

Heads-up Tribe, 10-K Carrasco blank Twins

By Jordan Bastian MLB.com @MLBastian

MINNEAPOLIS -- With runs difficult to come by on Wednesday afternoon against the Twins, Jose Ramirez and Rajai Davis elected to force the issue for the Indians.

Ramirez and Davis used their legs to generate a run in the sixth inning, giving Carlos Carrasco all the support he required in a 2-0 victory to wrap up the three-game set at Target Field. Carrasco piled up 10 strikeouts and Cleveland left with consecutive series wins on its trek through Detroit and the Twin Cities.

"The hits and runs were hard to come by," Davis said. "To scrounge out one was the difference today."

Carrasco overpowered Minnesota's lineup for the American League Central-leading Indians (59-48), but the Tribe struggled to get anything going with lefty Adalberto Mejia on the mound. Following five shutout frames by the Twins starter, Davis and Ramirez pulled off a unique play that initially looked like a double steal of second and home.

When the smoke cleared, there were no official steals on the play, but it was nonetheless effective. Cleveland then tacked one unearned insurance run against closer Fernando Rodney in the ninth to help seal the road to the win column.

Davis and Ramirez got things rolling with consecutive one-out singles off reliever Matt Magill in the sixth. On Ramirez's hit to right field, Davis sprinted to third, putting runners on the corners with slugger Edwin Encarnacion at the plate.

Ramirez was off and running for second on the first pitch.

"I was just focused on trying to get to second base," Ramirez said via team translator Will Clements. "I didn't think the catcher was going to make the throw, because everybody knows that Davis is really quick at third base."

Catcher Mitch Garver came up firing out of the crouch to second baseman Ehire Adrianza, who gloved the ball and slapped down a tag as Ramirez slid headfirst into the base. As soon as the ball was in flight to second, Davis broke for the plate, beating the throw back to Garver to score the Tribe's first run.

"I'm just reading. Obviously, we read right," Davis said. "I'm waiting for the catcher to make the first move. Catcher made his move, so I made mine."

Ramirez was called out on the play, but Indians manager Terry Francona challenged the ruling. Had the All-Star third baseman been deemed safe, Davis would have added a steal of home to his impressive baserunning portfolio. Replays clearly showed Adrianza tagging Ramirez's left spike before the runner reached the base and the out call was confirmed after a 44-second review.

Technicalities aside, that proved to be the decisive moment in the win.

"Raj did a really good job," Francona said. "Because, at times, we have communication where the guy at third goes and, at times, we don't. With Jose getting thrown out there, that had a chance to be not good. So, I thought Raj did a terrific job on going on that ball. If we come up empty there, that's not good."

Working with little margin for error, Carrasco shouldered 7 1/3 innings, scattering four hits along the way. The big righty set down the first 11 batters he faced to open his outing and only once allowed a runner to reach third. Carrasco struck out 10, issued no walks and improved to 13-5 with a 3.66 ERA with the win.

"He was outstanding," Indians shortstop Francisco Lindor said. "He went fastball and he attacked the hitters. When he threw off it, he kept them off-balance. He was located in. He was locating outside. His offspeed, if he wanted to bounce it, he'd bounce it. And if he wanted to throw it for a strike, he was going to do that."

"He was very effective today. It's pretty scary if you've got a guy like that."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Giving Brad a hand: With a runner on first in the eighth, the Indians turned to All-Star lefty Brad Hand. The Twins countered with pinch-hitter Robbie Grossman, who fouled off five pitches en route to an 11-pitch walk. Minnesota then called upon recently acquired Logan Forsythe, who pulled a pitch from Hand sharply into the hole on the left side. Lindor made a sliding backhanded grab, spun and got a throw off in time to second baseman Erik Gonzalez to start a critical 6-4-3 double play. Hand then held the Twins in check in the ninth for his 26th save (second with Indians).

"I know he was going to try to pull the ball, so I shaded more towards my right side," Lindor said. "As soon as he hit it, I knew I had a chance. I just dived to stay underneath the baseball and it was just a matter of going to second. I know Gonzo has really quick hands and a good arm to first. I knew we had him."

Hand thought it was a hit off the bat.

"It was unbelievable," Hand said. "I thought it was getting through. Just to knock it down there would have been a good play to not let the run score. To be able to get two in that situation is huge."

Hand earns 5-out save

Triple threat: After Carrasco struck out both Jake Cave and Adrianza to begin the sixth inning, veteran Joe Mauer roped a pitch into the right-field corner and legged out a triple. It marked only the second triple in the past 252 games for Mauer. Pitching coach Carl Willis jogged out for a quick mound visit with Carrasco, who escaped the jam by striking out Eddie Rosario. That marked the pitcher's 10th strikeout, giving him four double-digit showings this year and 19 in his career.

"Two outs. He got a triple right there and I was going to face Rosario," Carrasco said. "I think he's one of the best right now in baseball. I just tried to strike him out or get a ground ball, but I don't want that run. Those guys play hard for me, so I don't want that run coming in. So, I thought we did a great job right there, the way [catcher Yan Gomes] called those pitches."

SOUND SMART

Carrasco now has three career games with at least 10 strikeouts and no walks. That puts him into a tie with CC Sabathia, Sam McDowell and Sonny Siebert for the second-most outings of that kind in Indians history. Tribe ace Corey Kluber holds the franchise record with 10 such games.

UP NEXT

Following a team off-day on Thursday, the Indians and Angels will open a three-game set at Progressive Field with a 7:10 p.m. ET tilt on Friday night. Righty Mike Clevinger (7-7, 3.43 ERA) is slated to start for the Tribe and newly acquired center fielder Leonys Martin is expected to be in the starting lineup. Los Angeles will counter with righty Jaime Barria (6-7, 3.74 ERA).

Team-first Kipnis relieved to stay at second base

By Jordan Bastian MLB.com @MLBastian

MINNEAPOLIS -- Jason Kipnis could not help but hear the various trade rumors involving the Indians over the past couple of weeks. When he would walk into a clubhouse, MLB Network was usually on one of the televisions. When he opened Twitter, names of possible targets for the Tribe were on his feed.

"It's hard not to see it," Kipnis said. "Even without looking for it, it's in our face."

But Chris Antonetti, the Indians' president of baseball operations, did not want Kipnis to be blindsided by any of the team's decisions. That is why Antonetti sat down with the veteran second baseman a couple of weeks ago to discuss the situation. Antonetti also wanted to know if Kipnis -- as he did last season -- would be willing to move to center field if an opportunity arose to add an impact infielder.

Kipnis was willing to make the switch, but that scenario is no longer in play. When the 4 p.m. ET non-waiver Trade Deadline passed on Tuesday afternoon, the Indians had acquired center fielder Leonys Martin from the Tigers to address the need for outfield help. Kipnis could stay put at second base, which was the team's preference all along.

"To Kip's credit, he was incredible with it," Antonetti said. "He said, 'Hey, I care most about being part of a winning team that wins the World Series, and whatever I can do to help that -- whether that's play second base or play the outfield -- I'd be willing to do. So, if you can get a player who helps us, I'll play wherever I can contribute and help the team.'"

"That allowed us to explore a lot of options. In the end, none of those options came to fruition, so Kip is going to continue to play second base for us, and we're really happy about that."

