

## These 5 teams had the best Drafts

By Jim Callis MLB.com @JimCallisMLB

With a record 10 picks before the start of the second round, the Rays had a unique opportunity in the 2011 Draft. But they failed to take advantage of their three first-round choices and seven supplemental first-rounders, landing a quality left-handed starter (Blake Snell) but just two other fringe big leaguers (Mikie Mahtook, Tyler Goeddel) and nothing else.

With its limited financial resources, Tampa Bay couldn't afford to swing and miss that badly. It's not a coincidence the club hasn't posted a winning record since 2013.

The Rays got another chance to clean up in the Draft this week. Thanks to the free-agent defection of Alex Cobb and the decision not to sign supplemental first-rounder Drew Rasmussen after he failed a post-Draft physical last year, Tampa Bay had three first-round choices (tying Kansas City for the most) and a bonus pool of \$12,415,600 (second only to the Royals). Based on initial impressions, the Rays amassed a better group of talent this week than any club did.

With its first two selections, the Rays grabbed a pair of left-handers who never should have fallen as far as they did. Arizona prepster Matthew Liberatore has quality stuff, advanced feel for a teenager and projectability, as well as a combination that led some evaluators to consider him the best pitcher available, yet he lasted until No. 16. South Florida's Shane McClanahan looked like a top-10-overall choice before a late-season fade dropped him all the way to No. 31 despite a fastball that reaches 100 mph and one of the better changeups in the Draft.

Tampa Bay spent its third first-rounder, No. 32 overall, on Indiana high school outfielder Nick Schnell, who has the potential for solid-or-better tools across the board. It concluded the first day of the Draft with offensive-minded Florida Atlantic middle infielder Tyler Frank (second round) and California right-hander Tanner Dodson (supplemental second), who has a fastball that hits 97 mph, flashes a plus slider and also won the Cape Cod League batting title with a .365 average last summer.

On the second day, the Rays started with two up-the-middle college players in Rice shortstop Ford Proctor (third round), a grinder with a line-drive bat, and Tulane center fielder Grant Witherspoon (fourth), who has sneaky all-around ability. Georgia high school right-hander Taj Bradley (fifth) is raw but athletic and projectable with a promising sinker and curveball, while Saint Louis righty Miller Hogan (sixth) is a polished college performer. They also took a pair of interesting gambles on the third day in San Diego left-hander Nick Sprengel (15th) and California Baptist righty Justin Montgomery (17th), who figured to go in the first five rounds before rough springs.

Based on initial impressions, no team had a better 2018 Draft than Tampa Bay. Here are the four other clubs that collected the most talent, plus one that did well without having any extra first-day selections:

### 2. Royals

Like Tampa Bay, Kansas City had a pool of more than \$12 million, three first-rounders and lucked into two pitchers who shouldn't have gotten to its first two picks. Florida right-hander Brady Singer was considered by all of the clubs in the top five before shockingly falling to No. 18, which will only fuel his considerable competitive fire, and with his stuff and track record, he's a good bet to race to the big leagues. Fellow Gators righty Jackson Kowar has a formidable fastball/changeup combo and should do the same after dropping from the mid-first-round to No. 33.

Afterward, the Royals continued to pound college pitching with left-handers Daniel Lynch (Virginia, first round), Kris Bubic (Stanford, supplemental first) and Austin Cox (Mercer, fifth) and righty Jonathan Bowlan (Memphis, second). They also added a pair of promising bats in college outfielders Kyle Isbel (UNLV, third) and Eric Cole (Arkansas, fourth).

### 3. D-backs

With its first three choices, Arizona nabbed three players it would have been happy to select at No. 25: California prepster Matt McLain (first round), a steady shortstop with precocious feel for hitting; Virginia's Jake McCarthy (supplemental first), a speedy center fielder with a track record of producing at the plate; and Illinois high schooler Alek Thomas (second), another quick center fielder with similar tools to McCarthy.

The D-backs scored a number of hard-throwing righties on the second day with Kansas' Jackson Goddard (third), Wright State's Ryan Weiss (fourth), Oregon's Matt Mercer (fifth) and Florida prepster Levi Kelly (eighth). Another Sunshine State high schooler, shortstop Blaze Alexander (11th), offers the strongest infield arm in the Draft and also some raw power.

|                                                                                                                               |    |           |     |      |          |        |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|-----------|-----|------|----------|--------|
| Draft prospect points                                                                                                         | 8  | Blue Jays | 750 | 21   | Pirates  | 598    |
| Awarding 200 points to the team that drafted the No. 1 prospect on MLB                                                        | 9  | Indians   | 749 | 22   | Tigers   | 567    |
| Pipeline's Top 200 list, 199 to the team that drafted No. 2, etc., here are the Draft rankings in terms of "prospect points." | 10 | Rangers   | 723 | 23   | Yankees  | 529    |
|                                                                                                                               | 11 | White Sox | 721 | 24   | Mets     | 486    |
|                                                                                                                               | 12 | Angels    | 715 | 25   | Astros   | 477    |
|                                                                                                                               | 13 | Marlins   | 703 | 26   | Twins    | 424    |
|                                                                                                                               | 14 | Red Sox   | 695 | 27   | Mariners | 422    |
| 1 Rays 1184                                                                                                                   | 15 | Nationals | 686 | 28   | Phillies | 406    |
| 2 Royals 1021                                                                                                                 | 16 | Giants    | 678 | 29   | Dodgers  | 370    |
| 3 D-backs 865                                                                                                                 | 17 | Athletics | 671 | 30   | Cubs     | 347    |
| 4 Brewers 804                                                                                                                 | 18 | Reds      | 658 | Rank | Team     | Points |
| 5 Braves 799                                                                                                                  | 19 | Orioles   | 657 |      |          |        |
| 6 Rockies 767                                                                                                                 | 20 | Padres    | 606 |      |          |        |
| 7 Cardinals 764                                                                                                               |    |           |     |      |          |        |

#### 4. Indians

Besides Tampa Bay and Kansas City, Cleveland was the only other club with multiple first-rounders, which it used on one of the best all-around high school bats (Canada catcher Noah Naylor) and the best fastball in the Draft (Georgia right-hander Ethan Hankins, who also has a nifty changeup).

After that, the Indians mixed another hard-throwing prep righty (New York's Lenny Torres, supplemental first round), premium college performers (Southern Mississippi right-hander Nick Sandlin, second; Towson shortstop Richie Palacios, third; Wofford left-hander Adam Scott, fourth) and promising high school bats (Florida third baseman Raynel Delgado, sixth; Texas outfielder Korey Holland, 14th).

#### **McKenzie stars in 2018 debut**

By William Boor MLB.com @wboor

It may have been the first start of the season for Triston McKenzie, but the 20-year-old right-hander looked to be in midseason form as he led Double-A Akron to a 7-4 win over New Hampshire.

The Indians' No. 2 prospect (No. 21 overall) started the season on the disabled list after experiencing forearm soreness during Spring Training. However, on Thursday he was ready to go and showed why he's one of the top pitching prospects in baseball as he threw five scoreless innings.

McKenzie, who threw 43 of his 63 pitches for strikes, walked two, struck out four and gave up just one hit -- a single to lead off the fifth -- in the outing.

#### **Indians relievers find stability in June**

By Jordan Bastian MLB.com @MLBastian

CLEVELAND -- The formula for helping the Indians' bullpen get back on track played out well over the past two wins over the Brewers. The offense got the lead, Cleveland's starter got through seven innings and the bridge required to reach closer Cody Allen was shortened.

