

## **Carrasco (14 K's) cruises to CG win over Crew**

By Andrew Wagner Special to MLB.com

MILWAUKEE -- Carlos Carrasco needed a good outing almost as much as the Indians needed him to have a good outing Wednesday afternoon at Miller Park.

Fortunately for all involved, Carrasco did just that, striking out a season-high 14 batters and recording his second complete game of the season as the Tribe snapped a four-game losing streak with a 6-2 victory over the Brewers.

"It's an understatement, but we needed that," manager Terry Francona said. "He can sure take his turn five days from now. He really did a good job."

Carrasco was scuffling coming into the game. He'd allowed 10 runs over his previous two starts, spanning 8 1/3 innings. Lorenzo Cain opened the bottom of the first with a leadoff single, but Carrasco retired the next three in order and had faced just one over the minimum through six innings.

Carrasco was especially dominant in the third through fifth innings, striking out eight of nine, including the side in the third and fourth. That extra level came -- not coincidentally -- just as Carrasco started to find his breaking ball, which, paired with nearly flawless fastball command, made things difficult for a Brewers team already struggling to score runs.

"He was making our guys miss by a pretty good amount," Brewers manager Craig Counsell said. "It was sharp, and rarely in a bad spot."

Cleveland's offense, though, wasn't faring much better against Brewers starter Junior Guerra. The right-hander had six strikeouts though his first three innings, but the Indians hit him for four runs in the fourth before recording an out.

Tyler Naquin's three-run homer -- his second home run of the season -- did the brunt of the damage, and Francisco Lindor added another homer when he led off the seventh with a solo shot off Corey Knebel, making his first appearance since straining his left hamstring April 5.

The Indians' bullpen has been a well-known Achilles' heel since Andrew Miller went on the disabled list with a left hamstring injury of his own last month, but any hope the Brewers had of exploiting that weakness disappeared quickly as Carrasco kept on dealing.

Carrasco's shutout bid came to an end when Travis Shaw drove in Christian Yelich on a fielder's choice in the seventh inning. Carrasco recovered, retiring the next two batters to get out of the inning, and he needed just six pitches to get through the eighth.

"We used the bullpen a lot in New York," Carrasco said. "I wasn't thinking about a complete game -- I was just going one at a time -- but I'm glad I got the complete game so those guys can start fresh on Friday."

Carrasco chipped in on offense, too, driving in an insurance run in the ninth. Jesus Aguilar's sac fly gave the Brewers a second run, but Carrasco struck out Shaw to end it.

"We lost four games. It's more important today that we won the game," Carrasco said. "Everything else comes after that. It was great to strike out 14 and get an RBI, but I'm happy we won the game."

### **MOMENTS THAT MATTERED**

The Indians couldn't get much going early against Guerra. But Jose Ramirez led off the fourth with a double and scored on Michael Brantley's single. Yonder Alonso moved Brantley to third with a double, and Naquin worked the count full before smacking a hanging slider to right-center.

### **SOUND SMART**

Carrasco struck out all nine Milwaukee starters at least once Wednesday and also fanned pinch-hitter Brett Phillips in the sixth inning, becoming the first pitcher to strike out 10 or more different batters in one game since teammate Corey Kluber struck out 10 different Orioles on June 19 of last season.

### **YOU GOTTA SEE THIS**

Carrasco found himself at the plate four times Wednesday thanks to Interleague Play. He struck out his first two times up against Guerra and bounced into an inning-ending force at second in the sixth, jamming his hand in the process.

So when Carrasco realized he'd be batting again in the ninth, he told Francona that he didn't want to swing the bat. That plan changed when Roberto Perez, his catcher, tripled to open the inning.

Carrasco followed that with a soft single to left, driving in Perez and stretching the Indians' lead to 6-1.

"I had just told Tito, 'I don't want to swing,' because I got jammed [in my last at-bat] and it was sore," Carrasco said. "When he got a triple, I knew I had to swing."

Francona was asked if he'd consider batting Carrasco in the designated hitter spot when the Indians return to Cleveland on Friday.

"That would be a no," Francona said. "But he can sure take his turn five days from now."

#### UP NEXT

Despite allowing no more than two earned runs in his past two starts, Trevor Bauer (2-5, 2.53 ERA) returns to the mound Friday as the Indians open a weekend series with Kansas City looking for his first victory since April 25. He allowed four runs (two earned) and struck out eight over six innings his last time out as the Tribe fell to the Yankees. Right-hander Jason Hammel (0-4, 4.78 ERA) gets the nod for Kansas City. First pitch is slated for 7:10 p.m. ET at Progressive Field.

#### **Tribe injury updates: Miller, Salazar**

By Andrew Wagner Special to MLB.com

MILWAUKEE -- Andrew Miller reported no problems a day after throwing approximately 35 pitches during Tuesday's simulated game, but he isn't sure yet whether he'll be back with the Indians this weekend.

Miller has been sidelined since straining his left hamstring on April 25, and while he's recovered from the injury itself, going nearly two weeks without pitching may require a little more work before he can get back on the mound in a game situation.

"My hamstring is the least of my worries," Miller said. "I just want to make sure I'm sharp and be ready to help these guys."

Miller will be evaluated Thursday during the team's off-day in Cleveland. Manager Terry Francona said that Miller would go through a strength analysis before deciding the next step.

"We need to talk through whether or not to do more to prove I'm ready to be back," Miller said. "Part of that is the test, part of that is just throwing."

Cleveland's bullpen struggled after losing Miller to the disabled list. The Tribe's relievers posted a 10.06 ERA in the first 12 games without him, but it showed encouraging signs in the series opener with three scoreless innings in a 3-2 loss at Milwaukee.

"I was hoping that it wouldn't take this long, from the sense that I was starting to feel pretty sharp," Miller said. "Ideally, I'd like to step back in and contribute in a positive way."

Francona said the Indians were encouraged with what they saw in an MRI performed on Danny Salazar, who has yet to throw for Cleveland this season because of impingement tendinitis in his right shoulder.

Salazar has been shut down for at least a week after receiving a PRP injection in the shoulder, which Francona thinks will help in the long run.

"We were really pleased," Francona said. "It's more to promote the healing, but also, in the future, if he feels something ... it's not the end of the world. This was more to put his mind at ease."

#### **Indians trade Urshela to Blue Jays**

By Gregor Chisholm MLB.com @gregorMLB

TORONTO -- The Blue Jays added depth to their battered infield on Wednesday afternoon by acquiring Gio Urshela from the Indians in exchange for a player to be named later or cash considerations.

Urshela was designated for assignment by Cleveland late last week. He recently returned from the 10-day disabled list after dealing with a right hamstring injury.

The Blue Jays have yet to officially announce their plans for Urshela, but he's out of options and is expected to join the 25-man roster in the near future. That would result in either infielder Richard Urena being optioned to the Minors or the Blue Jays returning to a four-man outfield by demoting Dalton Pompey or Anthony Alford.

"I saw him a little bit in Cleveland last year," Blue Jays manager John Gibbons said. "The word is he can play anywhere. But I've seen he's a really good third baseman, I know that. Really good. But you can put him at different spots."

Urshela has spent most of his career at third base, but Gibbons said he could potentially fill in at shortstop and second base as well. His arrival likely is another indication that the Blue Jays will consider using Josh Donaldson, who recently returned from a right shoulder injury, at designated hitter on at least a semi-regular basis.

Donaldson got the start at DH for Wednesday night's game against the Mariners, which resulted in the Blue Jays starting Russell Martin at third base. Once Urshela arrives, that's one scenario the Blue Jays will no longer have to explore.

The 26-year-old Urshela appeared in 67 games last season for Cleveland and posted a .224 batting average with one homer, seven doubles and 15 RBIs. In 11 Minor League games with Triple-A Columbus this year, he was efficient at the plate, posting a .324 average, seven RBIs and a .837 OPS.

## **Buckland named Tribe's Honorary Bat Girl**

By Andrew Wagner Special to MLB.com

MILWAUKEE -- Jennifer Buckland, a physical therapist at Cleveland Clinic Euclid Hospital, will serve as the Indians' Honorary Bat Girl as part of baseball's "Going to Bat Against Breast Cancer" initiative on Mother's Day, when the Tribe will host the Royals at 1:10 p.m. ET at Progressive Field.

Despite showing no symptoms and having no family history, Buckland was diagnosed with breast cancer following a routine mammogram in 2015.

Buckland was 40 at the time, and she opted to undergo a mastectomy followed by 12 weeks of chemotherapy. She participated in a research study for a cooling cap that helped patients keep their hair during treatment.

Because of Buckland's efforts, the research was published and the device was approved by the FDA.

Buckland is now living cancer free, providing support to other survivors -- while helping them with ways to prevent hair loss -- and training for the upcoming Cleveland Half Marathon.

Going to Bat Against Breast Cancer is supported by MLB charitable partners Stand Up To Cancer and Susan G. Komen. Since 2006, players have swung pink bats, worn pink ribbon decals and sported pink wristbands as part of the initiative, which is intended to raise awareness and -- through donations and auction proceeds -- funds to fight breast cancer.