Back when Antonetti met with Kipnis, there were rumblings that the Indians had inquired about Texas third baseman Adrian Beltre. Brian Dozier (traded by the Twins to the Dodgers) and Asdrubal Cabrera (traded by the Mets to the Phillies) were also linked to the Tribe. Before superstar Manny Machado went from the Orioles to the Dodgers, Cleveland was also rumored to be in the mix on that front.

If the Indians would have acquired a third baseman -- that is where Machado would have fit, given Francisco Lindor's presence at shortstop -- All-Star third baseman Jose Ramirez could have moved to second. Ramirez was at that position down the stretch last season, playing into Kipnis' move to center.

"[Antonetti] came to me earlier about, when I think Machado was still in play," Kipnis said. "And he said, 'We have no tires spinning yet, but I just wanted to run it by you, about if that were to happen, and maybe moving back to center.' I said, 'If you get Machado, yeah, I'll play center.' That's been the culture in here for a while. Guys doing anything that it takes to win."

Indians manager Terry Francona said Antonetti's approach to the matter probably played into Kipnis being open-minded about a position switch.

"In the end, we really did want to keep him where he was," Francona said. "There's obviously a lot of ways to go, but I think we felt like we're a better team keeping him where he is. And I also think part of maybe Kip's willingness is Chris' honesty with him. I don't know if you see too many front-office guys that are willing to sit down in the food room and talk to a guy. And I think that goes a long way."

After the news landed that the Indians acquired Martin, Kipnis did feel a sense of a relief.

"A little bit, yeah," Kipnis said. "It's what I've been doing all year, so there's [comfort there]. Oddly enough, we're getting closer to finally getting my legs underneath me. They haven't even been there all year. Still, there's been a bunch of scar tissue hanging around in my hamstrings and stuff and I haven't had a high gear."

"So, I think I finally had to buckle down even more on them once that center field idea came up again. I was like, 'Oh, crap, I better get a headstart on some of this other stuff.' So, I think even though there's times where there's been some bumps in the road so far at second -- we'll put it that way -- I think I've got some good baseball ahead of me coming up."

Martin arrives; 'really happy' to be with Indians

By Jordan Bastian MLB.com @MLBastian

MINNEAPOLIS -- Leonys Martin was in Miami on Monday, using the Tigers' off-day to spend some time at home. When the center fielder traveled back to Detroit one day later, his phone buzzed shortly after he stepped off the plane with plans of heading to the West Coast with his teammates.

Instead, Martin was needed in Minnesota. He had been traded to the Indians.

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"As soon as I landed, I got a phone call," Martin said. "My agent called me and said, 'This is going to happen.' I'm really happy to be here, man. I have to thank the Detroit Tigers organization for giving me the opportunity to be part [of their team]."

Martin arrived in Minneapolis late on Tuesday night and joined the American League Central-leading Tribe for Wednesday's game against the Twins. Prior to the non-waiver Trade Deadline, Cleveland reeled in the center fielder, along with Minor League pitcher Kyle Dowdy, in exchange for shortstop prospect Willi Castro.

In order to clear room on the active roster, the Indians optioned rookie outfielder Greg Allen to Triple-A Columbus.

With the Indians, Martin will handle the bulk of the innings in center field, splitting time with veteran Rajai Davis. The addition boosts Cleveland's outfield defensive and provides the lower-third of the lineup with a left-handed batter that has excelled against right-handed pitching (113 wRC+) this season.

Indians manager Terry Francona sat down with Martin on Wednesday morning to welcome him to the club and go over the plans.

"I just kind of told him how I view it and that he's going to play a lot -- certainly against righties," Francona said. "And there's probably going to be some lefties that he faces. But, I want he and Raj to complement each other. He comes with a really good reputation of being a good team-first guy, good in the clubhouse. So, we're kind of excited to get him going."

Martin was excited to get started with his new team, too.

"It's amazing to be here," Martin said. "This is the type of team you have to fight through nine innings [against], especially facing the pitchers. It's one of the best pitching [stuffs] in the league, one of the best five-man rotations in the league. It's really tough, especially when you play in the same division. But, now I have an opportunity to be here."

Martin cracked a smile.

"And I don't have to face them anymore," he added. "So, that's amazing. They went to the World Series a couple years ago. They have a lot of good, young guys who want to play baseball and veteran guys. I think we can do it. I came here to help."

Worth noting

- Indians relief ace Andrew Miller (60-day disabled list, right knee) completed back-to-back rehab appearances with Triple-A Columbus on Monday and Tuesday. In 1 2/3 innings combined, Miller faced the minimum, logged 20 pitches (15 strikes) and struck out two batters.

Francona, pitching coach Carl Willis and the team's medical staff will now discuss the next step with Miller. That could be a multi-inning rehab outing or coming off the DL for Friday's game against the Angels.

"If anybody misses him, it's me," Francona said. "Because, I know what he can do when we get him on a roll. That starts to get exciting. We saw what the addition of [Brad] Hand and [Adam] Cimber can do. You add Andrew, it has a chance to get exciting."

- Right-hander Josh Tomlin (10-day DL, right hamstring) felt good on Wednesday morning -- a day after throwing a simulated game at Target Field. He is now scheduled to start a Minor League rehab assignment on Friday and will log multi-inning outings throughout the stint.

"He's so easy to work with that we want to get his input," Francona said. "But, the idea behind it is to pitch enough to use all your pitches, but not pitch too much where, if something happens [with the MLB pitching staff], you're four days away from being available."

Jones homers twice for Lake County

- Indians No. 2 prospect Nolan Jones went deep twice -- the first two-homer game of his career -- for Class A Lake County. Jones, who finished 3-for-4, hit solo blasts in the fourth and sixth innings to bring his season total to 16.

Carlos Carrasco strikes out 10 in 7 1/3 innings as Cleveland Indians blank Twins, 2-0

By Paul Hoynes

MINNEAPOLIS -- If Terry Francona has said it once, he's said it a thousand times since he became manager of the Indians in 2013.

The saying goes like this: "At the end of the day, we just want to be one run better than the other team."

For much of Wednesday's 2-0 win over the Twins, the Indians were exactly one run better than Minnesota. In fact, they owned the only run of the game until they scored again in the ninth on a Yan Gomes' single, but it was the first run that made all the difference because of the way Carlos Carrasco (13-5, 3.66) pitched.

There were other elements involved in the win, such as the daring baserunning of Rajai Davis and Jose Ramirez and a clutch double play started by Francisco Lindor and turned by Erik Gonzalez. But it started with Carrasco, who threw 7 1/3 scoreless innings with 10 strikeouts and no walks.

"I thought Carlos was terrific," Francona. "He made them respect his fastball. . .once they have to respect his velocity, then he spins (his breaking balls) like that, it's pretty good."

Carrasco retired 14 straight before Jorge Polanco singled with two out in the fourth. He struck out the side in the sixth to give him 10 strikeouts for the day. No. 10 was a big one.

Joe Mauer, with two out, tripled into the right field corner. Carrasco, working with the 1-0 lead, stranded Mauer by striking out Eddie Rosario. The Twins left fielder came into the game with six homers and 11 RBI against the Indians this season.

Carrasco said he struck out Rosario on a curveball.

"After the strikeout, he told me he was waiting for a slider," said Carrasco. "I think this was the first time I threw a curveball, just kind of down in the dirt. That's what Gomer (catcher Yan Gomes) went to."