That allowed Indians manager Terry Francona to allocate the outs in the middle innings the best way he saw fit, as opposed to over-exposing relievers in less-than-ideal matchups. That has been one of the challenges over the past six weeks for the Tribe's bullpen and will continue to be a tightrope routine until someone emerges as a reliable setup man, or the club goes out and gets one via trade.

"The last thing you want to do is just get a guy up because you're getting him up," Francona said. "You always want to have a reason. That's been the hardest thing. And, how much rope to give guys."

The flames of May's bullpen disaster -- Cleveland's relief corps posted a bloated 8.01 ERA last month -- have died down some, and Francona has experienced a little more reliability in recent games. No, a few good games do not erase the damage done or the need for a reinforcement or two, but there have been baby steps in the right direction. And Francona is always searching for that silver lining.

In the last two wins over a Brewers squad that boasts the best record in the National League at the moment, it was right-hander Neil Ramirez who stepped up as a potential bridge builder. Ramirez set down three in a row in the eighth inning in Tuesday's 3-2 victory and then recorded an out in the eighth on Wednesday to help the Indians finish off a 3-1 win.

"I'm a guy that likes to throw a lot," Ramirez said. "I'm here just to get outs. I'm happy to pitch in any situation. For [Francona] to have some trust in me later in games, it's awesome. But, I know that everybody else out there can do that job, too. We're just going to keep it rolling."

Ramirez -- signed to a Minor League contract over the winter -- is one of a handful of arms who have come up from Triple-A Columbus to plug the holes as the bullpen has taken on a lot of water. The righty can reach 96-97 mph with his fastball and balances that with a slider that has been sharp at times. Ramirez has yielded no runs in his last five appearances. That is not a large sample, but again, it is progress.

There have also been encouraging signs from relievers Evan Marshall (no runs in his past four outings and a team-leading 57.1 percent ground-ball rate on the year) and the recently-signed Oliver Perez (no runs through 2 2/3 innings with the Tribe). The more pitchers like that emerge, the less someone like lefty Tyler Olson needs to face righties, who have hit .355 with a 1.106 OPS off him.

Those recent strides might also buy time for veterans Dan Otero and Zach McAllister to continue to sort through what is leading to their persistent problems on the mound.

Dating back to when relief ace Andrew Miller originally landed on the disabled list on April 26, the Indians have selected the contracts of relievers from Triple-A six times, designated a reliever for assignment five times, acquired one reliever via trade and another on a Major League contract. There have been three DL stints involving the bullpen on top of all the other moving parts.

That instability in personnel has contributed to the problem.

"We want to get Miller back there big time," Ramirez said. "He's a huge piece of what we do out there. To get him back is going to be huge."

Miller, who is on the DL again due to a right knee issue, is back to throwing off a mound, but his return timetable remains unclear.

On the season, Cleveland's bullpen ranks last in the Majors in ERA (5.93), home runs allowed per nine innings (1.8) and home-run-to-fly-ball ratio (17.3 percent). While the front office puts the MLB Draft in the rearview mirror and begins turning its focus to possible trades over the next two months, Francona will continue to test the arms at his disposal, searching for the right combination.

"When guys are starting to back up and start to be consistent, I think they earn pitching in leverage situations," Francona said. "We'll just try to, like we always do, put out there who we think has a chance to succeed and in the right positions. But, we're not going to run from Otero and McAllister. They're all going to pitch."

### **Baseball | Whether with Clippers or Indians, Adam Plutko giving team strong starts**

By Mark Znidar

It was a performance worth toasting with adult beverages at a nightclub until the help begins putting chairs upside down onto tables, but Adam Plutko chose to celebrate a no-hitter for the Clippers last Saturday by making calls to loved ones and friends in his room at the Embassy Suites in Syracuse, New York.

Wife Allison received one of the calls while at a wedding in Santa Barbara, California.

Last September, the couple was at a wedding when the Cleveland Indians called Plutko with the news that he was being promoted to the major leagues for the first time.

"We're going to start wedding crashing pretty soon," he said.

Plutko followed the no-hitter by giving up three hits, no walks and one earned run and striking out five in six innings in a 7-4 loss to the Norfolk Tides on Thursday at Huntington Park.

It was another Corey Kluber-like performance from Plutko during a season in which he has gone from question mark because of offseason surgery for a hip impingement to a legitimate candidate to grab Cleveland's No. 5 spot in the rotation.

"He has done a really good job this year of focusing (on the next start) and not looking outside of that, what's going to happen next week, next month or a year from now," Clippers manager Chris Tremie said. "He is just focusing on his day-to-day job. He is in a really good routine."

Plutko, a 26-year-old right-hander, was sent to the Clippers after he got the decision in a 9-6 victory over the Chicago White Sox on May 28. Cleveland manager Terry Francona told him there was no need for a fifth starter because the Indians had off days on Monday and Thursday. What made him the No. 1 candidate to replace Josh Tomlin were victories against Toronto on May 3 and the Chicago Cubs on May 23.

Shortstop Francisco Lindor called Plutko's start against the Blue Jays "unreal." He gave up six hits and three runs in 7 1/3 innings in a 13-4 victory in the second game of a doubleheader.

Cleveland used six relievers in the first game, and the team needed Plutko to pitch as deep as he could. He was an 11th-round draft pick 2013 after being voted most outstanding player as UCLA won the College World Series.

What was Plutko's reaction his first big league win?

"That was great — another team win," he said. "I didn't strike out a whole lot of guys. I threw the ball and the defense made plays. The most gratifying part for a pitcher is walking off the mound knowing he kept his team in the game and gave the baton to the bullpen. I did my job."

Francona said Plutko did a lot more than that for a weary team.

"Boy, did he save our (butts)," Francona said. "He pitched — I mean, he really pitched — and that was really fun to watch. That's as big as there was."

Plutko gave up two hits in six innings to outduel Jon Lester in a 1-0 victory over the Cubs on national television at Wrigley Field.

The impressive part is how Plutko has taken his game from Columbus to Cleveland and back without hiccups. He earned his first start for the Indians by no-hitting Indianapolis over 7 2/3 innings on April 28.

"I think it goes back to thinking small — working the next pitch — because you can't think about what happened or what can happen," he said. "It's about thinking in the moment. It's a learned sports psychology thing, and I've worked with some great ones. I've been working on this my entire career."

Cleveland assistant director of player development Alex Eckelman said that Plutko has reached another level in his development.

"That just shows you the growth, the maturity, Adam has made," Eckelman said. "We are bringing him up to do a job — to win games at the big-league level — and for him take those opportunities the way he has done, and to have the confidence, shows a lot about where he is."

## By the Numbers: Facing Corey Kluber was difficult enough. Then he decided to stop walking anyone

T.J. Zuppe Jun 8, 2018 4

Want to win a bet with your pals around your local watering hole? Want to wow your friends and family at the dinner table with a random tidbit of useless information? Of course you do.

So, riddle me this ...

Who was the last hitter to draw a walk off of Indians ace Corey Kluber?

Are you scratching your head? Are you vexed by this confounding and seemingly impossible inquiry? How about some hints?

- Kluber's last walk came on May 8.
- His current streak stretches over five starts and 35 1/3 innings, the longest in franchise history since Paul Byrd's 48-inning stretch in 2007.
- Kluber's last walk, coincidentally, also came against the Brewers, the same squad he held to one run in seven innings Tuesday night.
- The walk was delivered to a 25-year-old outfielder, one who was linked to the Indians through trade speculation over the winter.

Give up? ... Fine.

That fourth-inning free pass was delivered to Domingo Santana.

Whether he keeps the ball in a glass case on his mantel is currently a mystery.

