

## **Peter Gammons: The Cleveland Indians, best run team in professional sports**

March 5, 2018 by Peter Gammons 7 Comments

PHOENIX—The Cleveland Indians have won 454 games the last five years, 22 more than the runner-up Boston Red Sox. In those years, the Indians spent \$414M less in payroll than Boston, which at the start speaks volumes about how well the Indians have been run.

Two years ago, they got to the tenth inning of an incredible World Series game 7, in a rain delay. Last October they lost an agonizing 5th game of the ALDS to the Yankees, with Corey Kluber, the best pitcher in the American League hurt. They had a 22 game winning streak that ran until September 15, their +254 run differential was 56 runs better than the next best American League team (Houston), they won 102 games, they led the league in earned run average, their starters were 81-38 and they had four players hit between 29 and 38 homers, including 29 apiece from the left side of their infield, Francisco Lindor and Jose Ramirez.

And they even drew 2.05M (22nd in MLB) to the ballpark formerly known as The Jake, the only time in this five year run they drew more than 1.6M or were higher than 28th in the majors.

That is the reality they live with. One could argue that in terms of talent and human player development, the growth of young front office talent (6 current general managers and three club presidents), they are presently the best run organization in the sport, especially given their financial restraints. That extra inning loss to the Cubs in 2016 is all that stands between Terry Francona have three World Series rings and a guaranteed ride to Cooperstown, although when his time comes, he is likely to make it into the Hall of Fame.

All that said, in the first week of March, the hoopla has been for the Yankees and the twin towers, Giancarlo Stanton and Aaron Judge, as well as what should be the best bullpen in the game. Or Houston, the world champions loaded with extraordinarily skilled young players and the addition of Gerrit Cole. And the Red Sox, with J.D. Martinez added to another highly skilled team of young position players.

But even though they lost Carlos Santana and his 63 extra-base-hits to free agency as well as Bryan Shaw, who led the league in appearances in this five year run, in reality the American League road to late October may well again run through the shores of Lake Erie. "From the top (owner Paul Dolan) through the front office to the coaching staff, the clubhouse, the minor leagues, this is a unique place," says Francona. Tito is the hub of the function of the organization run by Chris Antonetti and Mike Chernoff, but then, coming here in 2013 after leaving the cacophony of Boston in 2011 was absolutely the right place at the right time. "There is so much energy devoted to getting things done right," says their talented young pitcher Mike Clevinger, "it's a tremendous place to play and grow."

For instance, since they don't know where Michael Brantley's shoulder rehab will be come April, while Jason Kipnis plans on returning to second base, he is constantly kept abreast of whether or not he will have to play some outfield. In turn, they have been able to find players like Andrew Miller, who is completely unselfish and while one of the elite relievers in either league has no issue pitching whenever and wherever Francona believes is the leverage spot to utilize him.

Since Miller came from the Yankees at the trading deadline in 2016 and led them to Game Seven of the Series, the bullpen and Francona's usage have been the team's driving wheel. Shaw is a loss, a freakish workhorse who also gets lefthanded batters out better than righthanders, but Miller and Cody Allen return at the end, Dan Otero is back in the middle with Zach McAllister, they came up with Nick Goody and Tyler Olson last season in the process of leading the majors in save percentage.

Kluber has won two Cy Young Awards, his focus is the pitching equivalent of Joey Votto, his changeup is an evolving work in progress and he is a model; players and scouts who went to an indoor facility in Massachusetts this winter were amazed by how every ball Kluber throws in January is done with the focus and precision of the seventh game of the World Series. Catcher Roberto Perez thinks Carlos Carrasco "can win the Cy Young as well;" Kluber and Carrasco did strike out 491 in 403 innings last season. Trevor Bauer, who this winter added a Kluber slider that has changed his repertoire, seems on the brink of frontline status and Clevinger may be, as well.

What's fascinating about the foursome is that they are all consumed by greatness. Bauer is coming to grips with all the elements of that consumption. Clevinger, whose stuff is unquestioned, has been inconsistent throwing strikes in his 174 2/3 major league innings, walking 84, striking out 187. His numbers ahead in the count are dominant. His numbers when he throws ball one are, well, not so dominant. So this winter he worked on his balance to help that consistency, working on balance beams, "learning," he says, "how to walk properly" and doing a series of big toe exercises. For those of us that have been to 45 previous spring trainings, there are plenty of things we can learn in year 46. And there's Danny Salazar, he of the great stuff but physical issues that probably will keep him out of the rotation in early April. And Josh Tomlin, vastly unappreciated.

And, in the mid

summer wings, there is Shane Bieber. Drafted in the fourth round in 2016 out of UC Santa Barbara, he went through the Midwest, Carolina and Eastern League last season and, while thinking about throwing strikes, in 197 professional innings has 183 strikeouts and 12 walks. 183 strikeouts and 12 walks.

They signed Yonder Alonso in place of Santana, Kipnis is healthy, the Lindor-Ramirez left side is at star level, and the fact that Perez came into camp in the best condition of his career gives them a tandem with Yan Gomes that handles the pitching. Bradley Zimmer is an elite speed center fielder whose hitting is developing, Brantley is still a health uncertainty, albeit one of the best hitters in the league. One of their best prospects, Bobby Bradley, has hit 79 homers in three professional seasons and reported in such chiseled shape he was nearly unrecognizable.

They have the farm system depth that has allowed them to make deals for Miller and Jay Bruce the last two years, although with the possible free agent losses at the end of this season, they may be reluctant to make a major move.

Yet, they know all too well it's been since 1948 since Cleveland has won a World Series. Yes, they won 108 games in a 154 game schedule in 1954 and were swept by the Giants. The 1997 seven game series against the Marlins was a heartbreak. So was 1995 to the Braves. And 2016 to the Cubs, so there may be the thought that the time has come today around July 31.

Other than the Twins, the Indians do have the luxury of a division that allows them to rest pitchers and likely win 100-something games. That could allow Francona to do whatever he can to get into October with his pitching intact, which hasn't been the case in 2016 and 2017.

The Astros are fully aware of the Indians. So are the Yankees and Red Sox. There's a reason they've won 22 more games than any other American League team the last five years, and while their 2018 payroll may be almost \$100M less than that of the Red Sox, it may not matter. They are that good, that well managed, that well run, proof of the Marine officer training lesson that the first tenet of leadership is authenticity.