The Indians took the 1-0 lead in the sixth on some gutsy baserunning by Davis and Ramirez.

Davis singled off Polanco's glove at shortstop with one out. Ramirez singled to right to send Davis to third. The Indians had the ideal runners on base for a double steal. Davis entered the game with 16 steals and Ramirez with 25.

Ramirez, with Edwin Encarnacion at the plate, broke for second. As soon as he left, Davis headed for home. Catcher Mitch Garver threw to second, where Polanco tagged the foot of Ramirez as he slid past him.

Polanco turned and threw home, but Davis was already sliding across the plate. The Indians challenged the out call at second base, but replay confirmed that Ramirez was out. It's just the fourth time in 29 attempts that Ramirez has been thrown out.

Terry Francona on Carlos Carrasco, Rajai Davis, Brad Hand

Davis said his key to run was Garver.

"I'm waiting for the catcher to make the first move," he said. "Yeah (the catcher is the key). Catcher made his move, so I made mine."

Encarnacion followed with a double, but Leonys Martin, pinch-hitting for Brandon Guyer in his first appearance as an Indian, flied out to center.

Carrasco, 5-0 in his last six starts, allowed four hits. His double-digit strikeout game was his fourth of the season as he avenged losses to the Twins on June 1 and June 16.

Brad Hand, working for the second straight day, relieved Carrasco with one out and one on in the eighth. He walked Robbie Grossman, but induced newly acquired Logan Forsythe to hit a smash to short. Lindor made a stop, whirled and threw to Gonzalez at second, who made a great turn to get Forsythe at first and end the inning.

Hand finished the game for his second American League save and 26th overall. Hand, a Minneapolis native, was pitching in front of family and friends.

"It was unbelievable," said Hand of the double play. "I thought it was getting through. Just to knock it down there would have been a good play. To be able to get two (outs) in that situation is huge."

The Indians had their chances against lefty Alberto Mejia, who started on short notice after scheduled starter Lance Lynn was traded to the Yankees on Monday. Gonzalez singled and Lindor walked with one out in the third, but Davis grounded into a double play.

In the fourth, Encarnacion walked and Guyer was hit by a pitch with one out. Yonder Alonso sent a liner to right that Max Kepler caught with a dive. He got to his feet and threw to second to double up Encarnacion, who had strayed way off the bag.

Mejia, in just his fourth appearance and third start of the year, threw five scoreless innings. He allowed one hit, walked three and hit a batter.

What it means

Carrasco's double-digit strikeout game Wednesday was the 19th of his career.

The pitches

Mejia threw 74 pitches, 45 (61 percent) for strikes. Carrasco threw 101 pitches, 72 (71 percent) for strikes.

New guy makes good

Martin, who made his Indians debut by pinch-hitting for Guyer in the sixth, started the ninth with a single. He advanced to third on Polanco's error and scored on Gomes broken-bat single to center.

Thanks for coming

The Indians and Twins drew 29,261 to Target Field on Wednesday afternoon. First pitch was at 1:10 p.m. with a temperature of 73 degrees.

Next

The Indians are off Thursday before opening a seven-game homestand on Friday when the Angels visit for a three-game series. The Indians will start Mike Clevinger (7-7, 3.43), Corey Kluber (13-6, 2.76) and Shane Bieber (5-2, 4.73). The Angels are scheduled to start Jamie Barria (6-7, 3.74), Felix Pena (1-2, 5.23) and Tyler Skaggs (8-7, 3.34).

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Cleveland Indians Greg Allen learning to cope with 'the process' of baseball

By Paul Hoynes

MINNEAPOLIS - Baseball is hard game to play and handle.

The Indians activated Shane Bieber on July 24. To make room on the 25-man roster, Yandy Diaz was optioned to Class AAA Columbus even though he was hitting .500 (7-for-14).

On Tuesday night rookie center fielder Greg Allen had one of the best game of his short big-league career - three hits and three runs in a 6-2 win over the Twins. After the game manager Terry Francona and bench coach Brad Mills told Allen he was going back to Columbus to make room for newly acquired center fielder Leonys Martin.

In the long run good performances, like good deeds, probably don't go unrewarded. But baseball is certainly not a game built on immediate gratification.

The move didn't catch Allen by surprise. Every baseball player can do roster math in his head faster than any pocket calculator. When it was announced the Indians had acquired Martin from the Tigers before Tuesday's 4 p.m. trading deadline, Allen knew he was on the outside looking in as soon as Martin was activated.

"You're aware of it," said Allen. "Especially during the tradeline. A lot of things are going on, not only with your team, but with other teams as well. Really, I just came in here today trying to focus and help the team win today."

Said Francona, "We talked to him after the game and explained to him what was going on. I think he kind of knew, but we wanted to talk to him because he's certainly a kid we think highly of. I wanted to make sure he understood that and nothing gets in the way of his development because he has a chance to be an everyday center fielder for us."

Ballplayers aren't built in a day. Early in the season, Allen had trouble bunting in sacrifice situations. In the third inning Tuesday night, Roberto Perez hit a leadoff double and Allen advanced him to third with a bunt down the first baseline that he turned into a hit because of his speed.

"A lot of time and effort has been spent on refining that tool more than anything," said Allen. "There are so many ways you can impact the game. It doesn't always have to be a big hit. You just want to find ways to do the little things right and getting bunts down was definitely one of those things I wanted to focus on and be more efficient at."

Allen leaves the Tribe hitting .224 (33-for-147) with four doubles, two triples, one homer and five RBI. He's six-for-six stealing bases and has scored 17 runs in 47 games.

The switch-hitter is batting .289 (44-for-152) with 12 doubles, one homer and 10 RBI at Columbus. He's scored 27 runs and stolen 12 bases in 17 attempts.

Allen has already bounced between Cleveland and the Class AAA Columbus four times this year. He is a young guy with options and is usually the first to go when a move has to be made.

"It's a process, but you understand the nature of things," said Allen. "That's how these things work sometimes. But you do the best you can and focus on the here and now wherever you may be."

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Cleveland Indians Trade Scribbles: What they got, what they gave up - Terry Pluto

By Terry Pluto, The Plain Dealer

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Scribbles in my Cleveland Indians notebook as the trading deadline comes to an end.