MLB will again donate its licensed uniform royalties from Mother's Day apparel to Susan G. Komen and Stand Up To Cancer. Players will also continue to have the opportunity to use pink bats during Mother's Day games, and Louisville Slugger, the Official Bat of Major League Baseball, will donate proceeds from the sales of their pink bats -- which will be stamped with the MLB breast-cancer awareness logo -- to Susan G. Komen and Stand Up To Cancer.

## **Indians trade Giovanni Urshela to Toronto Blue Jays**

By Ryan Lewis

A difficult decision finally came to its conclusion Wednesday when the Indians traded utility infielder Giovanni Urshela to the Toronto Blue Jays for cash considerations.

Urshela was designated for assignment last week upon completion of his rehab assignment from a strained hamstring he suffered near the end of spring training. Entering camp, the Indians knew they would likely lose Urshela or Erik Gonzalez once the season started, as they had only one utility spot available on the roster and neither player had an option remaining.

Urshela either needed to be traded or pass through waivers to be sent down to the minor leagues.

Urshela's stint on the disabled list delayed the situation, and Gonzalez played well enough to essentially force the Indians' hand. Gonzalez is hitting .375 this season and had a career day — four hits and four RBI in the doubleheader against the Blue Jays on May 3 — before the Indians had to designate one of their utility infielders for assignment.

Urshela, known mostly for his defense at third base, hit .225 with a .587 OPS in 423 at-bats for the Indians between the 2015 and 2017 seasons.

## **Raptor takes one swing against Cleveland Indians' Corey Kluber and sees 'Angels in the Outfield'**

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

MILWAUKEE - Brent Suter knew about Corey Kluber. Last year's Cy Young winner didn't know that much about Suter.

"I see him pitch on TV all the time because he's Must See TV," said Suter, after Milwaukee beat Kluber and the Indians, 3-2, Tuesday night at Miller Park. "He's probably one of the best pitchers in the game."

Suter's nickname is Raptor. The 6-5 left-hander amuses his teammates by walking like one of those deadly, two-legged dinosaurs from the Cretaceous Period. His walk-up music is the theme song from Jurassic Park.

What Suter mostly does is pitch. He did a lot of that Tuesday night after starter Wade Miley left with an injured right oblique muscle in the first inning. But this being a National League park, Suter swung the bat as well.

To put it mildly, he made an impression.

Suter started the third inning by driving Kluber's first pitch over the center field wall. The ball left the bat at 102 mph and landed 433 feet from the plate.

"I went up there, saw the ball up a little bit and put the bat on the ball," said Suter, a 31st round draft pick out of Harvard in 2012. "After that it was just cloud nine. Like Angels in the Outfield. It was fun. Man, it was a good time."

In the Milwaukee dugout, his teammates mobbed him. Confetti poppers went off. His teammates filled the dugout with Raptor noises.

"Guys kept telling me, 'Man, do you know how far you hit that?'" said Suter. "They were saying 433 feet. I said, 'Really? That's awesome.' It was one of those awesome baseball moments that you'll never forget.

"It was a lot of fun. There was confetti flying. . . It's one of those things you'll never forget. Just so very happy that we got the win and did the job."

It was believed to be the first home allowed by Kluber to a pitcher.

Suter's first big-league homer gave Milwaukee a lead it never lost. It was the second homer Kluber allowed in the game and the 10th he's allowed this season. Travis Shaw hit a two-run homer in the first.

"The one to Shaw was a bad pitch," said Kluber. "The pitch was a breaking ball. We were trying to go down with the breaking ball. It just kind of spun out of my hand and stayed over the plate. He did what he was supposed to do with it."

What about Raptor's homer?

"It's the first pitch of an inning," said Kluber. "I'm trying to get ahead of the guy. I don't know anything about him in as far as a scouting report and stuff."

"So I tried going fastball away. Tip your hat to him. He went out and got it and put a good swing on it and hit a home run."

Kluber (5-2, 2.62) allowed three runs on five hits in six innings. He was removed for a pinch hitter in the seventh. Regarding the 10 homers he's allowed, Kluber did not seem overly concerned despite being tied for second place for the most homers allowed in the AL. Teammate Josh Tomlin leads with 13.

"That's what hitters try to do now. They just try to hit home runs," said Kluber. "If you make a mistake and they're trying to hit a home run, that's bound to happen."

"Basically it comes down to the pitches I've given up home runs on - there have been a couple of good ones - but for the most part they're mistakes and guys are doing what they're supposed to do with them."

"Hitters are usually swinging against me. With that approach, and with guys trying to lift the ball, if I make a mistake it just seems like it goes out of the ballpark. It's not really much of an adjustment to make besides trying to not make those mistakes."

Kluber has allowed half of his 10 homes in his last two starts. It is the first time in his career he's allowed two or more homers in consecutive games.

Tuesday night he said he felt "out of whack" for the first three or four innings. He didn't feel he was throwing from his normal arm slot. Kluber said some film study between innings helped get him back on the right path.

"It's something to build on," said Kluber, 12-5 with a 2.29 ERA in 20 interleague starts.

For the Raptor and the Brewers it was something to celebrate.

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#### **Road warrior: Cleveland Indians, Milwaukee Brewers lineups for Wednesday, Game No. 36**

By Paul Hoynes, [cleveland.com phoynes@cleveland.com](mailto:phoynes@cleveland.com)

MILWAUKEE -- Jose Ramirez took the Indians team lead in home runs in Tuesday's 3-2 loss to the Brewers at Miller Park.

In the third inning, he hit his 10th homer to cut Milwaukee's lead to 2-1. It was his third homer in the last three games and his seventh on the road.

While the Indians' offense has been inconsistent, Ramirez has not. He's hitting .284 (38-for-134) with nine doubles, 10 homers and 22 RBI. He has an OPS of .948.

Ramirez, after 34 games last year, was hitting .288 (36-for-126) with six doubles, six homers and 24 RBI. He had an OPS of .860.

Bradley Zimmer, after missing the last two games, was back in the lineup for Wednesday. It will be Zimmer's first game since he collided with the center field wall Saturday at Yankee Stadium and left the game in the seventh inning.

Jesus Aguilar, who spent the first nine years of his career with the Indians, was Milwaukee's starting first baseman on Wednesday. Aguilar is hitting .350 (21-for-60) with two homers and 10 RBI in 29 games.

Aguilar played only 35 games in the big leagues with the Indians. He hit 140 homers in the minors, but not one in the big leagues for the Tribe.

In the last two years with the Brewers, Aguilar has hit 18 homers in 162 games.

#### **Carlos Carrasco strikes out 14, singles home a run as Cleveland Indians beat Milwaukee, 6-2**

By Paul Hoynes, [cleveland.com phoynes@cleveland.com](mailto:phoynes@cleveland.com)

MILWAUKEE - The Indians ended an otherwise disappointing trip with a well-played victory Wednesday afternoon against the Brewers at Miller Park.

Carlos Carrasco sliced and diced his way through Milwaukee's lineup, while Tyler Naquin and Francisco Lindor provided the power in a 6-2 win over Milwaukee. Carrasco struck out 14 in his second complete game of the season.

The Indians ended this trip through New York and Milwaukee with a 1-4 record. They were outscored, 24-20, which shows what a couple of errors and bullpen meltdowns can mean to the team on the wrong end of those baseball pitfalls.

"Carlos really did a nice job," said manager Terry Francona. "He started out kind of sluggish and then pitched his way into feeling good. He used breaking ball really well. It's an understatement, but we needed that."

Carrasco (5-1, 3.61), in his first career appearance against Milwaukee, changed speeds beautifully. From the third through sixth innings, he had nine of his season-high 14 strikeouts. He struck out the Brewers in order in the third and fourth innings.

In the fourth, he struck out Christian Yelich and Jesus Aguilar on 85 mph sliders. He ended the inning by getting Travis Shaw on a 95 mph fastball.

"For the first three innings I couldn't find myself," said Carrasco. "I went back to the dugout and talked to Roberto (Perez, catcher) and Carl (Willis, pitching coach). I said I feel good, but I just couldn't find myself.

"Then I went out for the fourth and we just started getting everything working. We started going fastball slider. Then we went back to slider, fastball. That's what we had talked about before the game. So if they were looking for one pitch, I threw another one."

On Tuesday Francona was asked about Carrasco's skills with the bat. "We just don't want him to get hurt," said Francona, jokingly referring to National League rules that require the pitcher to hit.

Well, after a triple by Perez in the ninth, Carrasco lined a single through the middle in the ninth for the Tribe's final run. He came into that at-bat 1-for-15 in the big leagues.

"In my at bat before the ninth inning, I jammed my right thumb," said Carrasco. "So in the ninth, I told Tito I'm not going to swing. Then Roberto gets the triple and I've got to swing."

Francona rolled out a lineup against right-hander Junior Guerra (2-3, 3.09) featuring four straight left-handed hitters - Michael Brantley, Yonder Alonso, Naquin and Bradley Zimmer - from the fourth through the seventh spot. Guerra has better splits against lefties than righties, but the strategy paid dividends in the fourth.

