

## Races get close as All-Star voting nears wire

The would-be All-Star starters remain the same in both leagues, but with only three days left to vote on the 2018 Camping World MLB All-Star Ballot, there are five spots that remain too close to call.

The Reds' Scooter Gennett and the Cubs' Javier Baez are pushing Ozzie Albies of the Braves at second base in the National League, while a pair of Astros -- shortstop Carlos Correa and first baseman Yuli Gurriel -- are trying to make late move to take the voting lead at their respective positions in the American League.

Another Houston player, second baseman Jose Altuve, continues to have the highest vote total of any player in either league. Braves first baseman Freddie Freeman leads all NL players in votes.

The Red Sox have two players -- Mookie Betts and J.D. Martinez -- in line to start in the AL, while the Braves have three (Albies, Freeman and Nick Markakis) in the NL.

Voting to decide the starters for the 89th All-Star Game presented by Mastercard on July 17 at Washington's Nationals Park continues until 11:59 p.m. ET on Thursday.

Here are the latest voting results for both leagues:

### AMERICAN LEAGUE

#### CATCHER

1. Wilson Ramos, Rays: 1,556,195
2. Gary Sanchez, Yankees: 1,116,568
3. Brian McCann, Astros: 961,325
4. Salvador Perez, Royals: 614,492
5. Yan Gomes, Indians: 522,139

There was no movement in the top five this week, though Ramos stretched his lead by about 280,000 votes over Sanchez, who landed on the disabled list with a groin injury. The Rays backstop, whose .290 average and 74 hits are tops among AL catchers, has a commanding lead of nearly 440,000 votes, putting him in good position to earn his first career All-Star start.

#### FIRST BASE

1. Jose Abreu, White Sox: 1,312,221
2. Yuli Gurriel, Astros: 1,088,068
3. Mitch Moreland, Red Sox: 907,955
4. Albert Pujols, Angels: 688,594
5. Miguel Cabrera, Tigers: 499,603

Gurriel picked up about 92,000 votes this week, moving within 224,000 of Abreu, whose 50 RBIs continue to be tops among AL first basemen. The rest of the top five remains the same, though this appears to be a two-man race. Moreland, whose .889 OPS leads all AL players at his position, sits in third place.

#### SECOND BASE

1. Jose Altuve, Astros: 3,405,815
2. Gleyber Torres, Yankees: 997,724
3. Dee Gordon, Mariners: 528,270
4. Jason Kipnis, Indians: 372,885
5. Jed Lowrie, Athletics: 255,092

Altuve's place in the AL starting lineup is secure, while his overall vote lead stands at 286,709 over Red Sox outfielder Mookie Betts. Torres, Gordon and Kipnis remain in the three spots behind Altuve, while Oakland's Jed Lowrie moved past Boston's Dustin Pedroia to regain fifth place.

#### THIRD BASE

1. Jose Ramirez, Indians: 1,811,902
2. Alex Bregman, Astros: 1,050,370
3. Miguel Andujar, Yankees: 963,641
4. Adrian Beltre, Rangers: 590,283
5. Kyle Seager, Mariners: 447,940

Ramirez's lead grew by more than 205,000 votes this week, giving him a comfortable 761,000-vote lead over Bregman, who surged past Andujar into the No. 2 spot. Ramirez is tied for second in the Majors with 24 home runs, one behind Boston designated hitter J.D. Martinez. Seager moved into the top five, replacing the Royals' Mike Moustakas.

#### SHORTSTOP

1. Manny Machado, Orioles: 1,272,233
2. Carlos Correa, Astros: 1,135,152
3. Francisco Lindor, Indians: 898,977
4. Didi Gregorius, Yankees: 824,710
5. Jean Segura, Mariners: 675,140

Correa landed on the disabled list with a back ailment on Friday, and while the Astros' star isn't expected to miss much time, it remains to be seen whether his inactivity during the final days of voting hinders his ability to challenge Machado. Correa picked up more than 30,000 votes on Machado this week, leaving a 137,000-vote gap between them. Lindor jumped back into third ahead of Gregorius, while Segura continues to round out the top five.

#### OUTFIELD

1. Mookie Betts, Red Sox: 3,119,106
2. Mike Trout, Angels: 2,666,972
3. Aaron Judge, Yankees: 2,021,348
4. George Springer, Astros: 1,141,661
5. Michael Brantley, Indians: 1,093,376
6. Andrew Benintendi, Red Sox: 1,071,135
7. Marwin Gonzalez, Astros: 768,281
8. Josh Reddick, Astros: 706,145
9. Eddie Rosario, Twins: 666,108
10. Mitch Haniger, Mariners: 652,563
11. Brett Gardner, Yankees: 636,087
12. Jackie Bradley Jr., Red Sox: 506,993
13. Aaron Hicks, Yankees: 483,574
14. Nicholas Castellanos, Tigers: 469,578
15. Tyler Naquin, Indians: 344,639

Betts, Trout and Judge continue to hold sizeable leads to be the starters, while the top seven spots remain unchanged from a week ago. Reddick and Rosario surged two spots each, knocking Gardner down to the No. 11 spot. Betts might be assured a starting spot in the AL outfield, but his chances of catching Altuve for the overall lead look bleak as the gap swelled from 123,453 a week ago to 286,709 this week. The only change on the list this week? Cleveland's Tyler Naquin, who replaced Seattle's Ben Gamel to return to the top 15.