1. The Tribe gave up Francisco Mejia, Will Castro, Connor Capel and Jhon Torres. Mejia is considered an elite prospect and he could end up being a regular catcher for the San Diego Padres. Baseball America and some other scouting outlets like Castro, but his future may be as an utility infielder. Torres and Capel are prospects in the low minors, and not on most lists of top 30 Tribe prospects for 2018.
2. I'm starting these notes with what the Indians gave up, because that's important. The only name that should give anyone pause is Mejia. He was the team's top rated prospect. But Mejia brought closer Brad Hand and useful side-arming reliever Adam Cimber. Hand is under contract through the 2021 season. Cimber is a rookie.
3. So the Indians will have Hand and Cimber around for several seasons. They still need more bullpen help in 2019, but this deal helped the Indians in 2018 and next year.
4. Relievers Cody Allen and Andrew Miller are headed for free agency. Rarely have the Indians re-signed a notable player once he comes to the end of his free agent season. That's why Hand and Cimber are so important. They are two arms to rebuild the bullpen.
5. The Indians traded Castro to Detroit for Leonys Martin, an elite defensive center-fielder. He can't be a free agent until after the 2019 season. As I recently wrote, this was a very useful trade for the Tribe.
- 6 The most intriguing move is a small deal with the Cardinals. The Indians sent Torres and Capel to St. Louis for Oscar Mercado. Torres is 18 years old and playing in the Arizona Summer League. He batting .273 (.776 OPS) with four HR and 16 RBI. Maybe he becomes a big leaguer, but he's years away.
7. Capel is 21 years old, batting .261 (.743 OPS) with six HR and 44 RBI for Class A Lynchburg. He hit 22 HR at Class A Lake County in 2017. He does have some power. It's possible he could make the majors. The point is, they gave up Torres and Capel who are in Class A for a promising prospect knocking on the door.
8. It has taken Mercado five years to find himself as a player worthy of being taken in the second round of the 2013 draft. But the 23-year-old is doing that right now. He's batting .285 (.759 OPS) with eight HR and 42 RBI. He is 31-of-39 in stolen bases. He's stolen at least 31 bases in each of the last four seasons.

9. As Tribe president Chris Antonetti said of Mercado: "He's a very athletic player. He's transitioned from shortstop to center field a couple of years ago and really made that transition well. We think he's an above average defender with above-average speed. He adds a good option for us in the near-term at the Major League level."

10. Mercado never hit above .254 and showed little power in his first four minor league seasons. But in 2017, he became a full-time center fielder and hit .287 (.769 OPS) with 13 HR and 46 RBI for Class AA Springfield. He also stole 38 bases. And he has continued to hit well in Class AAA this season.

11. ESPN's Keith Law wrote of Mercado: "He has become an above-average defender in center and a much better hitter, showing occasional pop and making more frequent contact. He's very instinctive in center, making up for average at-best speed. I really like his swing and think he could hit 35 doubles with double-digit homers."

12. It's odd Law considers Mercado speed to be "average at best." But it's encouraging that Mercado is becoming a productive hitter. The Indians are desperate for young outfielders as Bradley Zimmer (shoulder surgery) and Tyler Naquin (hip problems) are dealing with significant injuries. Having Mercado, Martin and Greg Allen (at Class AAA Columbus) available for this season and beyond is a huge plus.

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New RubberDucks pitcher Kyle Dowdy excited to join Indians organization

by ABJ/Ohio.com correspondent

Right-handed pitcher Kyle Dowdy arrived at Canal Park on Wednesday with a smile that is probably still on his face.

The final piece of a trade that sent RubberDucks shortstop Willi Castro to the Detroit Tigers for center fielder Leonys Martin, Dowdy said he is happy to be with the Ducks and ecstatic to forward his career.

While that sounds cliché, Dowdy really is excited to be a part of the Indians organization.

"It's really an honor to be included [in the deal] and to join this incredible organization and the minds here," Dowdy said. "Everybody I've run into here are class acts. They're supportive of you and want to make you the best."

A spot starter for the Erie SeaWolves and Toledo Mud Hens, Dowdy headlined 14 of the 24 games he appeared in for the Tigers organization.

The Ducks have already told him he'll take Matt Whitehouse's spot in the rotation with his first start coming Friday.

"It's incredible to have a role, know your role and know what's expected of you in that role," Dowdy said. "To know that every fifth day, I'm going out there and give everything I have is great."

Dowdy, 25, has already hit the ground running and is picking the brain of everybody in the organization.

That includes Ducks pitching coach Rigo Beltran, who is looking forward to honing Dowdy's fastball, curveball, cutter and changeup.

"I'm excited to have him," Beltran said. "Just talking to him, he seems like a really smart kid with a lot of ability. He's hungry to learn. I know there's a lot of things in this organization that he hasn't been exposed to in Detroit. I think it's going to be a mutual relationship where both parties are going to build upon."

"Just looking at his videos, his numbers and how's he's trending, I'm really excited to be a part of his development and to help become a major leaguer."

Dowdy isn't coming into the organization blind either. He appeared in 13 games for Erie this season and pitched 1⅓ innings against the RubberDucks on May 13, earning a save in a spotless performance.

He played with Andrew Calica, Bradley Zimmer and Greg Allen in summer ball during high school and has trained with others in the organization in college.

What has Dowdy even more excited is the prospect of playing for an organization that is solid from top to bottom.

With the Indians atop the American League Central and the Ducks running away with the Eastern League Western Division, a look through the minor leagues shows Mahoning Valley leading the New-York Penn Pinckney Division and Columbus, Lynchburg and Lake County in the mix of their respective leagues.

"It's incredible," Dowdy said. "You have Akron, who is leading. You've got Columbus who is in the hunt, and you have the Indians, who are leading. You go out there every day and it's, 'OK. We're going out there to compete and to win. We know that the end of the season, we'll be there the last couple of games. If we do what we're supposed to do, we'll be competing for a championship.'"

Roster moves

Right-handed reliever Dominic DeMasi was promoted to Columbus to make room for Dowdy. Infielder Alexis Pantoja and right-handed pitcher James Karinchak have been received from Lynchburg. Reliever Mitch Brown was placed on the seven-day disabled list (right hand blister).

Hot Rods roll by Captains; four promoted to Lynchburg

By David Glasier, The News-Herald

As regards the game that was played Aug. 1 at Classic Park, suffice to write it went far better for the visitors from Kentucky than the home team.

Putting up seven runs in the top of the first inning, the Bowling Green Hot Rods raced to a 13-4 victory over the Captains.

Lake County starter and eventual loser Juan Hillman (3-11, 5.82 ERA) had the kind of outing best filed and forgotten.

The 21-year-old left-hander from Florida did not make it out of the first inning. He faced eight batters, retired only one of them, and had given up four runs when Captains manager Luke Carlin came to the mound and made the call to the bullpen for Maiker Manzanillo.

The Hot Rods had scored three more runs in the top of the first by the time they finally were retired. All seven runs were charged to Hillman, whose roller-coaster season hit another low point.

Bowling Green added two runs in the top of the second and on more in the top of the fourth to take a 10-0 lead before Captains third baseman Nolan Jones got his team on the board in the bottom of the fourth with the first of his two solo home runs. Jones connected again in the bottom of the sixth. He has 16 home runs, tied for team lead with Will Benson, and a team-high 49 RBI. Jose Vicente followed Jones' solo blast in the bottom of the sixth with his 11th round-tripper.

Carlin lamented the early struggles that put his team in such a deep hole but credited his hitters for the battles they won against Bowling Green starter and winner Tommy Romero (8-3, 2.74 ERA) and two relievers.

"That's a good team," Carlin said of the Hot Rods. The Tampa Bay affiliate won the first-half title in the Midwest League's Eastern Division and is 70-38 overall. Bowling Green is 11-3 in the season series with the Captains.

Lake County slipped to 17-21 in the second half, 46-61 overall.

On a decidedly more upbeat note, before the game Carlin had the pleasure of telling four of his players they had earned promotions to the advanced Single-A Lynchburg (Va.) Hillcats.

Making the move up were infielder Tyler Friis (.279, three home runs, 24 RBI), outfielder Austen Wade (.269, two home runs, 16 RBI), right-handed relief pitcher Nick Sandlin (0-0, 1.74 ERA) and left-handed reliever Kyle Nelson (3-1, 0.76 ERA, seven saves).