Perhaps one of the most underappreciated elements of Kluber's dominance is his ability to adapt and change as needed, continuing to adjust his attack mode over different seasons, months or even particular games. If he needs to feature his nuclear breaking ball, he'll use it as his most deployed weapon. If he needs to shift to a different offering or sequence — even go against the game plan — he's more than capable of adapting on the fly.

Yan Gomes often speaks of Kluber's unmatched ability to make midgame adjustments, and it's that cerebral aspect that has helped lift him to a constant battle with Max Scherzer for the best pitcher in the game moniker.

Not only is Kluber dominating this season (1.96 ERA, 2.96 FIP, 2.5 fWAR), but if you look back to June 1, 2017, the day the righty returned from his monthlong stint on the disabled list, his numbers are beyond jaw-dropping.

Innings: 258

ERA: 1.74

FIP: 2.38

xFIP: 2.37

Strikeouts: 319

Walks: 33

Opposing OPS: .517

Michael Martínez's career OPS is .504. Essentially, Kluber has turned opposing hitters into Martínez clones.

The dominant hurler says the key is his steady, regimented routine. After watching him walk straight into the weight room after meeting with the media — you know, just after he had tossed seven superb innings — I guess we have no choice but to believe him.

This season, the 32-year-old righty has continued to adapt and change.

His latest walkless stretch has dropped his season free-pass rate to 2.9 percent, a career low for the two-time Cy Young Award winner. That also ranks lowest in the game among qualified pitchers, tied with Miles Mikolas of the Cardinals.

But his impressive display of command isn't just about throwing more strikes. In fact, if you focus on his zone rate — the percentage of pitches a hurler throws inside the strike zone — Kluber is actually throwing more than 4 percent fewer pitches in the zone compared with last year. On top of that, his edge percentage — the rate of pitches thrown on the fringe parts of the strike zone — is down almost 2 percent from last season, according to MLB Statcast.

So, if it's not simply about being more around the zone, what is causing the decrease in walks? Like most things, it's a combination of several factors.

One big area to consider is the increase in contact. Kluber hasn't induced as many strikeouts this year, and his overall swinging-strike rate is down. That means more balls have been put in play.

On the surface, that might appear concerning, particularly when coupled with an increased rate of hard contact. However, the average launch angle against Kluber has dropped, leading to a few more grounders. That means the ball might be hit harder, but more balls are hitting the infield dirt.

| Corey Kluber | Avg.Exit Velo | Launch Angle | Hard-hit% | wOBA | K%   | GB%  | BB% |
|--------------|---------------|--------------|-----------|------|------|------|-----|
| 2017         | 85 mph        | 10.1         | 29.3      | .240 | 34.1 | 44.5 | 4.6 |
| 2018         | 87.6 mph      | 8.9          | 32.5      | .239 | 27.5 | 48.1 | 2.9 |

(The Indians have been one of baseball's best at converting grounders into outs, so that strategy is sound.)

One potential reason for the grounder increase is the growing number of two-seamers Kluber has thrown this year, a pitch that can often help generate more ground balls. For Kluber, it's led to a grounder 55.1 percent of the time this season.

Here is how Kluber has deployed his arsenal over the past two years. As you can see, he's featuring his slider a bit less often in 2018. His sinker and cutter have emerged as the backbone.

| Year | Four-seam | Two-seam | Cutter | Slider | Change |
|------|-----------|----------|--------|--------|--------|
| 2017 | 14.12     | 27.61    | 24.33  | 27.61  | 6.34   |
| 2018 | 7.77      | 34.38    | 30.25  | 21.90  | 5.70   |

His two-seamer also leads to his lowest swinging-strike rate of any offering, and using it more could help explain why he's not getting as many swinging-strikes. His slider, his true weapon of mass destruction, is still inducing whiffs nearly 20 percent of the time, but if he's throwing it a bit less often, well ... you get the picture.

This brings us back to our point of origin: the decline in walks.

Kluber has said he's not purposely looking to generate earlier contact or looking to specifically pitch to contact, but regardless, it's been a byproduct of the way he's attacked. Opposing hitters certainly don't want to face a two-strike count — that looming breaking ball is enough to strike fear into the bravest of hearts — so it makes sense that they'd jump on the first non-slider they see.

That leads to some quicker battles and fewer deeper counts.

"If it's a two-pitch at-bat," Kluber said, "you can't walk a guy."

Voilà!

One additional point to consider reflects back to his zone percentage. While fewer of his offerings have actually been in the zone, hitters are making contact on pitches outside the zone 13 percent more often than last year. And if the opposition is content to get themselves out by chasing pitches earlier in the count, that would seem to bode well for his ability to limit the free passes.

Will his new style of attack continue? Will hitters cut back on their aggressiveness? Or, might he dust off his breaking ball as a second-half weapon to further confuse and perplex the opposition? When it comes to Kluber, expect the unexpected.

Here are some other interesting numbers and Tribe trends to consider.

6 — That's how many times Cody Allen has recorded at least four outs in a game this season. Allen accomplished that feat seven times during the entire 2017 regular season.

To his credit, he was able to record a pair of saves within a 24-hour period, tossing a total of 2 1/3 innings against the Brewers this week, working around a solo homer. In the midst of their raging bullpen inferno, any ability to put out a fire or two will be celebrated and appreciated. But asking Allen to continue that level of work is a little unfair and potentially a bit problematic.

Thus far, Allen's pitches-per-outing average (17) isn't that far beyond last year's (16.88), but much like their increased reliance on their starters, how that impacts the typically reliable hurler over the entire season remains to be seen.

On some level, it's understandable.

With Andrew Miller still working his way back from inflammation in his right knee — he continues to throw on the side and is making strides toward an eventual return — the Tribe's already shaky group of relievers has been thinned to dangerous levels, and when a win is in sight, it's easy to justify selling out for the victory, especially with an off day looming the next day.

It's also fair to say Allen has appreciated the work, using it to gain a better feel for his knuckle-curve — the important complement to his 94-95 mph fastball — but continuing to thrust him into multiple-inning appearances is asking a lot and probably isn't ideal.

That makes the next few numbers more important.

Neil Ramirez has earned more high-leverage opportunities in Terry Francona's bullpen. (Brad Rempel/USA Today Sports)

5 — That's how many consecutive scoreless appearances Neil Ramirez has recorded. Over that time, the righty has worked 4 2/3 innings, scattering three hits and two walks, striking out five.

A few weeks ago, he was facing the heart of Triple-A offenses. Now, with a few solid appearances under his belt, he's already been elevated near the top of Terry Francona's relief depth chart.

"I think they earn pitching in leverage situations," Francona said. "I just try to, like we always do, put out there who we think has a chance to succeed and in the right positions."

Ramirez can run his fastball up to 95-96 mph, which makes him one of the more interesting arms to travel to Cleveland using the Columbus shuttle. The 29-year-old had a dominant rookie season with the Cubs in 2014, but he hasn't been able to recapture the magic that resulted in a 1.44 ERA over 50 appearances since.

One of the more notable elements below the surface has been the spin rate on Ramirez's fastball. According to a Statcast search at Baseball Savant, the righty currently owns the highest fastball spin rate on the staff, besting Allen by a slight margin. His heater currently ranks 32nd in spin rate among MLB pitchers with at least 80 fastballs thrown.

That's important, because a high spin rate has been linked to pitches that don't drop at the same rate as ones with league average spin, almost making it appear as if it's rising. That can help lead to more strikeouts or even weaker pop-ups, as hitters struggle to judge the height of the heater as it approaches the zone.

In a small sample, Ramirez owns the highest "rise" on his fastball on the staff, according to vertical movement leaderboards over at FanGraphs.

When you pair that with a slider that has demonstrated the most horizontal movement it's ever displayed in the majors, it makes Ramirez, if nothing else, worthy of a deeper look in the continued search for worthy bullpen arms.