### **Clevinger set to open season in Tribe's rotation**

By Alyson Footer MLB.com @alysonfooter

GLENDALE, Ariz. -- At this point, all Mike Clevinger has to do is stay healthy. His spot in the Indians' rotation is all but locked up, due partly to the effective spring he's having and partly to the fact that Danny Salazar is behind schedule with a shoulder issue.

Even if Salazar were healthy and pitching well, Clevinger would have made it difficult for manager Terry Francona to leave him out of the rotation when camp breaks at the end of the month. But as of Monday, the Opening Day starting five will be Corey Kluber, Carlos Carrasco, Trevor Bauer, Clevinger and either Josh Tomlin or Ryan Merritt.

"As we stand right now, he's going to be in the rotation," Francona said of Clevinger following the Tribe's 8-1 loss to the Dodgers on Monday. "Danny's not going to be ready. We're looking for 'Clev' to have a big year. He's strong, and he should be able to be that innings-eater type pitcher."

Perhaps Clevinger's outing against the Dodgers at Camelback Ranch was more foreshadowing of what's to come. After not striking out a batter in his first two Cactus League appearances, Clevinger fanned six Dodgers in a three-inning, 62-pitch outing.

While two facts are indisputable when it comes to Spring Training -- it's still early in the process, and hitters don't quite have their timing yet -- Clevinger's outing was nonetheless impressive, seeing that he was dominant against a Dodgers lineup that featured several of their A-list, National League pennant-winning hitters.

"We could potentially see these guys in October," Clevinger said. "So it's good to see them now and kind of test the waters. It was fun. It was a good game."

Clevinger needed a total of six pitches to strike out Corey Seager and Justin Turner in the opening frame. He fanned Cody Bellinger and Matt Kemp to begin the second, and he struck out two more in the third, coaxing K's from Joc Pederson and Enrique Hernandez before walking No. 9 hitter Trayce Thompson.

Unlike his first two outings when he used approximately five offspeed pitches total, Monday's start featured a more balanced array of his pitches, which might explain the elevated strikeout totals.

"Like a lot of good pitchers, you work on your command of your fastball and your arm strength, and then as you get your legs under you and you start to get your delivery intact, you start breaking out your other pitches," Francona said.

Clevinger has come a long way in the past year. He didn't make the rotation last Spring Training, instead joining the starting staff as a callup in May. He has more starting experience than relief -- of his 27 outings in '17, 21 were starts. He split time between both jobs in September, which also happened to be his best month -- seven appearances, four starts, a 0.99 ERA and 1.02 WHIP. Opponents batted .191 against him.

His versatility is an asset, but Clevinger has his sights set on one role when the season starts.

"Whether it's the rotation or the bullpen, wherever the cards lie -- but I'm a starter," he said. "I want to keep that story going."

The Indians will give him every opportunity to do so when camp breaks. No longer on the outside trying to break in, Clevinger's performances so far have seemingly earned him the opportunity to carve out a permanent spot in the Tribe's already stacked rotation.

"There's a maturation process, and he falls into that," Francona said. "He is stronger and has some experience, and the experience factor can be really big for guys."

### **Salazar not on pace for Opening Day roster**

By Alyson Footer MLB.com @alysonfooter

GLENDALE, Ariz. -- Opening Day is still a few weeks away, but the remaining time left in Spring Training will not be enough for starting pitcher Danny Salazar to be ready for the start of the regular season. Mike Clevinger instead will nab the final spot in the rotation, with Salazar spending his time not competing for a job, but rather, just getting healthy.

Salazar, battling right shoulder inflammation, remains a few weeks behind in his throwing program. As of Monday morning, he had progressed to throwing at 90 feet.

"He is going in the right direction," manager Terry Francona said. "If he does that for a couple of days, then the next thing will be maybe throwing off the mound, which I don't think we're too far away from."

Another high-profile rehabber is also progressing well, according to the skipper. Michael Brantley, recovering from right ankle surgery, has been taking full rounds of batting practice and is now working on movements on defense.

"Brantley's doing terrific, to where he's getting antsy and bugging everybody -- which I figure is really good," Francona said.

Francona hesitated to give a time table for Brantley's return, but said he is pleased with the outfielder's efforts.

"Spend five seconds around him, you know how hard he works," Francona said. "He'll be ready when he's ready. I do think the good part of this is when he's ready hopefully he can stay ready."

#### Camp battles

It was a ho-hum day for the Tribe's offense against the Dodgers on Monday. The entire team combined for four hits and one run in an 8-1 loss.

The Tribe's quiet day at the plate extended to a handful of players hoping to make the team as an extra outfielder. Tyler Naquin was 0-for-3, Melvin Upton Jr. was 0-for-2 with a walk and Brandon Barnes was also 0-for-2 with a walk.

In other words, Monday's game didn't make that picture any clearer.

Naquin, a former first-rounder who enjoyed a breakout season two years ago, is one of the few outfielders on the active roster competing for one of the final spots. Others -- Rajai Davis, Upton, Barnes -- are non-roster invitees.

Naquin has five hits in 16 spring at-bats.

"The No. 1 thing is being healthy," he said before Monday's game. "Putting yourself in the right position, taking care of yourself in order to be in that position. I feel like I'm in a great spot."

#### Pipeline musings

Being an up-and-coming shortstop in the Indians' system might seem on its face less than ideal, considering All-Star Francisco Lindor is under club control until 2022.

But that should not, and does not, affect how Willi Castro will be evaluated by the Indians as his development through the club's Minor League system continues.

"We try to explain to the guys, don't look at what you perceive as road blocks," Francona said. "Normally if you can help a team win, teams are going to find a place for you. We tell them all the time, it might not be on their time table, but if you can play ..."

Prospects can switch positions. They can also be used as a trade chip for a club to strengthen other areas. Castro's fate has yet to be determined, but like every young player in big league camp, now is simply the time to show what he can do.

The 20-year-old Castro, who started at short on Monday, is ranked as the No. 5 prospect in the Indians' system. At Class A Advanced in 2017, he slashed .290/.337/.424, while slugging 11 homers and stealing 19 bases in 123 games.

He will eventually be sent to Minor League camp, where he will receive more playing time, aiding his ability to prepare for his upcoming season.

"He's getting valuable experience, and we're getting to know him, which we think is valuable," Francona said. "The organization really thinks highly of him, obviously."

#### Up next

The Indians will play their in-state rival and Goodyear neighbors, the Reds, at Goodyear Ballpark on Tuesday at 3:05 p.m. ET (watch live on MLB.TV). Rotation mainstay Carlos Carrasco will make his first start and second appearance of the spring. His first outing was a fourth-inning appearance on March 2 against the Rangers, during which he yielded two hits and one run. The Reds will counter with lefty Brandon Finnegan, who will make his first appearance of the Cactus League season.