#### DESIGNATED HITTER

1. J.D. Martinez, Red Sox: 2,236,945
2. Giancarlo Stanton, Yankees: 977,274
3. Evan Gattis, Astros: 953,460
4. Nelson Cruz, Mariners: 601,794
5. Edwin Encarnacion, Indians: 559,915

Martinez's lead over his pinstriped rival Stanton swelled from 936,000 to more than 1.25 million, lining up the Major League home run leader for his first All-Star start and second overall selection. Stanton and Gattis remain behind Martinez, while Cruz climbed to the No. 4 spot and Encarnacion returned to the top five, knocking injured Angels star Shohei Ohtani off the list.

#### NATIONAL LEAGUE

##### CATCHER

1. Buster Posey, Giants: 1,384,631
2. Willson Contreras, Cubs: 1,240,132
3. Kurt Suzuki, Braves: 1,174,470
4. Yadier Molina, Cardinals: 913,149
5. J.T. Realmuto, Marlins: 818,925

Posey led Contreras by roughly 92,000 votes a week ago, but the Giants' catcher saw his lead grow to more than 144,000 votes. Suzuki remains a dark-horse contender, sitting about 210,000 votes behind Posey, who would be making his fourth straight start and fifth of his career. Realmuto, who leads NL catchers with a .908 OPS, makes his first appearance in the top five, knocking Yasmani Grandal of the Dodgers off the list.

##### FIRST BASE

1. Freddie Freeman, Braves: 2,905,301
2. Anthony Rizzo, Cubs: 1,178,915
3. Brandon Belt, Giants: 802,027
4. Cody Bellinger, Dodgers: 661,485
5. Joey Votto, Reds: 479,803

Freeman's place in the NL's starting lineup seems to be locked in thanks to a vote total more than twice of his nearest competitor. Although the top spot isn't in doubt, it should be noted that Joey Votto of the Reds moved back into the top five after being bumped out by the Cardinals' Jose Martinez last week.

##### SECOND BASE

1. Ozzie Albies, Braves: 1,857,185
2. Scooter Gennett, Reds: 1,689,393
3. Javier Baez, Cubs: 1,586,888
4. Joe Panik, Giants: 493,573
5. Logan Forsythe, Dodgers: 379,325

Albies lengthened his lead over Baez, but the Cubs' second baseman might not be the one to watch. Gennett is making a late move to challenge Albies for the starting job, picking up nearly 75,000 votes on the leader this week to move within roughly 168,000 votes of the top spot. Gennett (.898), Baez (.892) and Albies (.823) finished the week with the top three OPS among qualified NL second basemen.

#### THIRD BASE

1. Nolan Arenado, Rockies: 2,326,711
2. Kris Bryant, Cubs: 1,370,631
3. Johan Camargo, Braves: 868,860
4. Eugenio Suarez, Reds: 601,219
5. Justin Turner, Dodgers: 496,912

Just as Arenado took the NL lead in home runs with two against the Dodgers this weekend, the Rockies' third baseman saw his vote lead at third base swell by nearly 310,000 this week. Arenado is more than 950,000 votes ahead of Bryant, putting the Rockies star in position to make his second straight All-Star start and fourth consecutive appearance.

#### SHORTSTOP

1. Brandon Crawford, Giants: 2,303,516
2. Dansby Swanson, Braves: 1,162,263
3. Addison Russell, Cubs: 1,026,014
4. Trevor Story, Rockies: 820,484
5. Chris Taylor, Dodgers: 498,570

Crawford, whose .315 average and .884 OPS are No. 1 among NL shortstops, continues to hold a commanding lead at the position, setting him up for his second career All-Star appearance and first starting nod. The only change in the top five this week was the emergence of Chris Taylor of the Dodgers, who pushed his way past Washington's Trea Turner for the No. 5 spot.