0.1 — The wins above replacement total of lefty Oliver Pérez, who has appeared in three games for the Indians since signing a free-agent deal. Pérez had been pitching in the minors with the Yankees, but he exercised his opt-out on June 1, becoming a free agent.

Thus far, he's logged 2 2/3 scoreless innings for the relief-starved Tribe, yielding a pair of hits. The 36-year-old lefty faced one batter Wednesday afternoon, punching out Travis Shaw with a 92.3 mph two-seamer.

Pérez's WAR total is notable because despite logging fewer than three innings, he is already tied for the sixth-highest fWAR on the staff, largely thanks to the bullpen struggles that have engulfed the club since the end of April. Pérez is currently tied with Allen, Tyler Olson and Evan Marshall.

At the moment, nine pitchers have accumulated a negative WAR total this year. So, while Pérez's contributions are far from eye-popping, and Ramirez's scoreless appearances are far from an established, trusted trend, you'll understand why Francona is quick to grab on to any small sliver of a positive like it's the last Twinkie remaining in a post-apocalyptic world.

"I don't think we view it as short term (fix)," Francona said. "We think he can help us."

#### **RubberDucks 7, Fisher Cats 4**

The RubberDucks won the rubber match of a three-game series in Manchester, N.H., using two big innings to down the host Fisher Cats and make a winner of Triston McKenzie in his AA debut Thursday night.

The Ducks scored four runs in the third inning and added three in the seventh to maintain a two-game lead in the Eastern League's Western Division.

McKenzie (1-0) was activated from the disabled list on Thursday and pitched five shutout innings. He gave up just one hit — a lead-off single in the fifth — and struck out four.

The Indians' No. 2 minor-league prospect then gave way to three Ducks relievers. Jon Edwards and Nick Pasquale were effective and Mitch Brown came on to record five outs for his fourth save of the season.

Andrew Calica's two-run homer in the third and Sam Haggerty's solo shot in the seventh paced the Ducks.

#### **Indians intend to keep first-round pick Noah Naylor primarily at catcher, feel confident in medical reports of Ethan Hankins**

**By Ryan Lewis**

The craziness that is 40 rounds of selections over three days is complete, and Scott Barnsby has his first draft as Indians director of amateur scouting in the books. Now, perhaps he can get some rest.

"If you ask my wife, I'm looking pretty weathered these days," Barnsby said with a laugh this week when he met with reporters after the second day of picks. "[I'm not getting] as much as I need to. That's all right. It's worth it."

Barnsby had plenty of ammo in his first go-around heading the Indians' draft process, owning three of the top 41 picks and four of the top 67.

With their top selection, the Indians drafted 18-year-old Noah Naylor, adding another catcher who will rank high within the organization to join top prospect Francisco Mejia. And, like Mejia, the Indians view Naylor as primarily a catcher, but also someone who has the athleticism to move around if needed.

Both come with strong offensive pedigrees. The Indians have had Mejia experiment in the outfield to add some flexibility and another path to the majors. Naylor could eventually do something similar at third base or first base but, for now, he'll be behind the plate.

"We're excited about Noah, that he can really hit, controls the strike zone, really good hand-eye [coordination], can drive the ball to all fields," Barnsby said. "There's power there. Defensively, he's a stay-behind-the-plate catcher, [has good] arm strength, and he's actually athletic enough to move around the field and have some defensive versatility as well.

"... Obviously, how many days behind the plate, we're not sure. But we'll continue to get him some at-bats, maybe move him around the field."

At No. 35, the Indians took a minor risk on a health concern that could turn into a profitable selection. Ethan Hankins, an 18-year-old right-handed pitcher out of Georgia, positioned himself last summer to be in contention for one of the top selections in the draft, well ahead of where the Indians were picking.

He then was shut down for a little more than a month this spring with a shoulder/lat issue, lowering his draft stock. He was ranked No. 21 according to MLB Pipeline's pre-draft rankings, still ahead of Naylor, who was No. 27. But with the shoulder issue still lingering in teams' minds, he was passed over until the Indians pulled the trigger at No. 35.

"When he came back, he was going through a rehab process, the stuff wasn't quite where it had been previously," Barnsby said. "I think guys were kind of catching up on their looks. I don't think there's that much more to it, to be honest with you. I think what we felt really comfortable with was the work [scout] CT Bradford did to know that he's healthy. He worked extremely hard through his rehab and each time we saw him toward the end of the season, the stuff got progressively better. He actually came in here and he threw and he spent some time with our medical staff to make sure that we felt really good about him."

Eight of the Indians' first 12 picks were pitchers, including a run of four consecutive college right-handers between rounds 7-10. That run included Alex Royalty (eighth round, No. 253 overall), who Barnsby compared to Josh Tomlin, though he added that he normally doesn't like to put comps on prospects. But with the selection of collegiate pitchers comes the chance that they can progress up the organizational ladder a bit faster.

"We want to be mindful of how many innings they've thrown and the workload," Barnsby said. "We'll monitor that. But when there's not as much projection of the stuff, showing more now stuff or showing they can throw strikes and command the ball, that could certainly give them a chance to move quicker through the system."

Akron Beacon Journal LOADED: 06.08.2018

### **Here are 13 Walk-Off Thoughts on the Indians' 3-1 win against the Milwaukee Brewers Wednesday afternoon.**

By Ryan Lewis

1. Carlos Carrasco has been inconsistent this season to say the least, though he's also well established that when he has his best stuff, he's among the best pitchers in baseball. The Indians just hadn't seen that side of him as much recently. Carrasco was roughed up in his last two starts and in the second inning in Wednesday's outing was already facing a bases-loaded situation with Lorenzo Cain at the plate. In a key at-bat, Carrasco induced Cain to hit a harmless flyout to right field to escape the inning.
2. Carrasco in the third allowed a leadoff double to Christian Yelich and then an RBI single by Travis Shaw. He barely escaped the second and gave up a couple hits in the third. But, from that point, he cruised, allowing only two hits over his final 4 2/3 innings. After about 2.5 starts of struggling through innings, Carrasco reached back and found his top-tier stuff again.
3. Said Indians manager Terry Francona: And not just that, earlier in the game there were a lot of hits. It was the third inning, bases loaded, and he had fallen behind Cain, fought back into the count and got him to fly out to right. That at the time seemed big and later in the game when you look back, it was big. Cain is a guy that has really given Carlos trouble. He got him out with the bases loaded. That was a huge turn in the game. ... And I think you also, because he had to reach back for his last stuff, I think he found his best stuff and then for the rest of the game he was really good. Breaking ball, change up, he was crisp, that was a nice bounce-back from the other day."
4. Carrasco is now 7-4 this season with a 4.23 ERA and 83 strikeouts in 83 innings. While Corey Kluber and Trevor Bauer have pitched like Cy Young candidates and Mike Clevinger has been strong in his own right, Carrasco has mostly been so-so, searching the kind of aggressiveness that as made him a top-5 vote getter.
5. Said Carrasco: "I think it was the way I talked with Gomes and all the guys. Sometimes you have to be a little more aggressive. Bases loaded after two outs, it came back to me, what was going on for the last two games. It can't happen right here. I just got him to fly out to right field for the third out."
6. The Indians haven't often applied hard labels to their relievers, choosing rather to have flexibility and work the matchups when they can. So, Neil Ramirez won't be knighted Sir Setup anytime soon, but he's thrown his name into the ring. Two games in a row, Ramirez was sent to the mound with the Indians clinging to a tight lead. He's one of the last names you would have expected to find in those situations in back-to-back games, but, almost nothing has gone to plan for this bullpen all year, so perhaps it fits perfectly.
7. Said Ramirez: "I'm a guy that likes to throw a lot. I like getting out there. I'm here just to get outs. I'm happy to pitch in any situation. For him to have some trust in me later in games, it's awesome. But I know that everybody else out there can do that job, too. We're just going to keep it rolling."
8. As long as Miller is out, the Indians figure to use a committee to play the matchup game and try to bridge the gap to Cody Allen. Ramirez and Dan Otero could be used, as could Zach McAllister depending on the previous days' usage, along with lefties Tyler Olson and Oliver Perez.