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## Yonder Alonso's big adjustment, and what the market said about it

By Michael Hattery 3 hours ago

Major League Baseball is in a constant state of change, especially in a time where every organization's front office is teeming with analysts seeking the next marginal competitive advantage. It feels as if "sabermetrics," the term popularized by Michael Lewis' "Moneyball," does not fairly describe the depth and diversity of analytical advantages being pursued in front offices. Indeed, sabermetrics is on its third or fourth wave of thought. The most important part of the current wave of sabermetrics or advanced statistics is the number of players who are using advanced statistics and camera-collected information to optimize their mechanics and decision-making.

The launch angle revolution, perhaps more commonly known as the fly-ball revolution, has a few recognizable faces, two of whom hit baseball's free-agent market this past offseason. J.D. Martinez and, more locally, Yonder Alonso reached what ended up being a suboptimal market for any free agent.

One of the exciting parts of the launch angle revolution was the capacity for players like Alonso to revitalize what were once exciting profiles and climb closer to the top of the Major League Baseball meritocracy.

In spring 2017, Alonso told Eno Sarris, "I'm trying to punish it more, get it in the air." Alonso succeeded in putting the ball in the air more carrying a still impressive line drive rate, while raising his fly-ball percentage by roughly 9 percent. While 9 percent might not sound striking, it is a massive profile shift. Only one player added more launch angle between 2016 and 2017.

Player	2017 Launch Angle	2016 Launch Angle	Difference	Aaron Hill	23.3	16.1	7.2	Mike Moustakas	18.2	12.4	5.8
				Jed Lowrie	18.4	11.3	7.1	Gary Sanchez	13.4	7.9	5.5
				Drew Butera	17.6	11.3	6.3	Aaron Altherr	11.0	5.6	5.4
John Jaso	18.9	7.1		Jake Marisnick	15.4	9.2	6.2	C.J. Cron	18.0	12.7	5.3
	11.8			Kevin Plawecki	8.5	2.3	6.2	Yadier Molina	14.4	9.1	5.3
Yonder Alonso	19.0	10.3	8.7	Carlos Gomez	14.3	8.2	6.1	Logan Morrison	17.4	12.1	5.3
Chris Gimenez	14.6	6.5	8.1	Christian Vazquez	7.7	1.7	6.0	Miguel Montero	14.2	9.0	5.2
Teoscar Hernandez	19.9			Francisco Lindor	13.6	7.7	5.9	Adrian Gonzalez	14.4	9.3	5.1
	12.3	7.6		Josh Phegley	19.4	13.5	5.9	Alex Avila	12.0	6.9	5.1
Mallex Smith	3.6	-3.9	7.5	Paulo Orlando	13.0	7.2	5.8	Wil Myers	15.2	10.2	5.0

Cumulatively, Alonso's adjustment proved a boon, carrying an .866 OPS, the highest of his big-league career by nearly 120 points. By wRC+, Alonso had transformed himself from a league average bat to one of the 30 best in baseball in 2017, a climb that looked to create a solid if not overwhelming market as he entered free agency.

Yet, one of the great questions raised with Alonso and others who made a similar profile change was how teams would value a player who succeeded based on this overhaul. This is where the "juiced ball" adds a layer of complexity. Rob Arthur's research at FiveThirtyEight.com and that of others has demonstrated that the baseball was fundamentally different in both late 2016 and all of 2017.

While Major League Baseball through Rob Manfred has emphasized that there have been no fundamental changes to the baseball, the changes in 2016 and 2017 create an air of unpredictability as to how the baseball will play over the next few seasons be it continued in its current form, or being modulated back to pre-2016.

Of course, it is important to note that the launch angle revolution and the juiced ball, while in many ways intersecting, are too often conflated. The juiced ball certainly increased the incentive for players like Alonso to increase his overall launch angle. Even without the juiced ball, elevating the baseball for a player like Alonso, who has significant exit velocity, simply makes sense.

The challenge for teams and the internal projection systems upon which many player investments are based is that the sustainability and value of a new skill are difficult to project. For instance, Steamer and Depth Charts at FanGraphs see significant regression for Alonso in 2018, in part because 2017 in the context of Alonso's big-league career is an outlier. A reason to be optimistic in relation to the projection systems being that mechanical and approach change is the basis for the production improvement rather than any fluky BABIP or park-driven breakout.

Further, a difficulty arises in projection because baseball is a game of counter adjustments. How will pitchers counter? Can pitcher counters radically diminish productivity of Alonso types?

Alonso had a significantly worse second half last year, going from an OPS of .934 in the first half to .776 in the second half. One adjustment pitchers made in the second half involved increased fastballs in on the hands. Whether that was a cause of decline or part of a group of causes or the second half was simply the result of variance is impossible to tell. But the ability for pitchers to counter and diminish the value added of adjustments certainly creates difficulty in projecting performance.

The market, however, appears to have reflected a certain level of pessimism regarding fly ball-reliant player profiles.

Prior to leaving for a job with the San Diego Padres, contracts expert Dave Cameron published his yearly top-50 free-agents article with corresponding contract projections. Cameron has showed outstanding precision considering the complexity of marketplace and is not known for optimistic player contract projections. Using these contract projections, I evaluated the actual contracts received by the 18 position players who have signed on the top-50 list in the context of fly ball-driven profiles.

A few caveats, first the pool is obviously limited, which limits this analysis to suggestions rather than conclusions. Second, there are obviously other inputs that could impact each individual signing. Third, I used fly-ball percentage as a proxy for launch angle, which is flawed but made the buckets more manageable.

FB%	Projected	Commitment	Percentage
FB>39%	\$435	\$309.00	71%
FB<34%	\$259	\$251.25	97%

Of the 18 position players on the list signed, 11 had fly-ball percentages exceeding 39 percent, while the other seven all had fly-ball percentages below 34 percent. As you can see, those who were fly-ball reliant received a significantly smaller overall commitment than was projected by Cameron.

Further, the two major remaining position player free agents are Mike Moustakas and Neil Walker, both running fly-ball percentages above 42 percent in 2017. Each expected to receive significantly less than was originally projected.

Logan Morrison and Alonso were two players who made demonstrable launch angle adjustments only to receive a cut-rate contract. Alonso receiving less than 80 percent of his projected guarantee, and Morrison receiving just 25 percent of his projected deal guaranteed.