Switch-hitter Jose Ramirez, batting lefty, doubled to start the inning. Brantley singled to center for a 1-0 lead followed by Alonso's double to left. Naquin followed with a three-run homer to right on a 3-2 pitch for a 4-0 lead. It was Naquin's second homer and his first since April 2 against the Angels.

Naquin, who had two hits Wednesday, came into the game hitting .328 (20-for-61) against righties. Brantley, meanwhile, entered hitting .365 (23-for-63) against righties.

So there may have been a method to Francona's madness.

Exit velocity: 105.1 mph

Launch angle: 23deg

Distance: 418 ft

Lindor pushed the lead to 5-0 with a leadoff homer in the seventh. He hit a 2-1 pitch from Corey Knebel into the second deck in right field for his 10th homer. Lindor, who has hit in 11 straight games, is tied with Ramirez for the team lead in homers.

The Brewers made it 5-1 in the seventh. Yelich and Aguilar started the inning with singles to put runners on the corners. Yelich scored on Shaw's ground ball to second. Carrasco, however, was not done. He struck out the next two batters to end the seventh and retired the Brewers in order in the eighth.

Aguilar added a sacrifice fly in the ninth for Milwaukee.

Carrasco struck out 14 or more batters for the fourth time in his career. He struck out every batter he faced at least once on Wednesday except Hernan Perez.

"To be honest with you, the biggest thing is we won," said Carrasco, when asked if he was more impressed with his 14 strikeouts or RBI single. "We lost four straight straight games. The most important thing today is that the team won the game."

What it means

The Indians have scored 84 of their 164 runs this season on homers. They are 15-11 when they homer in a game.

The pitches

Guerra threw 99 pitches, 59 (60 percent) for strikes. Carrasco threw 117 pitches, 85 (73 percent) for strikes.

Thanks for coming

The Indians and Brewers drew 26,345 to Miller Park on Wednesday afternoon. First pitch was at 1:10 p.m. with a temperature of 70 degrees. The roof was closed because of rain.

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### **Cleveland Indians trade Giovanni Urshela to Toronto Blue Jays for cash considerations**

By Joe Noga, [cleveland.com](mailto:cnoga@cleveland.com) [jnoga@cleveland.com](mailto:jnoga@cleveland.com)

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Giovanni Urshela is heading to Toronto after the Cleveland Indians traded the 26-year-old infielder to the Blue Jays on Wednesday for cash considerations or a player to be named later.

The Indians designated Urshela for assignment on Friday after activating him from the 10-day disabled list, where he had spent the season's first 32 games.

Urshela injured his right hamstring in spring training and had completed a 20-day rehabilitation assignment at Class AAA Columbus on May 2. Cleveland had seven days to trade, release or place Urshela on waivers following the designation.

Both he and Erik Gonzalez entered the season without any remaining minor league options, forcing the club to keep one or both of them on the 25-man roster. Urshela's injury bought the Indians some time before having to make what manager Terry Francona called a "hard decision" between the two.

On Friday, Francona announced Gonzalez had won the competition with Urshela to be the Tribe's utility Infielder. Gonzalez raised his batting average from .182 to .391 with a 7-for-12 performance in three games last week, including both games of a doubleheader against Toronto.

Urshela hit .500 (21-for-42) in spring training with six doubles, three home runs and seven RBI in 18 games before getting hurt.

Cleveland signed Urshela, a native of Cartagena, Columbia, in July 2008 as an un-drafted free agent. He made his major-league debut June 9, 2015 against Seattle, going 0-for-3 in a 3-2 Indians defeat.

Last season, Urshela batted .224 with a .288 slugging percentage and .551 OPS in 67 games for the Indians. He hit .225 with seven home runs, 15 doubles and 36 RBI in 148 total big-league games with Cleveland.

### **Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 05.10.2018**

#### **On marathon at-bats and 5 other things we learned about the Cleveland Indians on Wednesday**

By Paul Hoynes, cleveland.com

MILWAUKEE - Pitchers, in general, can do without marathon at-bats. They want to get outs as quickly as possible. But sometimes that just doesn't work.

Indians right-hander Zach McAllister, in the eighth inning Tuesday night at Miller Park, engaged in a 15-pitch at-bat with Milwaukee catcher Manny Pina. There were two out with the bases loaded and the Brewers leading, 3-2, when McAllister replaced Tyler Olson.

After three straight fastballs, all at 95 mph or higher, the count was 1-2. Over the next 12 pitches, according to Statcast.com, McAllister threw 10 fastballs ranging from 96.4 mph to 97.8 mph and two curves. Pina took McAllister's last curve (pitch No.15) for a strike to end the inning.

Pina fouled off 12 of the 15 pitches he saw from McAllister in Milwaukee's 3-2 win.

"I was just thinking about getting strike one and hopefully putting him away," said McAllister. "Obviously, I want a strikeout or a ball hit right at someone in that situation. It just so happened that he wasn't going to miss a whole lot of pitches. He wasn't trying to do anything more than put the ball in play and foul off a bunch of pitches."

McAllister stayed with his fastball.

"The two breaking balls I threw were good pitches, but again I'm going to sit with my fastball until a guy shows he can pull it on me or put it in play," said McAllister. "It just got to a point where I had to show him something else and I was able to freeze him with a curveball."

Last year McAllister engaged in another long duel, this time with Houston's Marwin Gonzalez. The at-bat lasted 13 pitches on May 21 at Minute Maid Park. Gonzalez homered on the 13th pitch. This time around McAllister came out on top.

"Zach had a great at-bat," said manager Terry Francona. "He gave us a chance to win that game."

#### **No. 1: Positive report for Salazar**

Maybe, just maybe, Danny Salazar will be able to help the Indians sometime this season.

Last week Salazar was examined by Dr. Keith Meister, team physician for the Texas Rangers, and received a PRP injection in his right shoulder. He'll be shut down for a week to 10 days, but that doesn't mean he can't pitch for the Tribe sometime this season.

"This is good news," said Francona. "His MRI came back looking really good. We're really pleased. The injection is to promote healing and now he knows if he feels something it's not the end of the world."

"This was more to put his mind at ease."

Salazar came to spring training with a sore right shoulder and has not advanced beyond bullpen sessions. Meister confirmed the Indians' diagnosis that Salazar is suffering from impingement tendinitis in the right shoulder.

#### **No. 2: How far did it go?**

Francisco Lindor wanted to know how far his seventh-inning homer traveled in Wednesday's 6-2 win over the Brewers. He was told 424 feet.

When Lindor heard that he scrunched his face in disbelief. He thought it went farther.

"It felt like I got all of it," said Lindor with a smile. "And it looked farther than the ones in Cleveland. As long as they go out, I'm happy."

Lindor has 10 homers, including six in his last eight games, and is tied with Jose Ramirez for the team lead. Edwin Encarnacion has nine.

Ramirez, who doubled and stole two bases Wednesday, is hitting .381 (16-for-42) with 11 extra base hits and 10 RBI in his last 10 games. He reached 10 homers in 35 games this year, the fastest in franchise history by a switch-hitter.

#### **No. 3: Sharpness matters**

Lefty Andrew Miller, who could be activated Friday, isn't worried about the health of his left hamstring. He came out of Tuesday's simulated game/bullpen session feeling good.

The thing that concerns him is the sharpness of his pitches. Miller has yet to allow a run this season. He's thrown 10 scoreless innings in 11 appearances, but went on the DL on April 25 with a hamstring problem.

"My hamstring is the least of my worries," said Miller. "I'm just trying to figure out how to get sharp and be ready to help these guys."

Francona said Miller will get the strength in his hamstring tested on Thursday and could be activated Friday.

"My understanding is we've got to talk through whether I have to do more to prove I'm back," said Miller. "I think part of that is the test and part of that is throwing the ball. I was hoping it wouldn't take this long because I was starting to get pretty sharp."

"But you miss a couple of weeks - which is where we're at now -- ideally I can step back in and contribute in a positive way."

#### **No. 4: The man behind the mask**

Francona complimented catcher Roberto Perez for getting Carlos Carrasco through the early innings of Wednesday's start. Perez kept telling Carrasco that his arm looked lazy coming through his delivery.

"I thought Roberto did a good job of staying on Carlos and working him through those first couple of innings," said Francona. "You looked up (on scoreboard) and saw 90 mph, 91 mph. Then as he got into the game, and got into the flow, not only did he find his breaking ball, but he got some power back in his fastball."

Carrasco pitched his second complete game of the season, striking out 14 and allowed two runs on five hits.

No. 5: In closing

The Brewers lost two players in Tuesday's win. Lefty Wade Miley (right oblique) and second baseman Nick Franklin (right quadriceps) were placed on the disabled list Wednesday. Closer Corey Knebel came off the DL to replace Miley, while infielder Tyler Saladino was called up from the minors to replace Franklin. ... Outfielder Melky Cabrera went 1-for-4 at Class AAA Columbus on Tuesday. It was his second game since joining the Clippers from extended spring training in Goodyear, Ariz. Cabrera has an opt out date of June 1. ... Right-hander Matt Belisle, designated for assignment on May 2, has elected to become a free agent. ... Lefty Jeff Beliveau, designated for assignment on Friday, cleared waivers and accepted the outright option to Columbus.