Friis and Wade both have battled back from injuries that had them on the disabled list.

"Getting to that next level is really important," Carlin said. "It's an honor to share that moment with guys who've worked hard and are deserving of the promotion."

Indians 5, Clippers 4 | Adam Plutko's chances have been limited lately

Adam Plutko arguably is the best starting pitcher in the International League and without question Cleveland's sixth-best starter, but at the moment the right-hander is in baseball limbo.

The Indians could give him the hurry-up call to the big leagues any day, or he could be parked with the Clippers until teams are permitted to expand their rosters from 25 to 40 players on Sept. 1.

Plutko gave up five hits and two runs and struck out four in 4 1/3 innings while being limited to 75 pitches or less in the Clippers' 5-4 loss to the Indianapolis Indians on Wednesday night before 7,767 at Huntington Park.

The Clippers (56-52) lost the second of three games in the series and fell 3½ games behind Indianapolis (60-49) in the International League West.

Because Shane Bieber has claimed the No. 5 spot in Cleveland's rotation, Plutko has been limited in July to two starts totaling 10 innings with the Clippers, and five innings in the major leagues.

"I'm just trying to stay as sharp as possible and ease back into an extended pitch count," Plutko said. "It's a tough spot throwing only 15 innings in all of July. That's what some relievers do, but I'm not complaining one bit. If the phone rings, I have to be ready."

Plutko has had the best season of his professional life. He is 4-2 in 41 2/3 innings in nine games with Cleveland, and 5-3 with a 1.96 ERA in 12 starts for the Clippers.

Indianapolis got two hits off Plutko the first four innings, but Jerrick Suiter led off the fifth with a single and Erich Weiss followed with a double before Max Moroff hit a two-run double with one out.

"Going 2-and-0 to a guy who has had a lot of success in the big leagues in Moroff was a tough recipe," Plutko said. "That pitch was right down the middle. It just didn't work out. Sometimes he pops that pitch up in the infield and I get another hitter."

Triple-A rookie outfielder Connor Marabell extended his hitting streak to nine games with a double in the ninth off a 98-mph fastball, but his tenure with the club could be short-lived with Greg Allen being sent down by Cleveland and Oscar Mercado being acquired in a trade with St. Louis.

Marabell, 24, was a 25th-round draft choice out of Jacksonville in 2015, but he is playing like a high-round pick with his bat, legs and glove.

"I am a better player than a 25th-round player, but that's the way the draft goes sometimes," he said. "I've tried to get better every single day with my craft. I've been sticking with my routine. I try to go to the (batter's) box with confidence. I'm really competitive and don't like making outs."

He earned the promotion batting .295 with 11 homers and 59 RBI in 83 games for Akron.

"It was really surprising for me getting called up to Columbus," he said. "I thought I'd finish the year with Akron. This has been an opportunity."

Covering the Bases: Game 107 by Jordan Bastian

FIRST: The Indians have gone down this relief road before, but the addition of Brad Hand has once again illuminated the reality of life within Cleveland's bullpen under manager Terry Francona.

There are no set innings for pitchers. Cody Allen and Hand—and Andrew Miller when he rejoins the cast of late-inning arms—will be leveraged based on situations and matchups.

"It makes sense. You're matching up," Hand said. "You don't see it done very often. Usually, guys stick to their roles, but he's putting us in the best situations to succeed. We're all fine pitching in whatever the situation is."

Look no further the last two days in the Twin Cities.

On Tuesday night, Hand took over with one out and a runner on base in the seventh with Cleveland holding a 5–2 lead. The reason? The Twins had reached the left-heavy top of the lineup. Hand recorded four outs across the seventh and eighth, paving the way for Cody Allen, who worked 1.1 innings to close things out.

For Wednesday's win, Hand followed Carlos Carrasco in the eighth, inheriting a one-one, one-out jam in a 1–0 game. With the help of some slick defense by shortstop Francisco Lindor, Hand sidestepped the harm of a walk with an inning-ending double play. Then, the lefty worked the ninth and picked up the save.

Side note: Hand worked 10 multi-inning outings with the Padres before joining the Indians this season, so it's nothing new for him. What is different is logging at least four outs in consecutive games on back-to-back days. Francona has never used Allen for multi-inning outings two days in a row.

Allen and Miller have had a similar arrangement in season's past—most notably throughout the Tribe's 2016 run to the World Series. For this system to work, there is one critical component.

"First and foremost," Allen said, "you have to have the personnel that's able to do it, and we've been very fortunate here for a number of years to have a lot of guys down there that can handle multiple situations. ... To have a weapon like Brad to be able to come in at any point and either diffuse a rally or get through certain guys to set up perfectly for the later innings, it gives everybody a chance to maximize their abilities."

And what if Miller returns healthy and fully operational?

"That starts to get exciting," Francona said.

Miller logged back-to-back outings on Monday and Tuesday with Triple-A Columbus, facing five batters with no hiccups. The lefty struck out two and fired 20 pitches (15 strikes). Francona was eager to talk to Miller on Wednesday to start planning the next step.

There are two options.

Option 1: A multi-inning rehab appearance

Option 2: Come off the DL on Friday

Stay tuned.

In the meantime, Francona, pitching coach Carl Willis and the front office will have to sort out the tough decision that's potentially looming for the bullpen. Barring an unexpected development (see: a pitcher lands on the DL), someone in the 'pen likely has some bad news coming.

"That'll be very tough," Francona said of the team's decision.

During a season in which Cleveland has used 22 players in relief, at least the club is facing the kind of tough call that fits into the good-problem-to-have category. With Hand and sidearmer Adam Cimber in the fold, and Miller on the cusp of a comeback, the revolving door that has been the Tribe bullpen has a decreasing spin rate.

SECOND: After Wednesday's win, Jose Ramirez shifted into his street clothes and slipped into a pair of cheetah-print shoes.

"They look fast," quipped a reporter.

"Expensive, too," Ramirez replied via team translator Will Clements.

In the sixth inning, Ramirez's speed played a role in the Tribe scratching across the run that proved to be the difference. With Rajai Davis on third and slugger Edwin Encarnacion up, Ramirez sprinted from first to second.

On Ramirez's previous two steals in the series, the Twins opted not to throw. The Twins decided to go for it this time.

"We were going to throw through with one out," Twins manager Paul Molitor told reporters, "understanding they had speed over at third base at that stage of the game. I wasn't going to give him a free base."

Davis was waiting for the moment the baseball left the fingertips of catcher Mitch Garver.

"I'm waiting for the catcher to make the first move," Davis said. "Catcher made his move, so I made mine. ... [I go] as soon as the ball's in the air. For me. You could go when he cocks back, you know? But, that's risky."

Davis paused and smirked.

"Vegas," he added.

Minnesota's gamble paid off in the form of an out at second base. Second baseman Ehire Adrianza gloved the throw from Garver and got the tag on Ramirez's left spike. After the play, Francona challenged the out, but the ruling was confirmed.

Davis' gamble paid off in the form of a run. Adrianza did all he could to fire the ball back to Garver, but the Tribe's veteran outfielder was already sliding across the plate.

"That was the game-winning run right there," Indians shortstop Francisco Lindor said. "Raj was aware. They haven't thrown every time Josey steals second. But, he was aware that they're probably going to throw this time."