The 2017-18 free-agent market featured suppressed rates for a number of reasons, including a collective bargaining agreement that included a punitive luxury tax as well as a league with a lot of teams simply bottoming out or not competing for midlevel free agents.

However, it appears that first basemen, specifically those who rode launch angle adjustments or high fly-ball rates to productive 2017 seasons, had the most surprisingly limited market. Perhaps it had to do with a clogged market of first-base bats with similar profiles.

But by cost of a win, which Matt Swartz placed at \$10.2 million in 2017, Alonso's roughly two WAR projection in 2018 would suggest significant surplus. Even if we project slight decline in cost of win — which, based on 2017-2018 offseason expenditures, is likely — the launch angle revolution types like Alonso and Morrison project for significant contract surplus.

Which leads to the following questions: Are teams undervaluing launch angle adjustment success stories? Is the public overvaluing the value of the launch angle adjustment? Or does the ease of implementing launch angle adjustments encourage teams to implement these changes on existing players and avoid the market costs?

Each is probably unanswerable with just one year of player contracts after launch angle production, but one piece is certain: The Indians appear to have profited from an unpredictable market.

### **Starting 9: Indians should consider trading bats for gloves**

**Travis Sawchik 22 hours ago 4**

GOODYEAR, Ariz. — 1: The Indians' spring training neighbors in the developing west Phoenix suburb of Goodyear, Arizona, are the Cincinnati Reds. And it is in Reds camp this spring where an interesting experiment is taking place: The Reds have been playing their top prospect, third baseman Nick Senzel, at shortstop.

While most players move down the defensive spectrum (DH-1B-LF-RF-3B-CF-2B-SS-C-P) in professional baseball to positions that are less challenging defensively, Senzel is being given a chance to move up the spectrum. If he sticks there, it would give the Reds more offense in their lineup.

As I researched for FanGraphs last month, because of the increasing number of strikeouts and record level of home runs, there have never been fewer balls put in play. In fact, five positions — second base, shortstop, right field, center field and left field — have seen their opportunities steadily decline in the past decade, and all five of those positions have had their chances decline by 19 percent or more compared with 2017 levels.

What does this batted-ball climate mean for the Indians? It means the Indians can probably be more aggressive with the defensive placement of a player like Jason Kipnis and try to wedge as much run-scoring potential in the lineup as possible. After an injury-plagued 2017, Kipnis has demonstrated health and signs of returning to All-Star form this spring, with five home runs in his first five games, including another Sunday.

Not only are the Indians probably wise in returning Kipnis to second and Jose Ramirez to third to add as much offense as possible into their lineup, they might also want to consider continuing to experiment and create position versatility as they did a year ago.

2: While Indians manager Terry Francona said last week he'll always prize defense first when asked about the declining number of balls in play and what that could mean in trading defense for offense, this is also the same team and manager that had Kipnis and Lonnie Chisenhall spend time in center field last season.

Versatility is more and more crucial in today's game with bullpens increasing in importance, members and specialized roles while roster size remains static. The Indians might want to consider giving Kipnis — a center fielder in college at Arizona State who was converted to second base in pro ball — more looks in the outfield to improve versatility. Kipnis is an instinctive athlete. Remember this play from the ALDS?

“(Chisenhall) told me it was his ball,” said Kipnis to this reporter last week in the spring training clubhouse.

Said Chisenhall, Kipnis’ clubhouse neighbor: “I called it! ... But I looked at him and he had that eye of the tiger look as the center fielder. You have to back off.”

As Kipnis notes, it’s easier to move away from the ball — to move to the outfield from the infield — compared with moving from the outfield to the infield where the action occurs faster with the distance to the batter, and ball, reduced. He’s made both transitions in his career. So, in theory, it should be easier for infielders to convert to the outfield, and Kipnis could perhaps fill an infield-outfield platoon role.

“Power is easier to find,” Chisenhall said. “Guys who are athletic and can move around, that’s a huge asset. Kip moving to center, he’s been up the middle, it’s instinctual. You are using your athleticism.”

Maybe playing Chisenhall and Kipnis in center a year ago — albeit out of need — wasn’t so radical after all.

3: Only two major-league starters exceeded 210 innings pitched last season: Chris Sale and Ervin Santana. That’s the fewest number of pitchers to surpass 210 innings in the history of major league baseball.

Only 15 pitches exceeded 200 innings the past season, matching the number of 2016, the fewest in MLB history. The Indians, along with the Red Sox and Nationals, were the only teams to have two pitchers reach the 200-inning threshold the past season. For the Indians, Corey Kluber and Carlos Carrasco each reached the mark, and Kluber finished sixth in the majors in innings (203 1/2) despite missing a month of the season because of injury.

Only Justin Verlander and Martin Perez threw more pitches in the second half of the season than Kluber’s 1,555.

4: On the position player front, Francisco Lindor finished second in the majors in plate appearances (723) and Edwin Encarnacion (669) and Carlos Santana (667) finished 24th and 25th, respectively. The Indians were the only team to have three players in the top 25 of plate appearances.

5: Given these workloads, the Indians didn’t seem to place a high priority on rest despite winning the division by 17 games. Did the workload catch up to Kluber and the Indians in October? It’s hard to know. This author has previously advocated for more rest.

And, again, the Indians are in an excellent position to be a team on the cutting edge of increasing rest to promote efficiency and health. The Indians have the luxury of again residing in a division they are expected to win by a wide margin. At the moment, the Indians also have the starting pitching depth to skip an occasional start, or to consider lengthening the rotation, at times, to including six members as they did for a stretch last season.

Other teams are also looking into this idea of less is more.

6: Peter Gammons reported for The Athletic last week that the Red Sox are looking into reducing the workloads on Sale, Rick Porcello, and David Price, all whom have generally been workhorses in the regular season but have had postseason struggles.

Former Indians pitching coach Mickey Callaway told the New York Post he believes multi-inning relievers and optional relievers are ways to reduce the workload on a talented but injury-prone Mets staff. (Perhaps one way to better keep Danny Salazar healthy would be to turn him into a multi-inning reliever. Not only would his stuff play up even more in the bullpen, as is the case with most pitchers, but such a role might keep Salazar, and by extension his starting pitching teammates, healthier.)

Wrote Gammons of the Cubs and their progressive manager Joe Maddon:

“The Cubs have had the best starters’ ERA in baseball over the last three seasons combined. Joe Maddon is a strong proponent of the importance of rest over the long, sometimes hot season. He doesn’t like players taking batting practice on the field. He doesn’t manage every game as if the Cubs must win. Hence, in 2017 Jon Lester was the only pitcher to make as many as 32 starts and led the staff with 180 1/3 innings. Nine pitchers started games. The Cubs are built with depth for the long haul, with their pitchers and position players alike.”