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### **Cleveland Indians Scribbles: Is it time to worry? -- Terry Pluto (video)**

By Terry Pluto, The Plain Dealer [terrypluto2003@yahoo.com](mailto:terrypluto2003@yahoo.com)

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Scribbles in my Cleveland Indians notebook:

1. I've been telling myself not to worry about the Indians -- yet the Tribe is under-achieving with an 18-18 record. They are in first place in the dismal AL Central Division, but that's little comfort.
2. At this point a year ago, the Tribe was 19-17. The big issue was the starting rotation. On May 9, 2017, Corey Kluber was on the disabled list with a cranky back. He had a 3-2 record and 5.06 ERA. Hard to believe he was headed to a Cy Young Award.
3. Trevor Bauer (3-4, 6.92 ERA) was a mess. Ditto for Danny Salazar (2-4, 5.20 ERA) and Josh Tomlin (2-4, 5.87 ERA). Only Carlos Carrasco (4-2, 1.86 ERA) was pitching well among the starters.
4. A year ago, it was the bullpen keeping the Tribe above .500, along with some decent run production.
5. Even at the All-Star break, the Indians had a 47-40 record. They didn't look like a team heading to a 102-60 record. An outrageous, record-breaking 22-game winning streak changed everything.
6. By the end of the season, the Indians rotation had a 3.52 ERA -- best in the American League.
7. The Tribe's rotation has a 3.55 ERA this season, and that is with Tomlin being 0-4 with an 8.06 ERA. The rest of the rotation is sound: Kluber (5-2, 2.62 ERA), Bauer (2-3, 2.53 ERA), Mike Clevinger (2-0, 2.76 ERA) and Carrasco (5-1, 3.61).
8. I'd put Tomlin in the bullpen to work out some of his problems. Adam Plutko allowed three runs in 7 1/3 innings in a spot start last week. He is 3-2 with a 2.35 ERA at Class AAA Columbus.
9. Phenom Shane Bieber has a 0-1 record and 2.13 ERA at Columbus. He was 3-0 with a 1.16 ERA at Class AA Akron. He could be in the Majors soon.
10. Salazar is out indefinitely with his latest shoulder issues. But the Indians do have depth in the starting rotation.
11. This season, it's primarily the bullpen killing the Tribe. Relievers have a 5.40 ERA, that's 14th in the American League. In 2017, the Indians had the best bullpen in the American League (2.89 ERA).
12. It will help when Andrew Miller returns soon. They obviously miss Bryan Shaw and Joe Smith. But it's more than that. Dan Otero had a 2.13 ERA in 2016-17 for the Tribe. He has a 5.52 ERA this season. Zach McAllister has an 8.76 ERA after his 2.61 ERA last season. Nick Goody (0-2, 6.94) is on the disabled list with arm problems.
13. Goody, McAllister and Otero were important parts of the bullpen in 2017. They all are struggling. You can add lefty Tyler Olson to the list. He didn't allow a run in 20 innings last season. He has a 6.75 ERA this season.
14. Odds are the Tribe will find some effective relievers. Maybe it will be newcomer Oliver Drake, acquired from Milwaukee. Or it could be Evan Marshall, promoted from the minors. The Indians tend to find relievers out of nowhere -- cast off by other teams or guys who struggled earlier in their careers as starters.
15. At Class AAA Columbus, Neil Ramirez is 2-0 with a 2.93 ERA and 25 strikeouts in 15 1/3 innings. Ramirez had a 4-3 record and 2.20 ERA with the Cubs in 2014-15. Since then, he's pitched with three other teams. Been up and down from the minors. Had arm problems. Who knows? Sometimes a pitcher like that puts it together for a while.
16. There are a lot of other issues with the Indians. They rely on the home runs to score. They are second in the American League with 50 homers. They are seventh in the American League in runs scored. But they are No. 10 in hitting with runners in scoring position (.236).

17. Struggling with runners in scoring position: Yan Gomes (.059) Roberto Perez (.083), Rajai Davis (.100), Bradley Zimmer (.150), Edwin Encarnacion (.207), Jason Kipnis (.211) and Yonder Alonso (.217). Everyone else is at .270.

18. Manager Terry Francona can play with the batting order, perhaps dropping Kipnis (.186, .534 OPS) out of the No. 2 spot. Alonso is batting .179 vs. lefties, and he was .189 hitter vs. lefties last year. How about platooning him?

19. Davis is having a hard time vs. lefties, batting .167 (5-for-30). Melky Cabrera could take his roster spot once he gets into shape at Columbus.

20. But overall, the Indians biggest problem has been the bullpen, and they will probably have to trade for some help as the season goes along.

### **Trevor Bauer on what a pitcher can learn from a hitter's ugly swing**

By Zack Meisel May 9, 2018 10

NEW YORK — A pitcher's objective is to record outs, whether they come via strikeout or a harmless, towering fly to the warning track.

But when a pitcher makes a hitter look downright foolish — dropping to the dirt to offer at a breaking ball or half-committing to a feeble swing while chasing a pitch off the plate — that can accomplish a couple of things. One, it tacks on a strike to the count. And, two, it provides some extra data to the pitcher's mental register.

After all, pitchers frequently say that the best way to evaluate their stuff is to gauge a hitter's reactions. For Trevor Bauer, though, that doesn't necessarily mean that the uglier a hitter's swing, the more effective his pitches are. Bauer recently chatted with The Athletic about what he can learn from hitters' swings ... and from their takes.

ZM: The first time you faced Gleyber Torres, in the third inning, he offered an awkward half-swing at a 1-2 slider. Is that how you would draw it up in your head, in terms of a hitter's reaction telling you that the particular pitch worked?

TB: That one wasn't as indicative as some other ones are. Like, the ones that are more indicative are — I threw a really well-located slider to (Austin) Romine in a 2-2 count in his first at-bat. It missed the zone by (a couple of inches), kind of down and away. He took it and didn't flinch at it, which is indicative to me that — that tells me what his thought process was on that pitch, which is, "He's going to throw me something off-speed." He just slowed down, waiting, tracking the ball, so I knew I could throw him a comeback two-seam and freeze him because he was looking for off-speed stuff. So, I did. I missed. It was up and in or something and he fouled it off. I missed the location on that.

Bauer vs. Romine, 1.0 — Bauer missed low and away with a slider on Pitch 5, so he fired a few fastballs up in the zone.

The bad swings on sliders — I don't have enough of a read on throwing that pitch. I don't have enough experience throwing it where I can get a good indication of if it's working or not. Like, I knew (Saturday) it wasn't breaking laterally like I needed it to.

That one's hard for me to really say, because it never started off as a strike. It started as a ball and moved farther off the plate. So I think that's just probably a young, inexperienced hitter, someone who's aggressive.

ZM: Nomar Mazara with Texas last week lunged at a curveball and his knee ended up in the dirt. But you're not so much looking for that — you're looking at what the swing tells you about what he's thinking and how you can capitalize on that?

TB: My pitch movements are generally pretty consistent. I have a feeling coming out of my hand whether it's working or not. Mostly for me, that's, "Can I throw this generally where I want to? Does it feel like I can command the ball there?" Sometimes you throw a pitch and it goes where you want it to, but it felt completely foreign, like it ended up there on accident. So when I'm worried about a pitch working, it's, "Do I feel like I can command this pitch to go where it's supposed to?" If that's the case, then mostly I'm trying to read what a hitter's process or approach is at the plate. That's something I've picked up over the last couple years, is reading more on takes than swings. Swings can tell you, like the one to Mazara, he's clearly looking to swing in that at-bat, so he swings at a first-pitch curveball in the dirt, and I probably don't have to throw him a strike the rest of the at-bat. He's looking to be aggressive.

Romine takes a slider that misses the zone by a couple inches in a two-strike count, so, OK, he's slowed down, he's expecting something off-speed. That can give me some information on their scouting report, possibly, but mostly just that hitter, what his approach is going to be that day. You saw it in the at-bat where I walked him, I threw him a couple close off-speed pitches in two-strike counts that he didn't offer at. That's probably, given how that inning was going — I wasn't super sharp on thinking through everything. I probably should've thrown him more fastballs. You saw the swing he took in the 3-2 count when I threw him a couple fastballs. It wasn't close. I probably should've realized that earlier, especially given the information he had given me in previously at-bats.

Bauer vs. Romine 2.0: Bauer walked Romine in a rocky fifth inning on Saturday.

ZM: So I take it it was no accident that the hardest pitches you threw came in that fifth inning, including a 97.6-mph fastball to Romine.