Or, as Davis put it...

"I'm just reading. I'm reading," he said. "Obviously, we read right."

Technically, there were no stolen bases on this play. Ramirez was caught and Davis' sprint goes down as advancing on a fielder's choice in the fine print. That said, let's take a moment to appreciate what Ramirez is doing this year. He is already only the third player in Indians history (joining Grady Sizemore in 2008 and Joe Carter in 1987) to have at least 30 homers and 25 steals. Ramirez is on target to become the first 40/40 man in Cleveland history and only the fifth all-time. The only players in MLB history with at least 40 homers and 40 steals in one year are Alfonso Soriano (2006), Alex Rodriguez (1998), Barry Bonds (1996) and Jose Canseco (1988).

THIRD: Lindor let out a slight laugh after Wednesday's when a Minnesota-based reporter asked for his thoughts on the performance of the Indians' rotation this season.

"That's all I know," said the shortstop. "It's been the same pitching staff since 2016, so that's all I know. I love it."

Against the Twins, Carlos Carrasco continued to do his thing—to the point where his 10-strikeout, no-walk performance was almost yawn-inducing in its dominance. Minnesota never really posed a threat and the big right-hander racked up the punchouts, picked up his 13th win and trimmed his ERA to 3.66 behind 7.1 shutout innings.

"He was very effective today," Lindor said. "It's pretty scary if you've got a guy like that."

Most of the attention this season has been focused on Trevor Bauer, who is in the midst of a breakout showing and ranks second in MLB in WAR (5.3 per Fangraphs). Mike Clevinger and Corey Kluber have 3.1 fWAR apiece, tying them for 11th in MLB. Carrasco, who missed time on the DL, ranks 15th at 2.9.

Overall, the Indians' fWAR from the rotation is second in MLB to only the Astros. The starting staff is 51–31 with a 3.46 ERA and a 3.52 FIP, and that includes the troubles out of the fifth spot early in the year.

Carrasco's 10.1 K/9 ranks 16th among MLB starters, while his 22.5 K-BB% checks in at ninth.

This marked his third career outing with at least 10 strikeouts and zero walks, tying him with CC Sabathia, Sam McDowell and Sonny Siebert for the second-most such games in Cleveland history. Kluber holds the club record with 10 games of that type.

Kluber also holds the franchise record for most games with 10-plus strikeouts and no more than one walk with 31. Carrasco is second with 13 now. Hall-of-Famer Bob Feller ranks third at eight, followed by Sabathia and McDowell (seven each) and Luis Tiant and Dennis Eckersley (six each).

HOME: Shane Bieber, Thomas Pannone and two others headed out to a golf outing a year ago. The Indians Minor Leaguers were not worried about trade rumors. They just wanted to get some holes in on a gorgeous summer afternoon.

Pannone's cell phone rang. The news arrived that he had been traded to the Blue Jays in the deal that brought reliever Joe Smith to Cleveland for the stretch run last summer.

"I was out on the golf course with him when he got the call," Bieber said on Wednesday morning in Minnesota. "We had just started. We didn't finish. We were living together, so our foursome just went back and helped him pack up.

"I'm sure it's a whirlwind. I've never been there, but I can imagine it's a pretty good whirlwind to be traded from the only organization you've been with since you got drafted."

This brings us to Monday night.

Reports surfaced that the Nationals were fielding calls about superstar Bryce Harper and the Indians were one of the teams on the other line. By Tuesday morning, Washington decided to stand pat and Cleveland continued on its path toward acquiring center fielder Leonys Martin.

Jayson Stark of The Athletic reported Wednesday the the Indians and Nationals indeed had "deep conversations" about Harper on the eve of the non-waiver Trade Deadline. Yes, the teams had talks. That much has been confirmed. How "deep" may depend on your definition of that word.

The dialogue was at least to the extent that this bit of information came out late Monday night:

Source: #Indians, #Nats have been in contact regarding Bryce Harper, but Cleveland has thus far refused to include Shane Bieber in any offer.
@MLB @MLBNetwork
—@jonmorosi

Bieber—now a part of an Indians' rotation that lacks in depth behind the MLB group—was not scrolling Twitter throughout the night in search of the latest. He caught wind of the report that the Indians did not want to trade him by Tuesday, but did not put a whole lot of stock into the whole saga.

"There wasn't much reaction, just because there were no legs to it," Bieber said. "It's a pretty cool thing to see. It's always nice to have commitment from the club. The Indians have been nothing but great to me. They're great to everybody in the organization, through and through, from when you first get drafted until when you're with them for however many years.

"All the guys have nothing but high regard for the organization. It's definitely nice to hear, but there wasn't much to it."

"It's not fantasy baseball they're playing." Q&A with Cleveland's Jason Kipnis

by Jordan Bastian

Jason Kipnis took a seat on the back of a couch inside the visitors' clubhouse at Target Field on Tuesday afternoon. As a group of reporters gathered around the veteran second baseman, minutes after the Trade Deadline expired, Kipnis asked the first question.

"What's this about?" Kipnis said with a smirk. "I don't like being ambushed."

The topic at hand was a conversation Kipnis had a couple weeks ago with Chris Antonetti, the team's president of baseball operations. At the time, Cleveland's net was still cast wide—Manny Machado was among the possible trade targets—and Antonetti wanted to discuss the situation with Kipnis.

A year ago, when the Tribe was in the midst of its 22-game winning streak, the club had a good thing going in the infield and a need in the outfield. Kipnis agreed to shift to center field on the fly. Antonetti wanted to know—should the trade talks veered some certain paths—if Kipnis was open to a similar move this year.

Prior to Tuesday's Deadline, the Indians wound up acquiring center fielder Leonys Martin, taking the Kipnis scenario off the table.

"To Kip's credit, he was incredible with it," Antonetti said. "That allowed us to explore a lot of options. In the end, none of those options came to fruition, so Kip is going to continue to play second base for us and we're really happy about that."

Kipnis discussed that situation, his turbulent season and much more in lengthy chat prior to Tuesday's 6–2 win over the Twins. Here are the highlights of the Q&A.

Q: Chris spoke to you a couple weeks ago about the possibility of moving back to the outfield, because at that point the team didn't know how the Trade Deadline would impact the roster, and you were willing to do it. What was your mind-set over the past couple weeks given that uncertainty?

Kipnis: "When you've been here for a while and you know your so-called window and you know you have a playoff team, you want to be part of it in any way possible. And you want the best team they can get, so if the front office is going out and getting the best players to help us, be it a second baseman, be it a bullpen guy, whatever, we'll accommodate. We've seen a lot of guys move around, whether it's Cody and Miller, all those guys, or I did it last year. I would do it again if I thought that a guy was coming in to make us a better team."

Q: Did you pay particularly close attention to the trade rumors this year because of that?

Kipnis: "I've heard them. It's hard not to see it. A little bit, yeah. And before people think that I'm searching my name on Twitter or anything like that, you come into a big-league clubhouse with MLB Network on all day, or when we follow you guys on Twitter or something like that—even without looking for it, it's in our face. So, I've seen them. I knew all about, whether it was Dozier or Cabby, all of these ones, I saw them all come up. We didn't talk about those. (laughs) But, at the same time, I didn't think Chris had to ask me. I think he knew that I've always been about wanting to win here and we'll make it work any way we can."