7: The Indians have the luxuries of depth and a favorable division to keep their players as fresh. While the Indians had their eye on chasing a record-winning streak last season, much of their focus should be on positioning themselves as well as possible for an October run.

8: Jose Ramirez has watched video with Indians catching prospect Francisco Mejia. He has observed Mejia hit in practice, in the cage and games. He believes Mejia can be the best hitter on the club. That’s high praise for Mejia who could also fill an immediate need, that of better production against right-handed pitching from the catcher position.

In the past three seasons, Indians catchers rank 29th in weighted runs created plus (wRC+) with a mark of 60 — a 100 wRC+ is league average in taking into account park factors and scoring environment. Last season, the Indians’ catchers ranked 28th wRC+ mark (63) against righties.

On the 20-to-80 grade scouting scale employed by major-league scouts, Baseball America places a "60" grade on Mejia's switch-hitting bat and an 80, the top grade possible, on his throwing arm. Those are two plus tools that ought to find their way into a lineup soon.

9: Don't sleep on Melvin Upton Jr. as playing a significant role on the 2018 Indians, perhaps filling the spot Austin Jackson excelled in last season. The Indians need a right-handed outfield bat, particularly with Brandon Guyer's continued wrist issues, and the one thing the inconsistent Upton has done consistently throughout his career is hit left-handed pitching (109 wRC+). He's posted wRC+ marks of 124 or better in consecutive seasons. He's an excellent athlete who can still play a capable center field. Upton has a good chance to make the club and contribute.

HE SAID IT

"He's like a nine-year-old. No one is safe." — Indians PR director Bart Swain to Sports Illustrated on notorious clubhouse prankster Indians manager Terry Francona.

STAT OF THE WEEK: 22

The Indians' farm system rank, according to Baseball America.

Wrote BA: "Mejia isn't far away from helping the big league club, and RHP Tristan McKenzie is an excellent pitching prospect. The Indians have a number of potential big leaguers in the Nos. 5-15 range on their rankings, but few project as first-division regulars."

### **Simulated reality: If good pitching beats good hitting, how would the current Indians fare against the Tribe's thunderous bats of 1999?**

**By T.J. Zuppe 32 minutes ago 1**

There will be plenty of time for serious discussion and debate. We'll spend the next several months looking ahead to potential playoff matchups. We'll use whatever information we have to determine the Indians' strengths and weaknesses. We'll attempt to predict what might happen in October. And if past experience is any indication, our prognosis is likely to be way off target.

However, spring training presents a rare opportunity to break away from the norm to pursue fun, hypothetical or unusual questions. Using that unique time last year, we employed the computers over at WhatIfSports.com to simulate a series between the 2017 Indians and their 1997 counterparts, a matchup that was ultimately decided in a thrilling seven games.

This year, we wanted to try something different. Rather than use the same SimMatchup feature to reproduce another battle between teams separated by 20 years, we thought it might be more fun to see how the current group of pitchers would fare against the 1999 Indians, a squad that eclipsed the 1,000-run plateau during their 97-win campaign.

Featuring a lineup that boasted names like Kenny Lofton, Roberto Alomar, Jim Thome, Manny Ramirez and David Justice, that club is one of seven since 1930 to score at least 1,000 runs in a season. And while four other Tribe teams owned a higher wRC+ (1995, 1948, 1997, 1908), 1,000 runs is still 1,000 runs. But if there's any incarnation of the Indians capable of keeping those bats stymied, it's their current group. Yes, they're weakened by the offseason departure of Bryan Shaw, but the Tribe's pitching finished last season with the highest WAR total in baseball history, according to FanGraphs. Their 74 ERA-minus (a metric that helps compare earned run average across different eras) was the lowest in the majors since 1926, and the projections still expect the Indians to serve as one of baseball's best pitching staffs.

Unstoppable force, meet immovable object.

So, we got to work on piecing together the 2018 roster, subtracting Shaw, Carlos Santana and Jay Bruce, adding Yonder Alonso, Melvin Upton Jr. and Rajai Davis. We set up the lineups to resemble something similar to what Terry Francona and Mike Hargrove would run. We set the starting rotations. Then, we grabbed a big bag of popcorn, plopped on the couch and hit simulate.

Now, for a couple of quick notes on the matchup: WhatIfSports, for whatever reason, wouldn't allow the DH when the 2018 squad was the home team. Rather than play by NL rules, we compromised. The 1999 Tribe played at home for the entire series. Also, Tyler Olson and Ryan Merritt did not pitch enough innings to qualify for the WhatIfSports simulation, so we opted to insert Matt Belisle, currently a non-roster relief candidate, into the 2018 bullpen.

As you can see, this is extremely scientific and should be taken very seriously. We won't stand for anyone saying otherwise.

With that, let the showdown begin.

Game 1: Corey Kluber vs. Bartolo Colon

The first game of our fictional matchup begins with the 2018 Tribe grabbing a pair against a much younger Bartolo Colon in the top of the first. Jose Ramirez drove in Jason Kipnis with a double (check with the digital version of Zack Meisel to see if his helmet stayed on), and Michael Brantley lofted a run-scoring single to right-center. They would add three more runs in the third before Francisco Lindor launched a solo bomb to right-center in the fourth, extending the advantage to 6-0. Meanwhile, Corey Kluber, proving his breaking ball is lethal in any era, cruised through seven innings of three-hit work, striking out a dozen. Kenny Lofton, who probably insists this isn't a real playoff series, went down swinging four times, while Omar Vizquel and Roberto Alomar each whiffed three times. Kluber's counterpart, Colon, was charged with nine runs in 5 2/3 innings.

Player of the Game: Corey Kluber (seven shutout innings, 12 strikeouts)

Series: 1-0 2018 Indians

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Game 2: Carlos Carrasco vs. Charles Nagy

The 1999 bats defend their reputation by delivering a knockout blow to Carlos Carrasco in the second inning. Carrasco was charged with eight runs on eight hits, sent to the digital showers after Hall of Famer Jim Thome's two-run homer extended the lead to 8-0. Richie Sexson's two-run shot added to the rout. Yonder Alonso's two-run homer off Charles Nagy in the fourth got the 2018 Tribe on the board. In the meantime, the 1999 group is confused by this talk of his launch angle. And what the hell is a Statcast? (Could that be a side effect of the upcoming Y2K bug?!) Any thought of an improbable comeback is erased when Thome and David Justice go yard in the eighth. Mark Langston — yup, the 38-year-old Langston posted a 5.25 ERA in 25 games with the Indians in 1999 — retired the final three hitters in the ninth to even the series.