TB: Not an accident. It's a combination of having the ability to do that, which is, as I throw more pitches in an inning, my body gets loose and your blood flows, more sweat, whatever. The threshold for velocity is a little bit higher in that case than it would be coming out after a 15-minute



inning and throwing eight pitches. I just don't have the same level of looseness. But in big situations like that, those are game-changing situations, so I have to put my best foot forward, my max intensity, max effort. So I think, generally, you tend to see an uptick in stuff in situations like that. Some guys feel like they get outs better if they have a downtick in stuff and worry more about locating. I feel like it's the opposite. I can rev my stuff up. Generally, once I have that level of looseness and that feel in an inning like that, I don't worry about max effort, trying to throw hard, because it's just there, without having to try to (achieve) what isn't available to me. Usually you'll see the hardest pitches I throw either in a situation like that or in the last inning that I pitch, where I know I'm going to empty everything.

ZM: That's always been the case with Justin Verlander, too.

TB: He would start the game off cruising at 92-94 (mph) and then as soon as he got into a big situation, or later in the game, when the leverage is higher, the velo would be 96, 98, 100. And it didn't really matter, his pitch count. It was more so the game situation. In the leverage situations, you want to have your best stuff available to you. Guys who are able to do that are definitely at an advantage there.

### **When Yonder Alonso sought a new swing, he searched everywhere**

Travis Sawchik 3h ago 4

Yonder Alonso was searching.

He was back home in Miami, having just celebrated the New Year of 2017, knowing he needed answers; he had to be better. He was set to become a free agent after the coming season, having endured one of the worst years of his career. He had never been a power hitter, but he had slugged a career low .367 with just seven home runs. He had not made up for the power with a high batting average (.253) or on-base mark (.316). According to the catch-all, total-value statistic wins above replacement, Alonso was below replacement level (-0.3).

He recalled how in the middle of the previous year, when he was struggling badly, one of the assistants to Oakland A's general manager Billy Beane had approached him around the on-field batting cage during batting practice.

"I was hitting like .180. He said, 'You know, you are just hitting into bad luck,' " Alonso recalled. "And that to me, I just don't believe in that. I didn't accept that. Just hitting into bad luck? I didn't accept that. I sucked. It's June, and I have like four homers. I'm in the weight room stronger than like everyone on the team."

He was stronger than just about everyone on the team when it came to deadlifts and squats in the Oakland weight room. Khris Davis was the only A's player who topped him, he said. But he wasn't hitting for power like Davis. In fact, as he looked around the majors, he saw players like Justin Turner and Daniel Murphy transforming themselves into power hitters, and they were capable of playing in the middle or left side of the infield. Alonso was a 6-foot-1, 230-pound first baseman. He had to hit, or his major-league career was in jeopardy.

He was supposed to be in his prime, entering his age 30 season. Instead, he began looking for answers. Alonso went searching everywhere for best practices. And in January, he began with one of the most curious calls in search of help that a player will have admitted to: He called a writer.

Despite playing for the Oakland A's, the club credited with being at the forefront of the sabermetric movement, Alonso said he never spoke with the A's front office staff about analytics related to his performance.

"I didn't really talk to them about numbers," Alonso said. "(Former A's teammate and fly-ball hitter) Jed Lowrie was the first guy to introduce it to me."

Some players who have gone through swing transformations in recent years have been hesitant to share it with the major-league staff for fear of an ideological conflict. Many hitting instructors in the major leagues believe "launch angle" is antithetical to their teaching beliefs. Yet, Alonso had noticed a number of players turn around their careers with swing changes. They had seemed to be benefitting from information. He was curious. He wanted to make a change, at least experiment. He also wanted to do it on his own, to keep it as something of a secret project. After all, this was his career. This might be his last chance.

Orioles star and Miami native Manny Machado, his offseason workout partner, was one of the few people he confided in.

"I told him 'Look, I am making a big change,' " Alonso said. "Nobody is going to know about this."

But he had to talk to some people about his change. He had questions about the data he was beginning to explore at websites like FanGraphs and Baseball Savant. He had questions about what the flaws were in his approach. He decided to reach out to a Bay Area-based, analytically minded writer he had often seen roaming the A's clubhouse: The Athletic's Eno Sarris, who was then writing for FanGraphs. Sarris was different from the other writers as he asked data-based questions. He was more concerned with ideas and process than injury updates.

Alonso had his agent reach out to Sarris to see whether he would be interested in setting up a conference call. Sarris agreed.

"Eno was my first research (point)," Alonso said. "I called him and I had a meeting with him. The first thing I asked him about was the ballpark. ... After that I asked him 'What's wrong with me?'"

Sarris explained the issue.

Alonso had power, but Sarris noted he hit too many balls on the ground. Alonso's average launch angle of 10.6 degrees in 2016 ranked 267th among 471 major-league hitters to put at least 50 balls in play. He hit 1.3 ground balls for every fly ball in 2016 and 1.8 in 2015.

(In 2017, Alonso improved his launch angle to 19.4 degrees, ranking 22nd among hitters with at least 50 balls in play.)

"He got in contact with me as 'The stats guy in the clubhouse,'" Sarris told me when I reached out to gather his recollections. "He did all the work. And I'm not saying, he did all the work after I gave him a couple tips, I'm saying, he kind of knew what I was going to say and was already working on it. In this case, I was confirmation that his thinking about his game and what he could do to improve was correct. He was already changing his swing."

Alonso spoke to Sarris several times during the offseason. Alonso also wanted to learn how to conduct his own research into how he could use data to monitor his performance.

"The FanGraphs stuff, I was new to it," Alonso said. "I felt people were using it to their advantage. I wanted to see what it was and try to use it to my advantage. I called (Sarris) and I learned from him. ... (Now) I am going to Statcast. I am going to go through FanGraphs. I am going to go through all the websites."

One interesting side effect is that Alonso said seeing the underlying skills, like exit velocity and launch angle, have helped him weather slumps, like his slow start to this season, when he was hitting the ball well but having poor luck on batted balls. Alonso has been the 42nd unluckiest hitter to date, according to the difference between his actual weighted on-base mark (wOBA) and expected wOBA.

Sarris cited other comparable hitters who had made changes or who had similar underlying skills. Alonso would have more power if he could get the ball in the air.

"I put two-and-two together," Alonso said. "I said 'OK, this is what I'm going to work on in the offseason.'"

"My work was (implementing) all the answers (Sarris) gave me. The information he gave me was my answer to everything else." Sarris could help with the "whys" Alonso was seeking but not as much with the "hows," the actual mechanics of change of the swing. For that, Alonso went elsewhere in search of answers.

After speaking with Lowrie and other teammates, he decided upon using a leg kick to develop a better weight transfer, in essence to build a stronger base when making contact. He reached out to some star players who featured leg kicks like former A's star Josh Donaldson and Jose Bautista with the Blue Jays.

Alonso also sought out his old Reds teammate Joey Votto. They exchanged hundreds of texts over the winter on hitting philosophy and mechanics. "We spend hours and hours on phone calls and texts," Alonso said. "Texts, mostly. They were very elaborate, very detailed. But that's what makes Joey, Joey."

What Alonso was doing was essentially canvassing the country in search of best practices, best information.

His conclusion was if he could build a stronger base, better use his legs, he would generate more power and a bat path that would create more line drives and fly balls. Alonso never talks about changing his swing plane. He doesn't talk about launch angle. Perhaps those descriptors are too personal. For Alonso, getting his base right would get his bat path right, the last part of the kinetic chain he was trying to overhaul.

"I said 'I am going to learn this whole thing all the way from your feet to the head,'" Alonso said. "I had to start from the beginning. In the beginning, it was a lot of video work. I had to learn all the video work and everything that was wrong with me, and everything that was wrong with me was just like from here down."

Before his locker in the Progressive Field home clubhouse, Alonso motioned from his waist down.

"My legs weren't working," Alonso said. "I wasn't connected and I was going forward a lot. I was kind of hitting like if I weighed 150 pounds, instead of getting my 225-230 pounds into the ball. It felt like I was hitting with just my hands. It didn't translate, that's why I didn't hit the ball."

"I think it's more about using the ground as your friend."

He took the approach into the cage every day this last winter with Machado and his private hitting coach in a Miami facility. And then he brought it into the 2017 season when former FanGraphs editor, and now San Diego Padres front office official Dave Cameron dubbed Alonso the "poster boy" for the fly-ball revolution.

Alonso's launch angle spiked as did his average exit velocity on line drive and fly balls from 91.1 mph to 93.4 mph in 2017, a top-100 mark in baseball.

Said Alonso of his revamped approach: "I think this is for everybody, for a lot of people."

Alonso enjoyed a breakout season as did other swing-changers like Logan Morrison and Jay Bruce. But curiously, there was not a great market for their services. Morrison settled for a one-year deal after hitting 38 home runs. Alonso signed a relatively modest two-year, \$16 million contract in December, perhaps reading the market correctly and getting a second guaranteed year.

As more and more hitters join the Air Ball Revolution, one of the challenges for front offices is how to evaluate such performances. Are players who enjoyed such transformations able to consolidate gains over larger samples and as opponents adjust?

The Indians' interest and conviction in Alonso did not begin with a leaderboard search of Statcast data and launch angles. It did not begin with analytics. Rather it began with old-fashioned human intelligence gathering.