9. Said Francona: "Well, when guys are starting to back up and start to be consistent, I think they earn pitching in leverage situations. Just try to, like we always do, put out there who we think has a chance to succeed and in the right positions. But we're not going to run from Otero and McAllister. They're all going to pitch."

10. Rajai Davis hasn't had the most explosive season thus far. He had been thrown out in a couple of key situations. He was picked off, which isn't ideal for a speed-first option off the bench. He's been hitting in the low .200s with virtually no power and his defense isn't anything to write home about. But, at age 37, he can still spark an offense with his legs. On Wednesday, he stole three bases and as he took off for third, helped Michael Brantley's grounder to the left side find its way through the infield by forcing so much movement.

11. Said Francona: "That's the hope when Raj plays, that he can influence the game, and he did."

12. The Indians have some decisions to make, and soon, namely with Brandon Guyer potentially able to return on Friday. Lonnie Chisenhall is back, Greg Allen has been playing well and the outfield collectively is getting healthier. It could be Davis or Melky Cabrera that ends up as the odd man out, unless the club still feels Allen getting everyday at-bats in Triple-A is more beneficial.

13. Said Davis: "I can't focus on that. I can't make that decision. I don't make those decisions. When my name is called, I try to help us win."

Akron Beacon Journal LOADED: 06.08.2018

### **Cleveland Indians, Detroit Tigers series preview, pitching matchups**

By Paul Hoynes, cleveland.com

CLEVELAND, Ohio - Here is the preview and pitching matchups for the Indians' series against the Tigers.

Where/when: Comerica Park, Friday through Sunday.

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

Pitching matchups and starting times: RHP Trevor Bauer (4-4, 2.77) vs. RHP Michael Fulmer (2-5, 4.73) Friday at 7:10 p.m.; RHP Mike Clevinger (4-2, 3.36) vs. RHP Mike Fiers (5-3, 4.33) Saturday at 6:10 p.m. and RHP Corey Kluber (9-2, 1.96) vs. undecided Sunday at 1:10 p.m.

Series: The Indians are 5-2 against the Tigers this year. The Tigers lead, 1,120-1,089, overall.

Hot pitchers: Kluber has opened the season with 13 straight quality starts for the Indians. Detroit reliever Joe Jimenez (2-0, 2.45) has allowed three earned runs in his last 15 games, striking out 17 and walking one in 13 innings.

Hot hitters: Edwin Encarnacion of the Indians is hitting .315 (35-for-111) with 10 homers and 30 RBI since May 1. Detroit's Nick Castellanos entered Thursday's game with hits in 21 of his last 27 games.

Team updates: The Indians have won seven of their last 10 games. They're hitting .266 against the Tigers and have outscored them 35-20 in seven games. The Tigers, hitting .190 against the Indians, went into Thursday night's game against Boston having lost three of their last five games.

Disabled list: Indians - LHP Andrew Miller (right knee), OF Brandon Guyer (neck), OF Tyler Naquin (right hamstring), RHP Nick Goody (right elbow), LHP Ryan Merritt (left shoulder), RHP Danny Salazar (right shoulder) and RHP Cody Anderson (right elbow) are on the disabled list. Tigers - LHP Francisco Liriano (left hamstring), RHP Jordan Zimmerman (right shoulder), RHP Alex Wilson (left heel), LHP Daniel Norris (left groin), LHP Ryan Carpenter (right oblique), LHP Daniel Stumpf (left elbow) are on the disabled list. 3B Jeirmer Candelario is day to day with an injury to his right middle finger.

Next: The Indians open a four-game series against the White Sox at Guaranteed Rate Field on Monday night.

### **Triston McKenzie impresses in Class AA debut, leads Akron RubberDucks to win**

By Cliff Pinckard, cleveland.com

MANCHESTER, New Hampshire -- Right-hander Triston McKenzie threw five scoreless innings and Andrew Calica and Joe Sever each had two RBI in the Akron RubberDucks 7-4 victory Thursday night.

McKenzie (1-0, 0.00), a top Indians prospect who was activated from the disabled list on Thursday, allowed just one hit in his Class AA debut. He walked two and struck out four.

Meanwhile, Akron gave McKenzie a 4-0 lead in the third inning. Tyler Krieger brought in a run with a sacrifice bunt, and a throwing error by Fisher Cats pitcher Jordan Romano allowed another run to make it 2-0. Calica then homered to make it 4-0.

The RubberDucks sealed the win with three more runs in the seventh. Leading, 4-1, Sam Haggerty hit a solo shot to right field, and Sever later brought in two more runs with a double.

It was the first loss of the season for the Cats' Romano (8-1, 2.81 ERA), who gave up seven runs, six earned, on five hits in six innings.

Notes: Right-handed pitcher Zach Plesac was sent down to Class A Lynchburg, Virginia.

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 06.08.2018



## **Despite recent losses, Detroit Tigers have momentum on their side**

Anthony Fenech

BOSTON — The goose sat on a table in the middle of the cramped visitor's clubhouse at Fenway Park, and there was nothing it could do.

The Detroit Tigers were beaten badly again by the Red Sox on Wednesday night, and that's going to happen. Against the best team in the American League, against the bottom of their starting rotation, the matchup has looked like the junior varsity against the varsity. This point was going to come, up against superior championship-contending competition, and now it's here.

The first two months have been fun; the rally goose made for good headlines. But the mental fortitude of this Tigers team — and its physical capabilities — are being challenged like they have not been thus far. A doubleheader against the Yankees, a trip to Boston and an upcoming series against the suddenly-stabilized Indians will do that to a group that remains under-talented compared to the rest.

They have exceeded expectations, no doubt, in large part because of a culture change that began inside the clubhouse in spring training. And even after a pair of blowout losses all but killed the narrative of the #rallygoose, there is a certain sense of momentum that has built within not only the clubhouse, but the organization as a whole.

On Wednesday, the Tigers completed what, from this and other outside perspectives, was a progressive draft. Though it is years away from being considered successful, the team seemed to opt for more athleticism and upside than in years past. I cannot claim to have seen any of their picks besides top pick Casey Mize, but scouts whom I trust relayed skill sets I believe are prudent to the team's rebuilding.

Halfway through the first round, after Mize was already in tow, it was communicated by one scout how their draft room in Lakeland, Fla. was going to be upset if some team took prep outfielder Parker Meadows before their next pick at No. 44. The Tigers eventually got Meadows and left the first day of the draft with the two players they wanted most. For as much as all 40 rounds matter, the cream of the crop is at the top, and the conviction in those picks said something.

So, too, did the inquiries received upon arriving at the park on Tuesday morning, fresh off reporting on Mize's selection. Multiple players asked about the Auburn right-hander. One asked if I had his phone number. Coaches who had seen him on video spoke about his readiness and how they felt he could help the team in the not-so-distant future. The interest was unsolicited.

The team — and most notably, the coaching staff, led by manager Ron Gardenhire — has done their part to create this momentum. The goose, too. The team that is performing way better than they are, spit and vinegar and all, especially given the rash of injuries they've incurred and the roster depth issues they continue to deal with on a daily basis.