Player of the Game: Jim Thome (two homers, five RBI)

Series: 1-1

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Game 3: Trevor Bauer vs. Dave Burba

Manny Ramirez wasn't exactly known for his refined defensive skill, so perhaps it was an odd route or misread that led to Francisco Lindor's leadoff inside-the-park home run to the right field corner (Sarbaugh's waving him around!). The odd bounce led to the first of three homers allowed by Dave Burba, who served up two-run shots to Jason Kipnis and Yonder Alonso in the third. Roberto Alomar's two-run double and Ramirez's RBI single became the 1999 Tribe's only offense against Trevor Bauer, who danced around seven hits and five walks in six innings. Meanwhile, two of the eight runs allowed by Burba scored after Paul Shuey entered in relief, yielding RBI hits to Kipnis and Jose Ramirez. After two scoreless innings by Zach McAllister (apparently WhatIfSports has chosen Bryan Shaw's replacement), Andrew Miller slammed the door with a scoreless ninth, giving the 2018 Indians a 2-1 series advantage.

Player of the Game: Jason Kipnis (home run, three RBI)

Series: 2-1 2018 Indians

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Game 4: Mike Clevinger vs. Jaret Wright

Mike Clevinger is forced to work around some early jitters, walking David Justice to force in a run in the bottom of the first. Richie Sexson and Travis Fryman drove in runs in the third, extending the lead to 4-0. After trading runs in the fourth, the 2018 Indians got to Jaret Wright in the fifth, scoring three on Francisco Lindor's RBI single and Jose Ramirez's two-run double. Then, the digitized version of Mike Hargrove, for reasons only known by his coding, went back to Mark Langston (huh?!). ... One parrot-fueled stroll around the bases later, the current Tribe held a two-run edge. But after Omar Vizquel and Yonder Alonso traded homers — wait, did I just say Omar Vizquel? — Dan Otero gave up the lead on a Kenny Lofton RBI single and Vizquel two-run double. They must have been saving Cody Allen for the ninth (facepalm emoji). The 2018 Tribe managed to get the tying run to second in the final inning, but Mike Jackson, peering out from under his low-sitting cap, got Michael Brantley to ground out to even the series. Drama!

Player of the Game: Omar Vizquel (home run, three RBI)

Series: 2-2

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Game 5: Corey Kluber vs. Bartolo Colon

After he served as the hero of Game 1, it wouldn't take long for Corey Kluber's first blemish to appear. Kluber allowed a run-scoring single to Richie Sexson in the bottom of the second inning, the first run the rightly has allowed in this epic series. However, Bartolo Colon's nightmare continued, surrendering homers to Jose Ramirez and Edwin Encarnacion in a four-run third. Colon allowed another pair in the fifth, finally exiting after six innings. Sexson's homer in the sixth closed the gap to 6-2 — seriously, maybe this series has the Indians rethinking the idea of shipping Sexson to the Brewers in 2000 — but Kluber, Nick Goody and Matt Belisle held the 1999 bats at bay for the remainder of the pivotal contest. In the win, Kluber picked up another eight strikeouts, totaling 20 punchouts in his 14 innings.

Player of the Game: Corey Kluber (seven innings, eight strikeouts, two runs)

Series: 3-2 2018 Indians

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Game 6: Carlos Carrasco vs. Charles Nagy

Just one victory away from proving their simulated dominance over the 1999 bats, Carlos Carrasco demonstrated every bit of his superior ability, spinning a 7 1/3-inning, one-run masterpiece. Erasing any memory of Game 2 from his algorithm, Carrasco notched 12 of the 16 total strikeouts by 2018 pitchers in Game 6, allowing just three hits through the first seven innings.

Jose Ramirez's three-run homer to the trees in center were the only runs allowed by Charles Nagy, but the first-inning damage just three batters into the game proved to be critical. Jason Kipnis added an insurance homer in the eighth (what offseason trade rumors?). That run loomed large when the 1999 Tribe loaded the bases in the bottom half of the inning.

With the tying run at first, Nick Goody entered to face Roberto Alomar and Manny Ramirez with the bases loaded — how about that for high leverage? Goody proceeded to catch Alomar looking and Ramirez swinging to preserve the three-run lead. One inning later, Cody Allen, apparently emerging from the digital jail where WhatIfSports keeps their closers, recorded the save, retiring Jim Thome, David Justice and Richie Sexson in the ninth to clinch the thrilling series win.



Player of the Game: Carlos Carrasco (7 1/3 innings, one run, 12 strikeouts)

Series: 2018 Indians take the series (4-2)

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So, what did we learn? Well, we knew the 1999 Tribe could score. They still managed to knock around the current pitching, but Kluber's 20 innings were a difference maker. Overall, the 2018 pitchers posted a 5.19 ERA in the series, and the starters (Kluber, Carrasco, Bauer and Clevinger) owned a 5.12 ERA. They also managed to strike out 43 in 31 2/3 innings, thanks to big performances by Kluber and Carrasco. Plus, limiting them to just more than five runs per game is better than the 6.23 they averaged per contest in 1999.

We also knew that the 1999 Indians had a big pitching problem — they finished with the fourth-worst ERA in franchise history. While that may have put them around the bloated league average for that season, they were vulnerable. The 2018 offense took advantage of that weakness, scoring 6.67 runs per game and hitting .291 in the six-game series.

Of course, we know almost anything can happen in a small sample size — just ask the 2017 Tribe. But in this particular simulation, the current Indians' ability to extend beyond the limitations of a one-dimensional attack lifted them over their offensively geared former selves. Now, will they enjoy a similar fate if and when they face the Yankees and Astros this October? Sure, we could simulate it. But wouldn't it be more fun to watch it play out in the real world?

You're right. Give me a minute to set it back up ...

### **Mike Clevinger on track to be in Indians' Opening Day starting rotation, according to report; Dodgers 8, Indians 1**

By Ryan Lewis

Mike Clevinger said in January he wasn't even thinking about the bullpen as a potential landing spot, and that he had his sights set on logging 200 innings in 2018.

He knew at that point he'd be entering a four-man competition, along with Josh Tomlin, Danny Salazar and Ryan Merritt, for the two open spots in the Indians' starting rotation.

With more than three weeks remaining until Opening Day, Clevinger now knows he'll get his wish and have his spot in the starting rotation, at least to start the season, according to an MLB.com report.