During spring training in 2017, Indians GM Mike Chernoff said one of their scouts, Dave Malpass, noticed Alonso had made significant mechanical changes and seems to be hitting the ball with more authority.

Consider the screenshot of Alonso's mechanics from the spring of 2016 (left) to 2017 (right) that Sarris created at FanGraphs: "He was swinging with a bit more intensity," Chernoff said. "That gave us a lot more conviction after that, that the numbers, the power, was real and not just noise.

"It was pretty clear what we were seeing was real change."

The Indians asked Alonso whether he felt his gains were sustainable as they courted him in free agency in December.

"I told them," Alonso said. "They understood."

The changes look to be carrying over as Alonso ranks 19th in Baseball Savant's barrel per batted balls, which uses launch angle and exit velocity to search for optimum contact. Alonso has already homered eight times, which exceeds his full-season totals of 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016.

Despite the poor early luck, the changes look for real. Alonso's rebuild appears to be sustainable. While it's a story about Alonso unlocking his power potential, it's as much a story about curiosity and looking anywhere and everywhere for answers. In the data age, the curious player is rewarded.

### **Carlos Carrasco strikes out 14, Indians beat Brewers, 6-2**

By Rich Rovito, The Associated Press

MILWAUKEE >> Carlos Carrasco said he didn't feel confident in his command. The results said otherwise.

"For the first three innings, I didn't find myself," Carrasco said.

Carrasco struck out 14 while pitching his second complete game of the season as the Indians beat the Milwaukee Brewers, 6-2, on May 9. Carrasco fanned the side in the third inning. After a conversation between innings with catcher Roberto Perez and pitching coach Carl Willis, Carrasco got into a groove and struck out the side again in the fourth.

"When I went out for the fourth, we got everything working," Carrasco said. "Every pitch was working. When you have fastball command and can throw your breaking ball for a strike, guys are going to swing at it."

Carrasco (5-1) gave up five hits, walked one and threw 117 pitches. It was his 10th complete game in 149 big league starts.

"Early on, he looked a little sluggish, but he pitched his way into feeling good," Indians manager Terry Francona said. "As he got into the flow of the game, not only did he find his breaking ball, but he got some more power to his fastball."

After surrendering a combined 10 earned runs in his previous two outings, Carrasco was in total control and came within one of his career strikeout high. He also drove in a run, the first of his career, with a ninth-inning single.

"He got his slider going," Brewers manager Craig Counsell said. "It was sharp. Rarely in a bad spot. He was excellent."

Tyler Naquin and Francisco Lindor homered to power Cleveland.

The Indians broke through against Junior Guerra (2-3) with four runs in the fourth, capped by Naquin's three-run homer into the second deck in right field. Jose Ramirez led off the inning with a double and scored on Michael Brantley's single.

Guerra fanned nine in five innings.

"He kind of hung a split with guys on base," Counsell said of the pitch to Naquin. "It was just one bad pitch that cost him."

Brewers closer Corey Knebel gave up Lindor's leadoff home run in the seventh. Knebel, who had been on the disabled list since April 5 with a hamstring injury, was activated before the game.

The Brewers scored in the seventh on Travis Shaw's RBI groundout. They added another run on Jesus Aguilar's sacrifice fly in the ninth.

The Indians sent infielder Gio Urshela to Toronto for a player to be named or cash. The 26-year-old Urshela hadn't played in the majors this season because of a hamstring injury. He was designated for assignment last week. Urshela played in 67 games for Cleveland year, hitting .224 with 15 RBI. He hit .324 in 11 games this year at Triple-A Columbus.

Indians >> OF Bradley Zimmer returned to the starting lineup for the first time since Saturday, when he injured his left shoulder while crashing into the outfield wall at Yankee Stadium on May 5.

Brewers >> LHP Wade Miley was put on the DL. He left Tuesday night's game with a strained right oblique. . Placed Nick Franklin on the 10-day DL with a strained right quad and recalled infielder Tyler Saladino from Triple-A Colorado Springs. Franklin, who had just joined the club prior to Tuesday night's game after his contract was selected from Double-A Biloxi, was scheduled to have an MRI on Wednesday. .LHP Boone Logan, who has been on the DL with a left triceps injury since the start of the season, is expected to be activated when the team visits Colorado this weekend.

Indians >> After a day off on May 10, Trevor Bauer (2-3, 2.53 ERA) gets the start at home in the opener of a three-game set against Kansas City. Bauer is 2-4 in 12 career starts against the Royals.

Brewers >> Jhoulys Chacin (2-1, 4.08) takes the mound as Milwaukee opens a four-game series at Colorado. Chacin, who pitched for the Rockies from 2009-14, is 1-1 in three career starts against his former squad.

### **Mud Hens 3, Clippers 0 | Late homer beats run-starved Clippers**

Christin Stewart broke a scoreless tie in the bottom of the eighth inning with a three-run homer, lifting host Toledo to a 3-0 victory over the Clippers on Wednesday night before 3,721 at Fifth Third Field.

The Clippers, meanwhile, managed just two hits, both doubles by Eric Stamets.

Adam Plutko (3-3) pitched seven shutout innings before allowing a leadoff double to Ronny Rodriguez and a single to Jason Krizan to open the eighth. After striking out Dawel Lugo, Plutko was replaced by Ben Taylor. The next batter, Stewart, hit the second pitch from Taylor into the right-field seats for a three-run homer.

Toledo starter Josh Turley (2-1) allowed two hits over eight innings, with three walks and two strikeouts. Victor Alcantara struck out two in the ninth for his first save.

Plutko allowed seven hits with two walks and two strikeouts for Columbus.

Stamets doubled in the fifth and eighth innings, but that was it for the Clippers' offense. In the first three games of a four-game set against Toledo, the Clippers have scored one run, also losing 3-1 and 2-0.

### **Flying Squirrels 1, RubberDucks 0: Seven-game winning streak comes to end with shutout loss by Beacon Journal/Ohio.com**

Richmond Flying Squirrels starter Cory Taylor and three relievers combined to blank the visiting RubberDucks 1-0 in an Eastern League game Wednesday afternoon.

The Flying Squirrels (17-14) scored the only run of the game in the third inning on two infield hits and a sacrifice fly by Ryan Howard against Ducks starter Matt Whitehouse (1-1).

Whitehouse made his first start of 2018 and allowed four hits in 3½ innings with no walks and two strikeouts.

The RubberDucks (20-12) didn't get a hit off Taylor (4-1) until Daniel Salters singled in the fifth inning. It was the only hit Taylor allowed in his six innings of work as the Squirrels ended the Ducks' seven-game winning streak.

Ka'ai Tom had the only extra-base hit of the day for the Ducks with a double in the seventh inning.

The Ducks will return home to start a four-game series against the Erie SeaWolves at 6:35 p.m. Thursday.

### **Stark: Five ideas that could help put the action back in baseball By Jayson Stark May 10, 2018**

They never saw it coming. But here it is.

This is baseball in 2018. More strikeouts than hits. The fewest hits per game since 1972. A pace that is leading this sport toward 10,000 fewer balls in play this year than in 2009.

And they never saw it coming.

"It's kind of like you're sitting at a stop light, and you're rear-ended," said Braves vice chairman John Schuerholz, a longtime member of baseball's competition committee. "You might not have expected that to happen... but your awakening has occurred because it did. And I think that's where we are. This thing has hit all of us in the bumper."

He is talking about a number that has gotten the attention of everyone in his sport. Nearly 400 more strikeouts than hits? There is only one word for that, Schuerholz said.

That word is "alarming."

But now comes the hard part. It's impossible to miss that big dent in the bumper. But how do you fix it? There's not a body shop on earth that has all the parts to repair this problem.

So that's where we come in. We've spent the last week polling 23 executives, former executives, players, former players, managers and coaches. We asked them a simple question with no simple answer:

What can baseball do to put those baseballs back in play and get more action back in its sport?

The answers were fun. And creative. And thoughtful. But would any of them actually work? And could any of them actually happen? Here is the best of what this group proposed:

#### LIMIT THE SHIFT

We know what you're thinking: If the object is to put more balls in play, why would this sport start by attacking a defensive alignment aimed at balls that already are in play?

Good point, actually. But hear us out. There is a logic to this idea.

How are hitters and hitting coaches trying to combat the shift? By "trying to hit over it," said one NL exec.

And how do they do that? By changing swings – to add more lift, uppercut and launch angle.

So how have the pitchers responded to the hitters' adjustments? "By pitching up in the zone," said an NL pitching coach.

And what happens when uppercut swings meet elevated four-seam fastballs? Swing. Miss. Rinse. Repeat.

The result says "strikeout." But the culprit might be the shift. Which is responsible, in great part, for the most strikeout-prone swings we've seen, en masse, in baseball history.

"It's all about getting the ball in the air," said John Smoltz, Hall of Fame power pitcher turned Fox/MLB Network analyst. "And if you're trying to get the ball in the air, you're going to swing and miss. A lot."

So maybe messing with the shift isn't as off-target as it seems. And there are two ideas out there which could make an impact.

