President of Public Affairs Bob DiBiasio said.

Indians players and coaches also continue to show support with several programs that provide access and unique experiences for military members and their families.

Manager Terry Francona donates to deserving military families eight club seats and \$20 of loaded value vouchers per person. Veterans will also receive Indians-branded military caps and T-shirts, as well as an in-game scoreboard message.

Corey Kluber and his wife Amanda host local veterans from the Cleveland VA Medical Center on select home games. The veterans watch batting practice on the field and enjoy the game from the club Lounge.

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 05.08.2018

Chris Antonetti says it's not the right time for a trade to help Cleveland Indians' bullpen

By Paul Hoynes,

MILWAUKEE - Asked how he was doing Monday morning, Chris Antonetti said, "I've had better weekends."

Indians fans know what Antonetti is talking about. The Indians were swept by the Yankees at Yankee Stadium over the weekend in a three-game series where they had a chance to win all three games if not for a couple of errors by shortstop Francisco Lindor and a poor performance by the bullpen.

Antonetti, president of baseball operations, watched Lindor kick two double play ball and Trevor Bauer throw a temper tantrum. On Sunday, he watched closer Cody Allen fail to hold a 4-0 lead. The Yankees won that game, 7-4, by scoring seven runs in the eighth and ninth innings.

Indians' relievers allowed eight earned run in 4 2/3 innings (15.43 ERA) is the series. The Yankees, who have won 15 of their last 16 games, hit .522 (12-for-23) and drew six walks in the series against the Tribe's bullpen.

So what is Antonetti and the organization going to do about it?

Well, they're going to wait for lefty Andrew Miller to come off the disabled list. Miller, who rides shotgun with Allen in the eighth and ninth innings, could be activated Friday when the Indians return home for a three-game series against Kansas City.

Antonetti is also going to wait for Allen (2-1, 3.60), Dan Otero (0-1, 5.52), Zach McAllister (0-2, 9.00) and Tyler Olson (0-1, 7.15) to pitch better. If Nick Goody (0-2, 6.94) can come off the DL and do what he did last year, so much the better.

Perhaps one of the new bullpen arms the team cycled through last week - Alexi Ogando (0-1, 18.00), Ben Taylor and Evan Marshall can provide help. Not to mention Oliver Drake, the right handed reliever who gets left-handers out better than right-handers, who will join them Tuesday in Milwaukee.

What Antonetti is not going to do is go out and make a trade for a set-up man.

"It's not the time of year for an external addition," said Antonetti. "It's not a high period for trade activity."

But mostly what every decision maker in the organization - starting with owner Paul Dolan - is going to continue to do is live with the decision not to find a suitable replacement for established set-up men Bryan Shaw and/or Joe Smith at the end of last season. The Indians opened this season with their largest payroll in franchise history at \$135 million, a \$10 million bump from last year.

Most of that money went to scheduled raises to the starting rotation, position players and arbitration eligible players. The organization exercised the options on Michael Brantley and Josh Tomlin, but made a conscious decision not to re-sign any of their other free agents, including Shaw and Smith. Shaw and Smith signed big deals with the Rockies and Astros, respectively, but haven't pitched well. Shaw is 1-1 with a 6.06 ERA in 19 games, while Smith is 1-1 with an 8.14 ERA in 11 games.

But the fact that the Indians didn't find at least one established reliever to replace them is one of the reasons the bullpen has slipped from one of MLB'S best in mid-April to one of the worst in early May.

There are no perfect teams in the big leagues. Every team has a flaw and every flaw will be uncovered because the season lasts forever. It just so happens the Indians' flaw was uncovered earlier than expected, but everyone in the organization knew it was a possibility.

The Indians tried to throw numbers at the problem in spring training. But three of the pitchers they were looking at to handle Shaw's seventh inning - Otero, Goody and McAllister, despite solid performances last season - did not make the ALDS roster last season.

There are other reasons for the bullpen's problems. There always are.

In the last week, the Indians have played a doubleheader and two extra-inning games. They lost Goody to an elbow injury in Game 1 of Thursday's doubleheader against Toronto and Allen has put in some heavy duty usage without Miller.

In the last eight games, Allen has made four appearances and thrown 114 pitches in 3 2/3 innings. He's struck out one, walked six and allowed seven hits. Allen, as durable as they come, looks tired.

This is the same Allen who didn't allow a run in his first 10 games of the season. He was 1-0 with five saves, 13 strikes, two walks and five hits in 11 innings.

Miller should help Allen hit the refresh button. Miller, in fact, should help a lot of relievers.

Olson won't have to face too many righties and Otero won't have to face too many lefties. Switch-hitter Yangervis Solarte, batting right-handed, hit a grand slam off Olson in the 11th inning to give Toronto a 13-11 win in the first game of Thursday's doubleheader. In the ninth inning Sunday, rookie Gleyber Torres, batting left-handed, hit a game-winning three-run homer off Otero.

Miller, however, has only one arm. If the pen doesn't start pitching better individually and collectively it won't make that much of a difference.

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Francisco Lindor named American League Player of the Week for first time in his career

By Joe Noga,

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Cleveland Indians shortstop Francisco Lindor has been named American League Player of the week for the first time in his career based on his performance in games from April 30 through May 6.

Lindor hit .425 with four home runs, four doubles and 10 RBIs across eight games while slugging .426 with an on-base percentage of .825 as the Indians went 3-5 against the Rangers, Blue Jays and Yankees.

He becomes the first Cleveland Indians player to win the award in 2018. Corey Kluber and Jose Ramirez each won the award twice last season, once each in June and September.

The honor is sure to leave a bittersweet taste for Lindor, who committed critical errors on defense Friday and Saturday in New York that cost the Indians chances to win both games against the Yankees.

Despite his struggles in the field, Lindor has remained consistent at the plate, raising his season batting average from .205 on April 20 to .283 by Sunday.

His 17 hits, 11 runs and 33 total bases led all of Major League Baseball for the week. Lindor drove in at least one run in six of the Tribe's eight games and is currently on a nine-game hitting streak.

Now in his fourth big-league season, Lindor, 24, finished fifth in the A.L. Most Valuable Player voting last season and was named the Rawlings Platinum Glove defender in the American League in 2016.

Other candidates for the weekly award announced Monday on MLB Network were Mike Trout of Los Angeles, Eddie Rosario of the Minnesota Twins, Boston's Mookie Betts, New York Yankees teammates Gleyber Torres and Domingo German, Tampa Bay's Jake Faria, Houston pitchers Gerrit Cole and Justin Verlander and Seattle's James Paxton.

In recognition of being named AL Player of the Week, Lindor will be awarded a watch courtesy of Rockwell.

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