Q: Did Chris come to you?

Kipnis: "He came to me earlier about, when I think Machado was still in play. And he said, 'We have no tires spinning yet, but I just wanted to run it by you, about if that were to happen, and maybe moving back to center.' I said, 'If you get Machado, yeah, I'll [expletive] play center.' That's been the culture in here for a while. Guys doing anything that it takes to win."

Q: In the past, you've looked at social media a lot. Have you avoided it more this year just because of how the first few months of your season went?

Kipnis: "Oh God, yeah. I had to get away from that. I think I just tweeted about how I've been here for seven years and, fortunately, I've learned how to deal from adversity and I've learned how to deal with whiny adults on social media. (laughs) They're fans. They're passionate. They want what's best for the team. They want their team to win. And, if you're not helping their team win, they'll let you know. And, if you are, they'll also let you know and make you feel better about it. You've got to give them a reason to cheer. But, there's not much good for athletes to be on social media anymore, really, from the standpoint of, there's no way for us to win really any argument or anything like that without stepping on some toes. So, it's just not even worth the energy to go through it or try to respond."

Q: You've been here long enough to see that when the front office makes a splash, it's for players who are under control for a multiple years...

Kipnis: "They're very conscientious of being a small-market team. They do their due diligence. You can tell that they're a smart bunch up there. You see guys in the front office with the Indians go on to be front office people at higher positions of other organizations. So, they do good work here. They might not always bring in the sexy move or anything like that that the fans can rejoice about, but they're going to bring in a good move. I think fans need to realize that it's not fantasy baseball they're playing. There's actually constrictions and money and everything else that's involved. They can't just go ahead and make their superstar lineup like everybody wants."

Q: Does it help the feeling in the clubhouse, especially among the younger players, that this team is trying to win not just this year, but for the foreseeable future?

Kipnis: "The foreseeable future, absolutely. Early on, it wasn't a problem, just because we weren't winning that much in '11 and '12. But, I think when it came to it to see if the front office was on our side and if they would be all in, when the time is right, they've done nothing but prove that they've been all in and they've wanted to capitalize on this window. Yeah, the Indians are going to be winning for a while. They've got a lot of guys still signed. That's why I want them to trade the farm. (laughs) I'm not going to be here for much longer, so I don't know how they're going to do it in years to come, but that's why I want them to give up the whole house to give up everybody! I want to win now! I don't care how they are in four years. I won't be here. (laughs)"

Q: So, you were tweeting from a burner account about the Indians needing to go get Bryce Harper?

Kipnis: "Yeah. (laughs) Why do we not have Harper and Machado? We don't need these prospects. Let's go! It won't affect me!"

Q: Is it a relief that, given the direction they ended up going with trades, you get to stay at second?

Kipnis: "A little bit, yeah. Yeah, because it's what I've been doing all year, so there's the comfortability. Oddly enough, we're getting closer to finally getting my legs underneath me. They haven't even been there all year. Still, there's been a bunch of scar tissue hanging around in my hamstrings and stuff and I haven't had a high gear. So, I think I finally had to buckle down even more on them once that center field idea came up again. I was like, 'Oh, crap, I better get a head start on some of this other stuff.' So, I think even though there's times where there's been some bumps in the road so far at second—we'll put it that way—but I think I've got some good baseball ahead of me coming up."

Q: This is the first time you've mentioned the leg issue. Was not bringing it up earlier a "no excuses" thing?

Kipnis: "Yeah, it's not an excuse for the past. I think it's more of an excitement for me for the future, because I can feel it. Athletes are very in tune to their body. They can tell when stuff's coming around. So, I'm more excited. No, not an excuse at all."

Q: If you would've had to move back to center, how long would that process have taken you?

Kipnis: "Well, let's see, I was on the DL last time and they gave me three days of batting practice to take live and threw me in there, so... (laughs) I wasn't even at full sprints in my DL rehab yet, but they threw me on out there. It wouldn't take too long. Again, a couple days. A couple days."

Q: You did it at Arizona State. Same thing, right?

Kipnis: "Yeah, 'You did it eight years ago, why can't you do it right now?' I can, you've just got to give me a sec. It's like riding a bike. Well, this bike needs to be oiled up and re-chained and everything."

Q: In talking to hitting Ty Van Burkleo a few weeks ago, he said he was pointing out to you that your last 30 days or last several weeks have been much better offensively. How much have you tried to focus on that, rather than getting caught up in the numbers on the scoreboard?

Kipnis: "Sure, because I have been doing better, but then I look up and you're not going to like the line you see no matter what, until maybe the end of the year, when it gets, hopefully, toward .250 or .260. Then, I'm like, 'All right, I've fought my way back out of the big hole I put myself in at the beginning of the year.' But, to me, it's that I've been getting better and I still haven't found it. I still haven't gotten hot. I still haven't gotten comfortable. You still haven't seen me going the other way. And it's a constant battle each day to find it and also to go with what has been working. So, as much as I want to try to find that old swing each day, if I'm going OK, do I want to take that into the game, trying to do the old swing, or do I want to go with what's working? So, it's trying to find a happy medium each day."

NOTE: Entering Wednesday, Kipnis was batting .221/.304/.358 in 97 games overall for Cleveland. The last time his average was below .200 was June 16. In 32 games since that date, the second baseman has hit .283/.373/.500 with six homers, four doubles, a triple, 18 RBI, 15 runs and nearly as many walks (15) as strikeouts (20).

Q: Why do you think it's been such a struggle to find that consistency this year?

Kipnis: "I don't know. I don't know if we just haven't found what the adjustment that we need to make yet is. We've been looking. We've been watching tons of video and we've been working hard to find it, and for some reason, it just hasn't clicked in. Usually, it does. My goal is, whether it's clicked in or not, is to always at least be competitive at the plate and still get some stuff done. Until it does, we'll keep finding it. There's no answer. I don't know."

Q: You mentioned the "so-called window." As we get deeper into the season, is there an increasing sense of urgency in the clubhouse, knowing this could be the last year here for a lot of guys?

Kipnis: "We're getting down the stretch. It'll come back. I think we felt it more in Spring Training when it was talked about and when we knew about it. I think it was more of a topic then than it has been. I think once the season went underway, guys forgot about it. You've got other emotions. Down the stretch, though, I could see it coming up a little bit more, because you don't want to get into October and be like, 'Hey, oh, by the way, this is our last go-around. Hope everyone's been dotting the I's and crossing the T's and making sure. This is our last chance.' It's more of a process. You want to be gaining momentum going into October and you want to be playing your best team baseball. I think you could ask anybody in the clubhouse, we haven't come close to doing that, yet."

Q: Not that anyone would ever go into a game complacent, but when the AL Central is the way it is this year, where you have such a large lead and the division title seems like a foregone conclusion, can that factor into a team's play?

Kipnis: "I think it hurts a little bit. There's are a lot of positives that come from it. We can rest starters. We can rest bullpen guys. We have the luxury of giving Miller all the time he wants. We can give position players rest. There's tons of positives that comes from it. The negative is, when you're down a run or two to someone and maybe that extra urgency isn't there. Like, 'Hey, we've got to come back to win this game,' because if we lose this game, oh no, we're up nine in the division. That's just the way it is. So, I think we've got enough guys in here to make sure that, down the stretch, whether it's somehow creating ways to make it seem more than it is or trying to make it a playoff atmosphere, just do something to get that urgency going and get that ball rolling. I think we'll find a way to do it. But, it's human nature to see that division lead and kind of, not pull off the gas, but just know it's there. There's that cushion."