There is Plan A, which is so cut and dried, it would essentially end shifting as we know it: Draw a line across the second-base bag. Then require every team to play two infielders to the left of it and two infielders to the right of it. Bam. Shift that.

But how would that help address this problem? Because "nobody wants to hit a ball up the middle anymore," said Dan O'Dowd, former Rockies general manager, current MLB Network analyst. Once upon a time, players ingrained good hitting habits by trying to stay in the middle of the field in batting practice. But now, "if you hit a ball hard up the middle," O'Dowd said, "you're out."

While you ponder that, you should also ponder Plan B, which wouldn't be so extreme. It would just require infielders to be infielders – not quasi-rightfielders, lurking 40 feet deep in the outfield grass. Can you dream of a world where line drives over the infielders would actually be hits again? There are hundreds of hitters who would love to live in that dream.

"That's my big thing – the number of infielders who can play in the outfield," said Giants catcher Nick Hundley. "If you want to play three guys on the first-base side of the diamond, go ahead – but they have to play in the infield.... I mean, you can shift and do what you have to do. But your infielders have to play infield and your outfielders have to play outfield. Right now, you hit a missile in the 4-hole (through the right side) and it's a one-hopper to the short rightfielder. That's not a second baseman. That's a second baseman playing in right field."

It all makes sense – if you're in favor of it. But guess what happens any time this comes up? Yep. The usual. Nothing happens. Heck, the commissioner himself, Rob Manfred, floated this idea a couple of years ago. That float started leaking air pretty much instantaneously.

And upstairs in the analytics departments, they're still pushing back on all of this. Of course they are.

An exec from one shift-heavy team tried to make the case that every club has the “inalienable right to play your defenders where you see fit.” And while you can’t find that edict in the Bill of Rights, there are legions of data fans who agree.

“But there are rules in other sports that say you can’t stand in certain points,” an AL exec responded. “In the NBA, you can’t stand in the lane for more than three seconds, right?”

Right. So isn’t this a conversation worth having?

“Look,” said one exec. “Nothing is going to stop the use of analytics. Data drives the entire world right now. But if we think about this in terms of, ‘Is it making baseball a more entertaining product – and are there ways to make baseball a more entertaining product?’ That’s a conversation that ought to happen.”

## SHRINK THE STRIKE ZONE

The entire sport of baseball starts with the strike zone. But what if you redesigned that strike zone? What if you actually shrunk that zone? If this sport really wanted to help the hitters, wouldn’t it be doing that already?

Well, that almost happened. Remember? As recently as two years ago, there was an actual proposal presented to the players’ union. The idea was to raise the bottom of the strike zone by two inches, to the top of the knee, where the rulebook says it’s supposed to be.

Guess what happened to that idea? Yessir. Exactly what happens to all ideas like this. It floated off into a hazy bubble of hot air and disappeared. As always.

But that doesn’t mean the concept wasn’t oozing with logic. Granted, this might just lead to more walks, not more action. But the bottom of the current strike zone is a sea of outs, filled with whiffs and ground balls hopping directly into the shift.

So suppose you raised that line so that the bottom of the new zone was actually an area where hitters had a chance to swing the bat and hit more balls over those shifts? Who could possibly have an issue with that?

Oh, only every pitcher on earth. That’s who. And since pitchers make up half of the players’ union, what reason is there to think this is something that the union would ever sign off on?

“This is one of those issues,” said one exec, “that is going to be very difficult to get a consensus on – for obvious reasons.”

## LIMIT MID-INNING PITCHING CHANGES

The bullpen parade starts early these days. It starts so early, in fact, that there were over 1,300 more pitching changes in baseball last year than just five years ago. But guess what? That isn’t only a time-of-game or pace-of-game issue. It feeds right into this conversation, too.

“I’m a member of the competition committee and I’ve suggested this,” Smoltz said. “And I’ve been looked at like I’ve got three heads. But one real change you could make that might indirectly put more balls in play is to limit how many pitchers can pitch in a game.

“It’s those mid-inning pitching changes that are sucking the life out of the game,” Smoltz went on. “And that luxury that these managers have, of bringing three different guys into a game to face three different hitters, is making it tougher for those hitters to put the ball in play.”

Can anyone prove this? Yes. Everyone can prove this. Your average left-handed hitter now hits .223 against left-handed pitchers, with more strikeouts than hits. Against right-handers, that average goes up 28 points and the OPS goes up almost 100 points. So...your witness.

What Smoltz has proposed is to give every manager, say, three timeouts, just like other sports do. Baseball could define a “timeout” any way it wants. But for every mid-inning pitching change, that manager would lose one of his timeouts.

With just this simple change, baseball would introduce a whole new strategy debate. And speed up games. And free every left-handed masher on earth from the scourge of facing sidewheeling left-handed bullpen funk specialists in every single at-bat in the late innings. Brilliant.

But you guessed it. There is pushback on this – or any – idea to limit pitching changes. The competition committee has been down this road. It has kicked around rules that said every pitcher would have to face a minimum of two hitters or four. It has talked about rules that would limit every team to one mid-inning change per game or two.

It concluded, though, that only the most extreme limitations would make a real impact. And naturally, the more extreme the change, the more worry there is within the sport about whether it’s really worth experimenting with something that controversial.

Meanwhile, would the union ever sign off on a change that instantly made an entire population of situational lefthanders obsolete? Do we even need to answer that question?

## CHANGE THE BALL/BAT/MOUND

We heard it all here. Move the mound back. Try lowering it. Deaden the baseballs. Lower the seams to reduce spin rates. Ban certain bats. Or how about combinations of all of the above? Hard to see any of that happening. But it's sure worth thinking about. Here's a sampling:

— From an AL executive who had just watched James Paxton, Gerritt Cole and Max Scherzer pile up huge strikeout games in the same week: “[Those] Scherzer, Cole and Paxton starts were awesome, but it was a bit like watching a men's tennis player with a huge serve at Wimbledon. There's something to be said for going back to wood rackets after watching ace after ace after ace. If we could deaden the balls and/or change the bats, along with pushing the mound back slightly to account for the change in average velocity, over time we might get back to a more ball-in-play-centric game. I think there's roughly a negative percent chance of that happening, but that would be my suggestion to at least study.”

— From another AL exec: “Increase the size of the strike zone, deaden the ball, flatten the seams, all in concert. You'll see a quicker game. Hitters will be forced to adjust. There will be more contact, and there will be less reward for swinging for the fences.”

Before you dismiss any or all of that as too far out there, wait a minute. You know what you can't alter to fix this? The human beings. This is the strongest, fittest, best-conditioned group of athletes ever to play baseball. That's not changing.

And the upward surge in the flame coming out of pitchers' hands? That's not changing, either. Take a look at this chart. It tells you all you need to know about where velocity is headed.

### PITCHERS WITH AVERAGE FASTBALL OF 97+ MPH\*

2008: 1

2013: 6

2017: 23

### PITCHERS WITH AVERAGE FASTBALL OF 95+ MPH\*

2008: 22

2013: 45

2017: 98

(\*min. 50 IP)

SOURCE: Fangraphs

It's what Schuerholz calls “this tsunami of strikeouts” that is sucking up most of those balls that used to be in play. So how do you reduce strikeouts in an era where everybody throws 95 and up? Messing with either the baseball or the mound might do that, by neutralizing some of the impact of that velocity.

But there are potential ripple effects on pitcher health that even the sports-medicine profession is divided on. And no one really knows how much these changes would fix any or all of the problems.

So you probably haven't heard the last of this talk. But will any of it actually happen? There's probably a better chance of Bartolo Colon leading the league in stolen bases.

## REWARD WPA

“We've lost a generation,” said Dan O'Dowd, “of players who know how to play offense.”

Go to any player's page at MLB.com, he said. What do you find besides the basics? You find a list of Statcast metrics: Average exit velocity...Average HR distance...Average general velocity...Average launch angle...Average height.

Nothing wrong with any of those metrics, of course. Except for one thing.

“Everything we do in the game now is focused on what? Hitting the ball out of the ballpark,” O'Dowd said. “Why can't we create metrics that focus on players in the game who help produce runs by putting the ball in play, even with productive outs?”

Well, there's a metric that kind of does that – called Win Probability Added. According to baseball-reference.com, it measures “the change in [win] probability caused by this batter during the game.” And there's a list on the site that shows who led each league in WPA in every season since 1925.

But if you run down that list, you'll notice something. It's dominated by home run hitters. Why? Because productive outs don't change win probability as dramatically as long balls. And never will. But at least it's the right concept.

“It needs to dig a little deeper to become a mainstream stat that's part of our evaluation system,” O'Dowd said, “and becomes part of the system for compensating players, in arbitration and free agency. And it's a stat which, in the industry, there's very little awareness of....Maybe we need to have an award at the end of the year that rewards that statistic.”

OK, but how would a Win Probability Added Award help transform an entire sport? Because what needs to change, O'Dowd believes, is “the value awareness of players who don't see value in avoiding strikeouts.”