Now, it is the front office's job — namely, general manager Al Avila — to build on that momentum. If there is, indeed, a conviction in the process, then it must be showed in decisions going forward. The aggressiveness on the field should be shared in personnel moves.

They now have a potential front-line starter in Mize and he should be treated as such.

This is not Alex Faedo; this is a pitcher who can contribute in the short-term, one who will soon be paid handsomely to pitch professionally. If you want him to become the next Justin Verlander, then duplicate the development process.

They have a potential middle-of-the-order bat in Christin Stewart, who continues to tear up Triple-A Toledo. Stewart is 24 years old. For comparison, Nick Castellanos is 26 years old. Though there are complexities in Stewart's case — where he will play everyday defensively chiefly among them — a compelling argument is this: Why not get his early Major League struggles out of the way now, instead of next season?

And there's a pitcher that opened eyes on Monday, a righty named Sandy Baez, who, for four innings, dominated a Yankees team that faced him multiple times in spring training. Where is his future? Is it in the bullpen, where many believe, and if so, what could adding an arm like that to the back-end — pairing him with Joe Jimenez — mean for the not-so-distant future?

They are small developmental decisions that loom large in the timeframe for the Tigers' rebuilding. It's only a five-year process if you're hell bent on making it a five-year process. And it's not to say this is a one-year fix. One look at the 40-man roster and still-comparatively thin farm system smacks with reality that there is serious work left to do.

But the moves that have been made — beginning in the off-season by hiring Gardenhire — offers optimism that with a few more good moves, and with some aggressiveness, the Tigers aren't as far away as many believed.

Push the prospects. Make a good trade. Sign a couple free agents.

It definitely won't happen this year. It probably won't happen next year. But the moves that are on the horizon — most importantly this trade deadline, most notably with Michael Fulmer — and how the front office interprets this momentum, will be critical in charting when a winning baseball team next occupies Comerica Park.

Detroit Free Press LOADED:

### **Bosio thinks effects of surgery still impacting Tigers' Fulmer**

Chris McCosky,

Boston — Michael Fulmer never mentions the surgery when he tries to explain why his effectiveness has essentially fallen off a cliff after the 85-pitch mark in just about every one of his starts this season.

He will look you in the eye and tell you he feels fine, that he just needs to execute his pitches better when he gets through the lineup a third and fourth time. He will tell you that his velocity isn't decreasing after the fifth inning — that he is still throwing 95-97 mph.

And he is 100 percent correct. But something is amiss and pitching coach Chris Bosio believes the ulnar nerve transposition surgery Fulmer had last September is part of the problem.

"I think right now we are trying to wrap our hands around the recovery from that surgery," Bosio said before Thursday's game against the Boston Red Sox. "I am not a doctor. But I know there are some things in there we are trying to figure out, different treatments before the game, literally during the game and in between.

"Quite frankly, it's something I've never dealt with as a pitching coach."

Bosio has talked to the Tigers trainers and doctors; he's consulted with trainers outside the organization, including his trainer from his playing days in Seattle. He's read up on just about anything and everything he can get his hands on.

"From my understanding, as I get to know this surgery, every case is different," he said. "Every individual is different. But, man, when you do the breakdown on his numbers, once we get around 85 pitches, it's crazy — it seems to always happen around that pitch number.

"How do we break through that wall?"

From the 76th pitch on, according to Baseball Reference, opponents are hitting .340 with a .415 on-base percentage, slugging .533 with a .968 OPS against Fulmer. In the first five innings, he is holding hitters to a .225 average and a .683 OPS.

In the sixth and seventh innings, a total of 10 innings, his ERA is 11.70 and opponents are hitting .395 with a 1.105 OPS.

"That the velo is staying the same, that's the positive in this — the velo doesn't go down," Bosio said. "If the velo was dropping 5 to 7 mph, I think we'd be looking at a different animal. But we're not seeing that. We are seeing consistency in the flight of the ball and in the shape of his pitches.

"You see the record, but you have to look deeper at the way he's going about it. His pitch-ability, his pitch sequencing, he's still the same guy. But he's still not too far removed from the surgery."

Bosio had major surgery on his right foot this offseason. He's still limping noticeably. Some days, after a workout, he says he feels fine. But on Thursday he pulled up his pants leg and revealed severe swelling from his ankle up toward his knee.

"I get a lot of swelling, a lot of throbbing and I get pain," he said. "And that's something that I am not pitching with. So try to imagine that on a guy who had surgery on his throwing arm. And he's still able to throw at times, 96-97 mph and maintain that velocity. That's pretty impressive."

Bosio was asked how the effects of the surgery might be manifesting during Fulmer's starts.

"Sometimes it's different," he said. "Whether it's inflammation in the hand, in the arm, the thumb, the fingers — it varies."

The hope is, the further Fulmer gets from the surgery, the more these symptoms will dissipate. Already, his velocity has increased from 92-94 in his first few starts back up to 95-97 in his recent starts. But his command has not been as precise.

He's walked eight batters in the 10 innings he's worked beyond the fifth.

"It's not something Mike is going to be able to do on his own," Bosio said. "This is a team game. A lot of times it's one play, one pitch. It could be one at-bat where we blow a game open for him so he doesn't have to try to be so fine."

The Tigers started milking his arm — essentially massaging it to increase the blood flow — between innings of his starts. That helped with the velocity. They have tried various exercises and techniques between starts.

"But how do we kick through that door," Bosio said. "We're very careful with his pitch counts, not trying to push him too much because we don't want to hurt him. The effort is there. He's putting in the work. He's very diligent about how he goes about his game-planning and in-game adjustments. He's right up there with some of the best I've ever worked with.

"So I think it's a work in progress and it's getting better. This is a case in point where the numbers just don't tell the story about the year he's having."

Fulmer will be on the mound against the Indians Friday at Comerica Park, trying to avenge a six-run, three-inning outing he had in Cleveland in April.

**No leadoff for Candelario**

Manager Ron Gardenhire had used Jeimer Candelario in the lead-off spot in three games against a left-handed starter. On Thursday, against left-hander Jalen Beeks, Candelario was back in the five-hole.

"I don't think he was comfortable there in the leadoff spot," Gardenhire said. "I think he's one guy who looked like he might try to change what he's doing. I don't want him to get into that. (Hitting coach) Lloyd McClendon felt the same way."

Candelario went 3 for 12 with a home run, double and a walk in those three leadoff starts. He also knocked in three runs — which is another factor in hitting him fifth.

"We may still hit him leadoff here and there, but we always said we liked him in RBI spots," Gardenhire said. "Mostly, though, we just don't want him getting screwed up in the brain trying to do too much in the leadoff spot."

**Around the horn**

Right-hander Jordan Zimmermann (shoulder) will make one more rehab start at Toledo, Gardenhire said. Zimmermann went 4 1/3 innings at Toledo on Wednesday.

... Left-hander Francisco Liriano (hamstring) will throw a simulated game early next week and will make at least one rehab start before he's activated.

... Left-handed reliever Daniel Stumpf (ulnar nerve irritation) has begun playing catch. He will work his way up to a simulated game and a rehab stint, as well.

### **Orioles 'slugger' Chris Davis is having a mind-bogglingly bad season**

David Schoenfield

It was a relatively slow day of baseball on Thursday, so indulge me as I go down the rabbit hole with Chris Davis. Hopefully we'll all come out alive.

Davis is having a terrible season. I didn't realize exactly how mind-boggling awful until Wednesday morning when I noted that, despite playing in nearly all the Baltimore Orioles' games, he had scored just nine runs. I mentioned this on Twitter and one response I can print here came from robj1028, who wrote back, "I feel awkward liking a tweet that I don't really like the fact presented but there's no other reaction on Twitter."