Clevinger pitched three hitless innings and struck out six in Monday's 8-1 Cactus League loss to the Los Angeles Dodgers. Afterward, Indians manager Terry Francona told MLB.com that Clevinger will be joining the starting rotation out of camp, barring some unforeseen circumstances. Francona reportedly added that Salazar, who experienced an onset of right shoulder rotator cuff inflammation this winter, won't be fully ready by Opening Day to really challenge for a rotation spot. Salazar has been working his way back, but it appears his health has once again gotten in the way of his progress.

"As we stand right now, [Clevinger is] going to be in the rotation," Francona. "Danny's not going to be ready. We're looking for Clev to have a big year. He's strong, and he should be able to be that innings-eater type pitcher."

With Clevinger in and Salazar not fully ready, that leaves Tomlin as the front-runner for the final spot in the rotation. Merritt, who was roughed up on Monday (four runs allowed, two earned, four hits allowed, two strikeouts), is out of minor-league options, which could make him a natural fit for the last spot in the bullpen should he not make the starting rotation. Otherwise, he'll have to pass through waivers before being sent to the minors.

Last season, Clevinger went 12-6 with a 3.11 ERA and 10.1 K/9 rate in 121⅔ innings.

Akron Beacon Journal LOADED: 03.06.2018

### **Terry Francona names Mike Clevinger to Cleveland Indians' starting rotation for 2018**

By Paul Hoynes, cleveland.com

CLEVELAND, Ohio - Mike Clevinger has pitched himself into the Indians' starting rotation.

Clevinger threw three scoreless innings and struck out six on Monday in a 8-1 loss to the Dodgers at Camelback Ranch in Glendale, Ariz. Dodger manager Dave Roberts used a lineup that helped him reach Game 7 of the World Series last year and Clevinger handled it with ease. He retired eight straight - striking out six - before walking Trayce Thompson in the third. He faced 10 Dodgers, allowing one baserunner.

"As we stand right now, he's going to be in the rotation," manager Terry Francona told mlb.com after the game. "Danny (Salazar) is not going to be ready. We're looking for Clev to have a big year. He's strong, and he should be able to be that innings-eater type pitcher."

Salazar reported to spring training with an inflamed right rotator cuff. He's playing long toss at 90 feet, and Monday morning Francona said he could be ready to start throwing off the mound in a couple of days.

But with the season starting on March 29, Salazar won't have enough time to get ready and will almost assuredly open the season on the disabled list.

Clevinger gives the Indians four starters along with Corey Kluber, Carlos Carrasco and Trevor Bauer. Josh Tomlin and Ryan Merritt are still competing for the fifth spot. Tomlin got knocked around in his last start, and Merritt allowed four runs in the seventh inning Monday against the Dodgers.

There had been talk about Clevinger starting the season in the bullpen if he didn't win a job in the rotation. But at Tribe Fest in January he was already talking about pitching 200 innings this season.

"Whether it's the rotation or the bullpen, wherever the cards lie - but I'm a starter," Clevinger said Monday. "I want to keep that story going."

In three starts this spring, Clevinger has thrown six scoreless innings. Last year he went 12-6 with a 3.11 ERA in 27 games, including 21 starts. During the Indians' 22-game winning streak, Clevinger went 4-0 with a 0.38 ERA.

"There's a maturation process, and he falls into that," said Francona. "He is stronger and has some experience, and the experience factor can be really big for guys."

Feels like the first time: Carrasco will make his first start of the spring on Tuesday when he faces Brandon Finnegan and the Reds at 3:05 p.m. at Goodyear Ballpark. Carrasco has pitched only one inning because the Indians are easing him into the exhibition schedule after he set a career high with 200 innings pitched last season.

Last spring Carrasco experienced swelling in his right elbow, which is something the Indians would like to avoid this year. Shawn Morimando, Carlos Torres, Adam Plutko, Neil Ramirez, Alexi Ogando and Cameron Hill are also scheduled to pitch for the Tribe.

Hill has made three appearances this spring and thrown five scoreless innings. He's struck out four, walked one and opposition is hitting .118 against him. Last year at Class AA Akron, Hill was 4-4 with 13 saves and a 3.18 ERA. He struck out 50 in 62 1/3 innings.

The Indians drafted Hill in the 17th round in 2014 out of Redlands (Okla.) Community College.

SportsTime Ohio and WTAM will carry Tuesday's game.

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 03.06.2018

## **When it comes to talent, Terry Francona and the Cleveland Indians are all about excess**

By Paul Hoynes, cleveland.com

CLEVELAND, Ohio - How does one handle excess? It is an old question.

How many times have you heard about a person "getting too much too soon?" Or how about the upper crust saying, "You can never be too thin or too rich."

Is there a baseball version of excess? Where Indians manager Terry Francona is concerned a team can never have too much pitching. It is a belief shared by the 29 other managers in the big leagues, but Francona extends it to catchers and shortstops as well.

The Indians and Francona are fortunate. Their roster is stocked in all three areas. Stocked enough to withstand a critical injury and still play championship caliber baseball? Initially yes, but if the injury or injuries lingered, it would undoubtedly put a strain on the success of the Indians. The rotation is already dealing with Danny Salazar's right shoulder injury, but it is still a team strength with Corey Kluber, Carlos Carrasco and Trevor Bauer in the first three spots. Josh Tomlin, Mike Clevinger and Ryan Merritt, competing for the last two spots, are talented as well. If the Indians lose Merritt on waivers at the end of spring training, the depth would be depleted but they have Shawn Morimando, Adam Plutko, Sean Bieber and Cody Anderson in the pipeline. Anderson is recovering from Tommy John surgery on his right elbow.

It's not perfect. When the Indians put Anderson on the 60-day disabled list to create a roster spot for reliever Ben Taylor on Feb. 25, Francona said, "I made him look at the board. I told him, 'look at our pitching. Look past our starters.'

"I said Merritt is out of options. We don't have a lot of depth. Shawn Morimando is still developing. Plutko is coming off hip surgery. My point was that it's easy to feel out of sight out of mind when you're out here (Goodyear, Ariz.) for a year (rehabbing). Do your rehab correctly and at some point this year, you're going to be a starting option for us. Just don't get ahead of yourself."

Catchers are at a premium because their job is a dangerous one. The Indians have two good ones in Yan Gomes and Roberto Perez, but in 2016 they both missed a big part of the season with injuries. Perez needed surgery to repair a broken thumb. Gomes separated his shoulder and broke his hand.