#### OUTFIELD

1. Nick Markakis, Braves: 2,457,648
2. Matt Kemp, Dodgers: 2,046,534
3. Bryce Harper, Nationals: 1,777,221
4. Charlie Blackmon, Rockies: 1,310,107
5. Ronald Acuna Jr., Braves: 1,204,321
6. Ender Inciarte, Braves: 1,101,511
7. Jason Heyward, Cubs: 1,018,320
8. Kyle Schwarber, Cubs: 939,907
9. Ben Zobrist, Cubs: 900,316
10. Christian Yelich, Brewers: 708,250
11. Odubel Herrera, Phillies: 664,335
12. Lorenzo Cain, Brewers: 613,205
13. Andrew McCutchen, Giants: 595,907
14. Corey Dickerson, Pirates: 540,093
15. Yasiel Puig, Dodgers: 509,936

This list looks remarkably similar to last week's as the top 10 vote-getters remain the same. Markakis and Kemp appear to have locked up their starting spots, while Harper -- who has said he would participate in the T-Mobile Home Run Derby as long as he's on the NL roster -- maintains a comfortable 467,000-vote lead over Blackmon. The Nos. 11-15 spots feature the same names as a week ago, though Herrera jumped from No. 14 to 11, flipping spots with Dickerson.

Fans may cast votes for starters at MLB.com and all 30 club sites -- on computers, tablets and smartphones -- exclusively online using the 2018 Camping World MLB All-Star Ballot until Thursday at 11:59 p.m. ET. On smartphones and tablets, fans can also access the ballot via the MLB At Bat and MLB Ballpark mobile apps. Each fan can vote up to five times in any 24-hour period, for a maximum of 35 ballots cast.

Following the announcement of this year's All-Star starters, reserves and pitchers, fans should return to MLB.com and cast their 2018 Camping World MLB All-Star Final Vote for the final player on each league's roster. Then on Tuesday, July 17, while watching the 2018 All-Star Game presented by Mastercard live on FOX, fans may visit MLB.com to submit their choices for the Ted Williams Most Valuable Player Award presented by Chevrolet with the 2018 MLB All-Star Game MVP Vote.

The 89th Midsummer Classic, at Nationals Park in Washington, D.C., will be televised nationally by FOX Sports; in Canada by Rogers Sportsnet and RDS; and worldwide by partners in more than 180 countries. FOX Deportes will provide Spanish-language coverage in the United States, while ESPN Radio and ESPN Radio Deportes will provide exclusive national radio coverage of the All-Star Game. MLB Network, MLB.com and SiriusXM also will provide comprehensive All-Star Week coverage.

#### **Tribe active in int'l deals; Ramirez brother next?**

By Jesse Sanchez MLB.com @JesseSanchezMLB

The Indians signed more than 30 prospects during last year's international signing period and the club is off to another good start this year. According to industry sources, the club agreed to a \$2.1 million deal with shortstop Gabriel Rodriguez, ranked No. 6 on MLB.com's Top 30 International Prospects list and shortstop Junior Sanquintin, ranked No. 12, for \$1.25 million.

The club has also agreed to a \$650,000 deal with outfielder Sterling Romero and \$500,000 with shortstop Angel Martinez. The Indians are also linked to shortstop Jose Baez, the younger brother of Indians third baseman Jose Ramirez. Baez will not be eligible to sign until he turns 16 on Aug. 30.

The Indians did not confirm the deals.

The best infield prospect out of Venezuela this year, Rodriguez is also one of the best hitters in the class. Known for his projectable body and good control on both sides of the ball, the teenager reminds some scouts of Wilmer Flores at the same age. Overall, he has easy actions on defense and a smooth swing at the plate with developing power.

Sanquintin, who is from the Dominican Republic, favors comparably with Rodriguez, and there's a chance he has more upside on offense and defense. He just lacks Rodriguez's consistency. He's known for his emerging raw power, bat speed and overall skill set across the board.

According to the rules established by the Collective Bargaining Agreement, clubs that received a Competitive Balance Pick in Round B of the MLB Draft received a pool of \$6,025,400, while clubs like the Indians that received a Competitive Balance Pick in Round A of the Draft received \$5,504,500. All other clubs received \$4,983,500.

Teams are allowed to trade as much of their international pool money as they would like, but can only acquire 75 percent of a team's initial pool amount. Additionally, signing bonuses of \$10,000 or less do not count toward a club's bonus pool, and foreign professional players who are at least 25 and have played in a foreign league for at least six seasons are also exempt.

Jesse Sanchez, who has been writing for MLB.com since 2001, is a national reporter based in Phoenix. Follow him on Twitter @JesseSanchezMLB and Facebook.

### **Mejia makes Pipeline Team of the Week**

MLB Pipeline's Prospect Team of the Week honors the best performances from the previous seven days. Any Minor Leaguer currently on an organization Top 30 Prospects list on our Prospect Watch is eligible.

This week has four different players making their second appearance on a Prospect Team of the Week, though none have been quite as hot as Francisco Mejia.

After combining for a .189/.258/.293 batting line during the season's first two months, Mejia rebounded in earnest with a torrid month of June, hitting .455 with a 1.193 OPS. What's more, Mejia is raking at a .526 clip with 20 hits during his nine-game hitting streak, during which he's improved his season average from .251 to .291.