“Once, there was a mindset and a value that a strikeout was not a good thing,” he said. “But we're losing that mindset. The Joey Vottos of the world are disappearing... If we want players to believe that a strikeout is a bad thing, we need to create a system where a strikeout is not valued, where there's a reward for not striking out and there's a [negative value] for striking out.”

So what kind of reward would accomplish that? Well, there are only two sorts of rewards that ever really get players' attention. One is money (whaddayaknow). The other is winning.

"If I'm a player," said Smoltz, "and I hit 40 home runs and strike out 180 times and I'm not getting penalized financially – I'm strictly talking finances here – then hey, if financially there's no penalty, why am I going to change?"

Meanwhile, does more contact/fewer strikeouts lead to winning? It totally does. Of the last 14 World Series teams, half of them finished either first or second in their league in fewest strikeouts – including two of the last three champs (the 2017 Astros and 2015 Royals).

"Strikeouts are Kryptonite," Smoltz said. "Look at the Royals. Look at the Giants. The Astros last year got all the strikeouts out of their lineup.... When you look back at the champions of the last few years, not one team fits the analytical Three True Outcomes model."

In fact, he's right about that, too. Of the last 10 World Series winners, only one – the 2013 Red Sox – finished in the top five in its league in all the Three True Outcomes categories (strikeouts, walks, homers). Funny how that bit of powerful data hasn't much dented the Strikeouts Are Overrated philosophy of modern team-building.

And on the financial side, didn't last winter's free-agent market demonstrate that one-dimensional home run hitters aren't getting rewarded anymore? Ask Logan Morrison. Or Mike Moustakas. Or Mark Reynolds. How could players miss that message?

"We saw players who hit 30 to 40 home runs who literally could not get jobs," said one exec. "I think that's a sign that home runs and strikeouts – solely that combination – are not very highly valued in the marketplace."

That marketplace has started to speak – in free agency, at least. And "if you want to follow the trends in the game, follow the money," O'Dowd said, "and how players are compensated for doing what they do."

Baseball's natural inclination – in the Follow the Money sector and virtually all of these areas – has been mostly to sit back and let the game naturally react and evolve, the way it has for a century. And many of the people who responded in our survey favor exactly that.

But not everybody. Some look at the big trends and powerful numbers. They contemplate the true impact of 10,000 fewer balls in play. They consider the ominous potential to damage the sport, at a time when it's fighting for the attention of a we-want-action generation. And they think it's time to move, not wait.

"Do we just allow these types of changes to the game to occur organically, or do we as an industry try to make judgments about where the game should go and act accordingly?" asked one exec who admits to deep concerns about this trend. "Other sports do this evaluation all the time and are much more directive in their management of rules. Implicit in your original question is that baseball could change some things to positively affect the game. Does baseball have the wisdom and will to do so?"

That is one powerful question. But you know what it has in common with all of the questions we asked in this column? It's also a question with no clear answer.

We did notice one thing in the process of reporting this piece, however. Just posing these questions provoked a dialogue that seemed to energize everyone who took part in it. Maybe there's a moral in there someplace. There is no reason to let this dialogue end when everyone finishes reading this story. Is there?

"It's a very, very important matter," Schuerholz said. "And I think conversations like this, or even broader ones – about far-reaching methods of dealing with this – ought to be considered.

"So don't let this die," John Schuerholz told The Athletic. "And I promise that I won't at my level."

OK. Sounds like a deal.

### **Real or not? Gerrit Cole's approach bringing Cy Young results**

David Schoenfield

The big news Wednesday was the Yankees' dramatic win over the Red Sox, as they scored four runs in the eighth inning for a 9-6 victory and their 17th win in 18 games, but we have that covered elsewhere on ESPN.com. Instead, let's examine two of the most valuable players in the early going.

King Cole: You know Gerrit Cole is having a good season when he allows one run and strikes out nine in six innings, and the best the Astros' Twitter account can come up with is "Cole did Cole things." I mean, he was pretty good, though he wasn't as good as in his previous start, when he pitched a one-hitter with 16 strikeouts. That effort produced a Game Score of 100, the highest in Astros history for a nine-inning game.

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With the Astros' 4-1 win over the A's on Wednesday, Cole ran his record to 4-1 with a 1.43 ERA. The peripheral stats are just as appealing: 56.2 IP, 30 H, 12 BB, 86 SO, 3 HR. Let's get into what he's doing, first comparing some of his 2017 numbers with the Pirates to his hot start to 2018, with his rank among qualified starters in each category:

2017	RANK	2018	RANK		
Strikeout rate	23.1	23	41.3	1	
Swing/miss rate	21.9	37	35.9	3	
In-zone rate	51.8	14	54.9	5	
Average allowed	.254	29	.155	2	
Ground ball rate	46.5	32	32.4	86	
HR rate	3.7	48	1.4	12	

Those are the results. Cole was solid across the board in 2017, with a high home run rate leading to a 4.26 ERA. The increase in strikeout rate and swing-and-miss rate is phenomenal -- and note that his ground ball rate has plummeted.

As you might expect, and as others have reported, it's a change in philosophy. The Pirates like two-seamers and ground balls; the Astros like four-seamers and strikeouts. You can see the difference in Cole's fastball location:

Of course, the execution has been excellent as well, as Cole is throwing more strikes, which allows him to get into a few more advantageous counts each game. His miss rate on swings on pitches outside the zone has increased from 36 percent to 57 percent, which helps explain the lower batting average. Cole has been so dominant that this looks like something more than a hot streak. It seems to be real improvement that should result in Cy Young contention.

There's something else in the mix here as well, something less quantifiable. I heard Charlie Morton, who also played with Cole in Pittsburgh, on MLB Radio the other day, and he talked about how Cole just looks more relaxed, like he doesn't have to be The Man like he was expected to be in Pittsburgh. You can't analyze that in numbers, but you can analyze it in the results. Maybe not having that extra weight on his shoulders has helped Cole become a better pitcher.

On the mark: The Braves beat the Rays 5-2 for their seventh straight road victory, and one of the heroes was Nick Markakis, who jumped all over this 90 mph sinker from Ryan Yarbrough in the third inning:

The 34-year-old vet is now hitting .338/.419/.554, ranking 13th in the majors in wOBA, at .423 -- almost 100 points higher than in 2017, when he ranked 107th among qualified hitters. He has seven home runs already after hitting just eight in 2017 (when he played 160 games). Markakis has had some big years before, but his two really good ones came early in his career with the Orioles, back in 2007 and 2008, when he hit .300 with 20-plus home runs and 43-plus doubles each season. Baseball-Reference.com actually rates Markakis as the best position player in the AL in 2008, when he posted a .406 OBP and, thanks to 17 outfield assists, had terrific defensive metrics.

Since that season, he has been durable but hardly a star. In his first three seasons with the Braves, Markakis averaged 1.4 WAR, which placed him as a below-average regular. In looking at his numbers this year, the first thing that jumps out is that his strikeout rate is way down -- from 16.4 percent in 2017 to 8.1 percent. If only more players would follow this lead. Even though Markakis' BABIP is basically the same, .333 this season versus .324, his batting average is up from .275 to .338.

Markakis is swinging a little more (about 3 percent more often than in 2017) and missing a little less (though he has had years when he has missed less often), so it's more about swinging at the right pitches. His swing rate on 0-0 and 1-0 counts, for example, is up 5.3 percent. Still, he's always had pretty good plate discipline, and that has remained intact. As you might have expected, however, his launch angle has increased, from 8.6 percent on average to 13.0 percent. More fly balls equals more home runs. We'll see if he can keep it going -- and maybe even make his first All-Star team.

By the way, as Joe Posnanski recently wrote, Markakis has a chance at 3,000 hits. He's at 2,099, and if he ages well, it could happen. That's what durability and a .288 career average can do. (As Joe pointed out, Johnny Damon was in basically the same position and faltered at the end.) Is Markakis a Hall of Fame player? Of course not. But what if he does get to 3,000?

Home run of the day: Do you want to see Aaron Judge hit a home run off Craig Kimbrel? Of course you do:

It's OK if you smile, Aaron. After all, Statcast clocked that home run at 117.0 mph, making it the hardest-hit ball Kimbrel has allowed since tracking began in 2015.

By the way, the most impressive thing about the Yankees' streak is the teams they're beating. If you weight each game individually, the average win percentage of their opponents is .564, or the equivalent of a 91-win team.

No-hitter and strikeout follow-up: Two pieces to point your attention to:

The Year of Near No-hitters

On Tuesday, James Paxton threw the third no-hitter of the young season. If it seems like you've also heard about a new near no-no on a daily basis, you aren't imagining things: Baseball is currently...

We didn't have a no-hit bid on Wednesday, but we did have the Angels spinning an 8-0 shutout at Coors Field behind rookie Jaime Barria and three relievers, which is pretty impressive. We had Carlos Carrasco returning to form with 14 strikeouts for Cleveland in a complete-game win

over the Brewers. But maybe no game sums up modern pitching like Nick Pivetta's start for the Phillies against the Giants in an 11-2 thrashing. He went five innings and allowed no runs and no walks with seven K's -- yet somehow managed to throw 96 pitches. That's how we get the parade of relievers.