— JB

Angels drop below .500, again, in 7-2 loss to Rays

By Mike DiGiovanna

If the Angels are to make a late-summer run, if not to make the playoffs to at least make things interesting in the American League wild-card race, they might want to start soon.

They remained stuck in neutral in a 7-2 loss to the Tampa Bay Rays in Tropicana Field on Wednesday night, falling to 54-55 on the season. They're 9 ½ games behind Seattle and now Oakland for the last playoff spot.

Since June 25, the Angels have not strayed more than two games above or below the .500 mark, the very definition of a team spinning its wheels. They've been neither good enough to cut into the wild-card deficit nor bad enough to fall so far back they have no chance.

It appeared the Angels turned a corner last week with four straight wins, scoring 38 runs in those games against the Chicago White Sox and Mariners. They have now lost three in a row, along with catcher Martin Maldonado and second baseman Ian Kinsler, who were traded for prospects in the last week.

They still have enough offense to make a push. Mike Trout could win his third MVP award, Kole Calhoun has been one of the hottest hitters in baseball for a month, Andrelton Simmons is having a solid season, Albert Pujols and Justin Upton have hit well since mid-July, and Shohei Ohtani is back.

The Angels tend to run hot and cold though. They mustered only six hits, none after the sixth inning, struck out 11 times and went one for six with runners in scoring position Wednesday night.

Their starting pitchers, while ranking sixth in the AL with a 4.07 ERA, have produced only 42 quality starts, 11th in the league, and they rank 13th with 566 2/3 innings pitched. That has put a heavy burden on an overworked bullpen that has thrown 407 innings, second to Tampa Bay.

"There are some things that have to fall into place to have that run, but yes, I think we're capable of it," manager Mike Scioscia said. "I feel it. These guys are playing hard, they're working hard, we're just not attacking the ball on a consistent basis, and it comes back to our starting pitching.

"It's tough to absorb the one-out start, the starters coming out in the third or fourth inning. We need those guys to get us to a certain point."

Angels right-hander Nick Tropeano got to the sixth inning Wednesday night, and he escaped bases-loaded jams twice, getting Jake Bauers to line into an inning-ending double play in the third inning and striking out Ji-Man Choi with a full-count changeup to end the fifth.

But he couldn't hold a 2-0 lead, giving up three runs and three hits in the fourth, an inning that started with Tommy Pham getting hit by a pitch. Tropeano gave up four earned runs and seven hits in 5 2/3 innings, walking four and striking out four.

"I think the issue this season and especially today has been the big inning," said Tropeano, who fell to 4-6 with a 4.94 ERA. "It's been haunting me throughout this year and today especially. I think it stems from free passes. I have to clean up my mechanics, be more aggressive and trust my stuff."

The Angels made an early splash when Calhoun became the seventh player in Tropicana Field history to homer into the Rays Touch Tank beyond the right-center field wall, driving a hanging curve from Rays starter Tyler Glasnow 427 feet for a 1-0 lead.

It was the right fielder's 13th homer since his June 12 return from the disabled list, a torrid 36-game stretch in which Calhoun has hit .302 with nine doubles, 30 RBIs and 27 runs to raise his average from .145 to .211.

The Angels made it 2-0 in the fourth when Upton singled, took third on Pujols' double and scored on Simmons' 105-mph line-drive single to center.

After Tropeano hit Pham in the fourth, Joey Wendle doubled to right to advance Pham to third. Choi lined out to left, Upton charging in for the catch and making a strong throw to cutoff man Luis Valbuena to keep Pham at third.

Or so the Angels thought. Valbuena made an ill-advised, awkward flip to third in an attempt to pick off Pham, even though he had no play. Simmons was not close enough to the bag to catch the toss, which rolled into foul territory, allowing Pham to score.

The error, the first of two in the game for Valbuena, was unsightly, but Pham would have scored on Willy Adames' ensuing RBI single that tied the score 2-2. Mallek Smith followed with an RBI triple to left-center for a 3-2 Rays lead.

Adames' homer made it 4-2 in the sixth, and the Rays tacked on three runs off Hansel Robles in the eighth on Matt Duffy's RBI single and Bauers' two-run homer to right-center.

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Luis Valbuena's rough season continues in Angels' loss to Rays

By Jeff Fletcher | jffletcher@scng.com | Orange County Register

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — The Angels are still waiting for Luis Valbuena's season to turn around.

Valbuena had yet another forgettable game in the Angels' 7-2 loss to the Tampa Bay Rays on Wednesday night.

There was plenty of blame to go around on a night when the Angels had one hit with a runner in scoring position and their pitchers walked seven and hit two batters.

As for Valbuena, he had nothing go right. He struck out twice and grounded out in three at-bats, each time coming up with at least one runner on base. He also made two errors at third.

Valbuena is now hitting .200 with nine homers, none since June 23. He had briefly lost his regular spot in the lineup when David Fletcher took over at third, but the trade of Ian Kinsler moved Fletcher to second and allowed Valbuena another shot to come out of his slump.

It didn't go well on Wednesday. He struck out with two on and one out in the fourth, scuttling one of the Angels' most promising rallies. He also fanned after an Andrelton Simmons one-out walk in the sixth.

"At times it looks like he's moving forward a little bit," Manager Mike Scioscia said. "At times he's still searching. He's going to keep working hard and we're going to try to get him on the beam. He had some opportunities tonight and didn't get it done."

Hitting coach Eric Hinske said Valbuena is tinkering with his swing, trying to be shorter to the ball and to swing at more strikes.

Valbuena said it's mostly the latter.

"I have to swing at good pitches," he said. "That's the difference. That's it."

His discipline has also shown up in a decrease in walks. Last year he hit .199, but with enough walks to still have a .294 on-base percentage. This season, his on-base percentage is .252.

"I have to keep going," he said. "It was a bad day. Tomorrow is another day. I'll wait for my opportunity. I am doing my best. This is not my first time in this situation. I'll be better."

Valbuena also had a tough night defensively.

In the fourth, he made a poor decision trying to do too much. Tommy Pham was at third on a fly ball to left field. Pham had broken toward the plate but stopped. He wasn't far off the bag when Valbuena cut off the throw from left and tried to flip it to Simmons to get Pham before he could get back to third. Simmons wasn't close enough to the bag, and the ball dribbled into foul territory, allowing Pham to score.

The run was earned because the next two hitters had hits anyway, giving the Rays a 3-2 lead against Nick Tropeano. In the sixth, Tropeano had to throw extra pitches to escape a bases-loaded jam after Valbuena booted a grounder with two outs.

Tropeano then gave up a homer to Willy Adames leading off the sixth, putting the Angels behind 4-2.

That was too much for the Angels on a night when their offense, which had been performing well for about a week, couldn't manage any runs after the fourth.

Kole Calhoun put the Angels on the board with a first-inning homer that splashed into the Rays' "touch tank" beyond the right-center field fence. The tank of swimming rays was installed in 2006, and Calhoun became just the seventh player to hit a ball into it.

It was Calhoun's 13th homer since he came off the disabled list on June 18, the most in the American League since then.

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