Meanwhile, our old friend Diane Firstman pointed this out: Davis had entered his at-bats with 109 runners on base ... and driven in 11 of them. Things haven't turned around over the past two days. He went 1-for-4 with two strikeouts on Wednesday and 0-for-4 with three strikeouts in Thursday's 5-4 loss to the Blue Jays. He's still at nine runs scored in 55 games and is hitting .152/.232/.232. His OPS is barely better than Mike Trout's on-base percentage.

I wasn't the only one thinking of Davis. On Wednesday night, ESPN Insider contributor Dan Szymborski fired off a series of Davis-related tweets, including this one:

You're reading that correctly: With minus-1.7 FanGraphs WAR and minus-1.8 Baseball-Reference WAR, Davis is on pace for the worst season of all time. More on that in a moment. I want to start with that runs scored total.

Davis has nine runs scored. Four of those were home runs. On his other 26 hits and 19 walks and two hit by pitches and one reached on error, he has scored just five runs. Mookie Betts and Jeimer Candelario have both scored five runs in one game this season.

His five runs so fascinated me I even looked them up:

-- April 14: Doubled off somebody named Marcus Walden of the Red Sox and scored on two groundouts.

-- May 2: Singled off Eduardo Paredes of the Angels and later scored on Jace Peterson's triple.

By the way, both of these runs came in the ninth inning of games the Orioles were losing 10-2 entering the frame. I can't even continue.

Real or not? Mets can't do much of anything right

The Mets have scored seven runs in their past six games, all losses, and on Wednesday they even made the Orioles look good.

Real or Not? MadBum's return makes NL West a four-team race

The Giants got ace Madison Bumgarner back in action, which could be the nudge they need to keep another title bid alive.

Anyway, the "record" for fewest runs in a season by a qualified player is Leo Cardenas of the 1972 Angels with 25. Davis is on pace for 24 in 146 games. Cardenas' achievement is pretty remarkable because he didn't just limp past 500 plate appearances -- he batted 602 times. He hit .223/.272/.282 with six home runs. That was a legendarily bad offensive team as the Angels averaged just 2.93 runs per game. No wonder the AL instituted the DH in 1973.

The only other two qualifiers with fewer than 30 runs scored are Fred Raymer of the 1905 Boston Beaneaters with 26 runs (he hit .211/.232/.247) and Mario Guerrero of the 1978 A's with 27 runs. Guerrero actually hit an almost respectable .275/.302/.345 in 546 PAs. Get this: He started 41 games in the third spot in the lineup and hit .333 ... and still scored just nine runs in those games.

So, to Dan's tweet about worst seasons ever. Here are

FanGraphs' five worst position-player seasons (since 1900):

1. Jim Levey, 1933 Browns: -4.0 WAR

2. Jerry Royster, 1977 Braves: -3.8 WAR

3. Tommy Thevenow, 1930 Phillies: -3.6 WAR

4. Jim Levey, 1931 Browns: -3.3 WAR

5. George Wright, 1985 Rangers: -3.2 WAR

1. Jerry Royster, 1977 Braves: -4.0 WAR

2. Jim Levey, 1933 Browns: -3.9 WAR

3. George Wright, 1985 Rangers: -3.7 WAR

4. Jose Guillen, 1997 Pirates: -3.3 WAR

5. Jim Levey, 1931 Browns: -3.1 WAR

5. Lou Piniella, 1973 Royals: -3.1 WAR

And the Baseball-Reference list:

I would guess Davis has a shot, if only because of the most important criteria (besides sucking): playing time. Davis is signed for four more seasons after this one, at a hefty price of \$23 million per season. With such a heavy investment in Davis, and this season already lost, the Orioles may have little choice but to plow forward and hope Davis can figure things out.

And if he doesn't? As one reader responded to me, "I can't wait to tell my grandkids the Orioles couldn't sign Manny Machado because they instead signed Chris Davis."

OK, I said this was going to be a rabbit hole, so those lists beg the question: Who was Jim Levey? And how did he manage to have two of the worst seasons ever?

He actually has a pretty interesting little story. Born in Pittsburgh in 1906, he dropped out of school at an early age and at 16 was working in a steel mill, later quitting and joining the Marines. While stationed in Quantico, Virginia, he played baseball, football and basketball, and according to "The Big Book of Jewish Baseball," while on recruiting duty in Boston, he met a scout for the New York Giants who told him to go to New York for a tryout with John McGraw's team. Levey showed up without his glove or spikes and was told to beat it. The book says he signed a few

days later with the St. Louis Browns, so he must have been somewhere. After two seasons in the minors, he was installed as the starting shortstop in St. Louis in 1931. What did the Browns see in him? Well, you have to understand how bad the Browns were. They'd gone 64-90 in 1930 and drew -- not a misprint -- 152,088 fans. They had a little talent, less cash and few options.

Levey must have been a terrific athlete. In fact, there's an anecdote in another book about Jewish athletes that says he was going to race Ben Chapman -- who led the league in steals in 1931 -- that August. Apparently, players around the league had placed their bets. The Browns called off the race.

Anyway, Levey may have been fast -- he played three years in the NFL as a running back after his major league career ended -- but had trouble with everything else. In 1931, he hit .209/.264/.285 and made 58 errors. In 1933, he hit .195/.237/.240. The amazing thing about that season is he was moved into the leadoff spot for two weeks in late August and September. The Browns finished last and drew 88,113 fans all season.

The other weird thing: Levey actually hit .280 in 1932 and finished 19th in the MVP voting. The "Big Book of Jewish Baseball" quotes McGraw saying that year, "I'd trade my right arm, left leg and seven ballplayers for that young fellow."

Levey played for a long time in the minors after 1933 while moonlighting in the NFL and apparently played basketball as well in those pre-NBA days. As for the Browns? The franchise would eventually move to ... Baltimore.

Davis isn't the only former star who has had this happen to him. Adam Dunn just missed the top five with a minus-2.9 season in 2011 when he hit .159 for the White Sox. Willie McGee was the 1985 NL MVP, but had a minus-2.8 season in 1999 at age 40. Ted Simmons, George Scott and George Bell all had minus-2.5 seasons or worse.

What has happened? Davis is striking out a lot, but he always has struck out a lot. His fly ball rate is just 24.6 percent -- it was 46.9 percent in 2013, when he hit 53 home runs. When he has hit a fly ball, it has left the park just 8 percent of the time -- just half of the 16.5 percent rate he averaged from 2013 to 2017.

So the Orioles are left with a power hitter without enough power who is hitting a lot of ground balls. The team is bad, Machado probably will get traded and the future may be ugly.

Maybe Orioles fans should stay in the hole.

### **Captains down Dragons for first three-game series sweep of 2018**

**By David Glasier, The News-Herald**

The won-lost record is what it is, but the Captains are enjoying the here and now as the first half of the Midwest League season nears an end.

With a 5-2 victory over the Dayton on June 7 at Classic Park, the Captains swept the three-game series from the Dragons. It was the first three-game sweep of the season for the Captains, who improved to 25-35. Dayton slipped to 29-29 with the loss.

The Captains used solid pitching and power hitting to down the Dragons in thoroughly pleasant weather.

On the mound, the piggyback duo of Jean Carlos Mejia and Francisco Perez was impressive.

Mejia, activated on June 7 after a six-week stint on the disabled list with arm soreness, worked the first four innings. The 21-year-old right-hander from the Dominican Republic surrendered two runs on three hits in four innings. He finished with five strikeouts and yielded one walk.

Captains manager Luke Carlin said Mejia was on a 65-pitch limit for his first game action since April 13. He threw 55 pitches, 37 for strikes.