"If think we have a frontline catcher, catching every day," said Francona. "Rarely is it that you have two catchers who can catch everybody (on the staff). You don't have to alter the game because they both throw so well."

Behind Gomes and Perez is prospect Francisco Mejia. He is expected to start the season at Class AAA Columbus or Class AA Akron, but if the Indians need help offensively, he could be brought to the big leagues and not necessarily as a catcher. That's how highly the Indians regard his bat.

The Indians also have Eric Haase, Jack Murphy and veteran Ryan Hanigan in camp. Haase, who hit 26 homers last year at Class AA Akron, was added to the 40-man roster in November before the Rule 5 Draft. Hanigan, 37, has played parts of 11 seasons in the big leagues.

At shortstop the Indians have one of the best players in the game in Francisco Lindor. The 24-year-old switch-hitter hit 33 homers last season, a franchise record for middle infielders. He's already won a Gold and Platinum Glove and he's not going anywhere for at least the next four years.

That would seem to discourage any promising shortstops in the organization, but as Francona said, "You can never have enough shortstops."

The logic being if a player is good enough to play shortstop, he's good enough to play anywhere on the field.

Francisco Lindor Defensive Highlights 2017 (Cleveland Indians)

If the Indians had to play without Lindor for an extended period, who would get the first shot at replacing him?

Erik Gonzalez, trying to win the utility infielder's job, has proven to be an accomplished shortstop in the minors.

The Indians could also move Jose Ramirez from third to short. Third baseman Giovanni Urshela, competing with Gonzalez for the utility job, has displayed a good glove at short as well. Gonzalez and Urshela, however, are out of options and one or both could be gone at the end of camp.

The Indians have three others shortstops in camp - Eric Stamets, Willi Castro and Yu Chang. Stamets started 91 games at shortstop last year at Columbus. He hit a career-high 16 homers last season and has hit two this spring.

"He used to be a guy who we wanted to hit the ball on the ground and run," said Francona. "Now he's hitting the ball out of the park."

Castro, in his first big league camp with the Indians, hit .290 (136-for-469) with 11 homers and 58 RBI at Class A Lynchburg. He was hitting .448 (13-for-29) for Escogido in the Dominican this winter when he injured his knee sliding into a base. Surgery was not necessary and he's had no restrictions in spring training.

When asked how it feels to be a 20-year-old shortstop playing behind a two-time All-Star in Lindor, Castro said, "I just try to look at Lindor and learn the stuff I need to do to be in the big leagues. I just try to watch and learn."

Chang, 22, hit 24 homers with 66 RBI last season at Akron. This spring the Indians have been playing him some at third base. Chang has had some problem adjusting to the hot corner, but the Indians like his bat and feel he may outgrow shortstop

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 03.06.2018

## **Mike Clevinger throws three scoreless innings, but Cleveland Indians fade late in 8-1 loss to Dodgers**

**By Paul Hoynes**

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Ryan Merritt allowed four runs in the seventh inning as the Dodgers beat the Indians, 8-1, Monday afternoon at Camelback Ranch.

Merritt, trying to make the staff as a starter or reliever, retired the Dodgers in order in the sixth with the score tied, 1-1. Matt Kemp changed that with a one-out homer in the seventh. When Yasmani Grandal reached on a two-base error by left fielder Abraham Almonte, the Dodgers went to work on Merritt.

Joc Pederson and Kiki Hernandez hit consecutive doubles to make it 4-1. Merritt retired Trayce Thompson, but allowed another RBI double Jake Peter to make it 5-1. Two of the runs were unearned because of Almonte's error.

The Dodgers added three more runs in the eighth as Alex Verdugo and D.J. Peters homered off Evan Marshall. Two of those runs were unearned because of an error by minor leaguer Taylor Murphy in right field.

Mike Clevinger, in his third start of the spring, pitched three scoreless innings with six strikeouts for the Tribe. He retired eight straight, six on strikeouts, before the Thompson walked in the third.

Clevinger, trying to win a spot in the rotation, has not allowed a run in six innings this spring.

The Indians took a 1-0 lead in the first on Yonder Alonso's double off Ken Hill. Grandal tied it with a leadoff homer off Cody Allen in the fifth. Andrew Miller pitched a scoreless fourth in his second appearances of the spring. Allen retired the side in order after allowing the homer to Grandal.

Alonso had two of the Tribe's four hits. The Indians are 7-4-1 this spring.

**Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 03.06.2018**

### **1111511 Cleveland Indians**

## **Edwin Encarnacion to bat leadoff against L.A. Dodgers: Cleveland Indians spring training lineup**

By Joe Noga, cleveland.com

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Welcome to exhibition baseball, where records don't mean much and sometimes your 35-year-old designated hitter bats leadoff against the defending National League champs.

Cleveland slugger Edwin Encarnacion enters Monday's game hitting .167 with a home run and two RBI in 12 spring training at-bats. But in spring training, all bets are off. So the right-handed slugging first baseman/DH will bat leadoff in today's matchup with the Dodgers at Camelback Ranch.

Obviously it's a move to get Encarnacion a few extra swings, and nothing more gimmicky than that from manager Terry Francona.

Encarnacion has never started a regular season game as a leadoff hitter in his career. He's started four games as the No. 2 hitter in a batting order, and more than 620 in his natural No. 4 slot.

Meanwhile, Mike Clevinger starts his third game of the spring for the Indians. The righty has a 3.00 earned run average in three innings of work across his previous two starts, surrendering a run on two hits with no strikeouts or walks.

Clevinger will be followed on the mound by Andrew Miller, Cody Allen, Ryan Merritt, Evan Marshall, Ben Taylor and Robert Zarate. Rich Hill gets the start for the Dodgers.

What: Indians (7-3-1) vs. Dodgers (5-5-1)

The Tribe took the first spring training matchup against L.A. this year, scoring seven runs in the final two innings to beat the Dodgers, 8-7, on March 1. Cleveland will host L.A. in Goodyear on Thursday. Since 2015, the Tribe has a 4-2-2 record against the Dodgers in spring training, and is 11-5-2 (.688) in 18 total spring games dating back to 2009. The two clubs split last year's spring matchup 1-1.

Kipnis stays hot, Kluber comes around

Jason Kipnis clobbered his fifth home run in Cactus League play on Sunday and Corey Kluber struck out five batters in three innings as the Indians knocked off Milwaukee, 6-2.

What else is cooking in Tribe camp?

Besides Kipnis' white-hot bat, there are precious few other questions about the Indians floating around camp in Goodyear, Ariz. Paul Hoynes searches for answers here.

**Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 03.06.2018**