"I was excited to see Mejia back on the bump after not pitching for so long," Carlin said. "He worked hard when he was out and did a good job tonight."

Perez, sharing starts with Mejia, blanked the Dragons over five innings on three hits. He notched three strikeouts and issued two walks. The 21-year-old left-hander, also from the Dominican Republic, upped his record to 4-3 and lowered his ERA to 3.59 while earning the victory.

At the plate, first baseman Jose Vicente twice flexed his power stroke. The 22-year-old native of the Dominican Republic connected for a two-run home run in the bottom of the fourth inning off Dayton starter and eventual loser Packy Naughton (3-6, 5.09 ERA). He added a solo shot in the bottom of the sixth off Dayton reliever Austin Orweiler.

Vicente also doubled and is batting .269 with seven home runs and 16 RBI.

Lake County right fielder Oscar Gonzalez got to Naughton for a two-run home run in the top of the first inning. Gonzales is batting .274 with nine home runs and 28 RBI.

It was a banner day, too, for Captains outfielder Will Benson and relief pitchers Tommy DeJuneas and Kyle Nelson. On June 7, the Midwest League offense announced they will be on the Eastern Division team for the MWL All-Star Game in Lansing, Mich. on June 19.

**SUBSCRIBE TO HOME DELIVERY AND SAVE!**

David Glasier

David has been a full-time writer with The News-Herald since 1984. He writes about news, sports and entertainment. He served as president of the Television Critics Association from 1993-95. Reach the author at [dglasier@News-Herald.com](mailto:dglasier@News-Herald.com) or follow David on Twitter: @nhglasier.

### **Rocky Colavito remembers his 4-home-run day June 10, 1959**

By Marc Bona, [cleveland.commbona@cleveland.com](mailto:cleveland.commbona@cleveland.com)

CLEVELAND, Ohio - Before a game 59 years ago in Baltimore, a reporter was hanging around the batting cages when he sauntered up to Cleveland Indians slugger Rocky Colavito.

"I remember being 3-for-28 coming into that game," Colavito remembered from his home in Pennsylvania. "Harry Jones, the (Cleveland Plain Dealer) beat writer at the time, was around the batting cages. He says 'Hey Rock, when are you going to come out of this slump?' I said 'What slump?' That's the truth. I would never admit to it. He said 'Oh, c'mon.'" I said 'You never know, it just might be tonight.' He accepted that."

Colavito didn't just come out of the slump. He blasted his way out, becoming the eighth Major Leaguer to hit four home runs in a game.

Only 18 players have done it - six in the American League, 12 in the National League. Like Colavito, all but three did it within nine innings. It's extraordinarily rare, occurring even fewer times than perfect games. After Colavito, the next American Leaguer to hit four home runs in one game was Mike Cameron in 2002.

Colavito was penciled in the clean-up spot for the game, played on a warm night in Baltimore's Memorial Stadium. In Colavito's first at-bat in the first inning, he walked. Then the hitting barrage began.

#### Home Run No. 1

In the third, Colavito faced starter Jerry Walker with one on and one out, connected, and pulled a ball to deep left.

"I say I hit a fastball; someone tried to say it was a breaking ball," Colavito said. "I hit it well enough to be a home run. I stood right at home plate. I wanted to make sure it stayed fair. I knew it was a home run or foul; you couldn't tell in that ballpark."

In the bottom of the inning, Colavito took the field. Orioles centerfielder Albie Pearson smacked a line drive down the right-field line.

"I came running over and made the catch - decent, but nothing spectacular," he said. "As I caught it I was right on the foul line. A fan sitting in the stands threw a ... beer in my face. I was so livid someone would have the nerve to do that. I called him everything, I challenged him. We had an exchange."

#### Home Run No. 2

Arnie Portocarrero was on the mound in the fifth inning with no one on and one out.

"He was like what they call today a setup man," Colavito said. "He throws me a slider and - I'm not bragging, I hate braggards - but for someone who is three for 28 - it's on the outside part of the plate. And I hit this line drive over the left-field-center fence that kept climbing. I really hit it well."

#### Home Run No. 3

An inning later, Portocarrero was still on the mound for the Orioles. Colavito took him deep with a man on and two out.

"He throws me almost an identical pitch," he said. "Maybe he couldn't believe I hit a pitch like that for a home run; neither could I. Lo and behold I hit it again, only this time to left-center, more toward center. I think it was 385 feet. Also, anything that cleared a fence is 400 feet - a line drive, you know, when you hit a ball." (Colavito is correct: The left-field line was 309 feet, but center field was 410.)

Like a gladiator who wins over a crowd, Colavito felt a switch of allegiance on the road.

"So I go out to right field. This time I get a standing ovation from the people in the right-field bleachers - including this idiot who threw the beer in my face."

#### Home Run No. 4

Colavito's final at-bat came with no one on and one out in the ninth.

"Their ace reliever, Ernie Johnson, their closer, was in, and I heard later he was telling the guys in the bullpen 'I'll tell you how to take care of this guy, I'm going to get him out.' My roomie Herb Score is sitting on a ledge. I'm getting my bat, and he says 'C'mon, roomie, don't fool around and hit number four.' I said 'Roomie, I'm 3 for 28. If I get a single I'll be tickled to death. He said '(BS) go up there and do it.' I said 'Yeah, right,' and went on deck.

"First pitch was under my chin. He probably thought that up and in, low and outside - the old cliché. He throws the next pitch in the strike zone up and in, and I hit that ball as well as any of them, up in the (left-field) bleachers. I knew the second I hit it, it was a home run."

## Aftermath

After the game - which also saw home runs by Indians Minnie Minoso and Billy Martin - the kid who caught the ball made his way to the clubhouse. Indians traveling secretary Harold "Spud" Goldstein swapped him \$25 and two or three signed baseballs, said Colavito, who said players were required to sign baseballs before each game.

Colavito still has the ball. On it is inscribed "4th home run Beat Baltimore 11-8, June 10, 1959."

The win put the Indians at 27-24 (Cleveland finished 89-65, good for second behind the Chicago White Sox.) Colavito's line that day? He went 4-4 with four home runs, a walk, five runs scored with six RBIs. Tito Francona Sr. was in the game, going 2-5 with two runs scored. Gary Bell got the win.

Walker took the loss. It turned out to be Walker's best year, the only campaign in which he recorded double digits in victories. That same season, he became the youngest pitcher to start an All-Star game. He finished with the Indians in 1963-64 and moved on to a long career as a coach and front-office executive.

Portocarrero, whom Colavito victimized twice in the game, went to the same high school in New York as Manny Ramirez and Rod Carew, among other Major Leaguers.

Johnson became a longtime announcer. His son Ernie Johnson Jr. is a fixture in sports broadcasting, covering baseball and, of course, teaming with Charles Barkley, Shaquille O'Neal and Kenny Smith for NBA analysis.

One of the game's umpires would figure in another prominent albeit notorious night for Cleveland almost 15 years to the day later. Nestor Chylak was umpiring on June 4, 1974, between Texas and Cleveland. It was 10 Cent Beer Night in Cleveland Memorial Stadium. Chylak was at third base for both the drunken fiasco and Colavito's game.

Colavito's memory remains intact about that game 59 years ago, more so than some fans. Attendance that night was 15,883.

"Everyone says they were there," said Colavito, who will turn 85 on Aug. 10. "I never forget it. My youngest son (Steve), he never lets me forget it. He always calls me or sends me something.

"I have had people say 'I saw that game in Cleveland!' I tell them, 'Unless you can fly, you had to watch it on TV.' It's funny how people remember something and they put them right where it was."

Previous coverage: Last year, Colavito talked about his good friend and roommate, Herb Score, 60 years after a fateful pitch on May 7, 1957.