### **Double trouble: Tribe smash 11 doubles in win**

OAKLAND -- Francisco Lindor could not quite clear the Coliseum's wall in the third inning on Sunday afternoon. The baseball he launched to left-center struck the green padding with a thud and the Indians' shortstop pulled into second with a double.

Lindor had no such issues in the seventh, when he belted a home run out to right field to help the Tribe rout the A's with a 15-3 victory, salvaging a win in the three-game series. The blast came as part of powerful showing from Lindor, who had two of Cleveland's 11 doubles and three of the team's 13 extra-base hits in the overwhelming win.

"He's a threat," Indians veteran outfielder Rajai Davis said of Lindor. "He just knows how to hit and drive the ball a quarter-mile. No matter the ballpark, he makes the ballpark look small. It's amazing. It's impressive. It's fun to watch. A lot of guys wish they could be that kind of hitter, but to watch it, it's amazing."

The 11 doubles by the Indians are the most in a game in the Majors this season and the most in one contest by Cleveland since doubling a club-record 12 times on July 13, 1996, against the Twins. It marked the most doubles in a game for a team in MLB since the Royals had 11 against the Yankees on Aug. 11, 2003. The 11 two-base hits also set a record for one team at the Coliseum.

"It was great," said Lindor, who is the only MLB player this season to have three games with at least two doubles and a homer. "Hopefully, this gets us going in the right direction. Guys were on the right path. Guys felt very comfortable today."

Besides Lindor, the Indians also received two-base hits from Lonnie Chisenhall (two), Jose Ramirez (two), Yonder Alonso (two), Michael Brantley, Yan Gomes and Jason Kipnis. In the seventh inning, Lindor (21 homers this season) and Edwin Encarnacion (20) took things up a notch, with a home run apiece against reliever Yusmeiro Petit. Cleveland kept its foot on the gas, too.

"You can feel the tide is turning," Chisenhall said. "Guys taste blood. They want to get up there in the box."

The Indians, who managed just 10 runs total over the past five games on this road trip, pushed eight runs across the plate against the Oakland bullpen in the top of the eighth, which lasted nearly 26 minutes. The first 10 batters of the frame reached base, helping transform what had been a relatively close game into a blowout. The Indians were seemingly clinging to a 3-1 lead through six innings, before rolling out a dozen runs over the final three frames.

"At the end," Indians manager Terry Francona said, "the score doesn't really show how close that game was."

Tribe starter Mike Clevinger was not at his best, but the surplus of run support helped the right-hander to his seventh win of the season. Over six-plus innings, Clevinger allowed three runs on eight hits, ending with two walks and five strikeouts.

Lindor's two doubles upped his season total to a team-high 27, which ties the amount Ramirez posted in the first half last year en route to 56 doubles overall (third-most in a season in club history). Lindor, Ramirez (24 homers and 22 doubles) and Boston's Mookie Betts are the only players in MLB to currently have at least 20 homers and 20 two-base hits.

When told that Lindor insists he is not competing against Ramirez, Chisenhall smirked.

"It's not competing, but they know what the other is doing," Chisenhall said. "It's friendly as it can be. They both are hungry. They're both young. They're both continuing to make names for themselves. It's fun to watch."

#### MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

**Davis' double-play dive:** With one out and a runner on first in the third inning, Jed Lowrie lofted a pitch from Clevinger over shallow center field. As Mark Canha was going from first to third on the play, Davis sprinted in and made a diving catch to snare the fly ball before it could reach the grass. From his knees, Davis flipped the ball to Kipnis, who tossed it to Alonso at first to double up Canha for an inning-ending double play. Per Statcast™, Davis covered 62 feet in 4.1 seconds for the three-star catch (72 percent catch probability).

"That could've been different right there for them winning this game," Davis said. "Making that play and getting out of that inning, as opposed to being first and third, one out, or whatever it may have been, with their guys coming up, that's a play that you want to make. I'm glad I was able to make it."

**Quick pick:** Marcus Semien tried to start a rally for Oakland in the second with a one-out single to center off Clevinger. Then, after working to a 1-2 count against Jonathan Lucroy, Clevinger fired a throw to first, where Semien was caught flat-footed. Alonso gloved the ball and applied a swift tag before Semien could retreat. Clevinger followed with a strikeout of Lucroy to end the frame. Clevinger ranks fourth in the majors with four pickoffs this season.

"Baseball's a huge momentum sport, I think," Clevinger said. "Anytime you get that pendulum to swing your way on any event, especially something like that -- you get two outs and the bases are clean -- you get more energy out of that."

#### MITEL REPLAY OF THE DAY

After the A's pushed two runs across in the seventh, reliever Neil Ramirez faced a runner-on-first, two-out situation. On a pitch in the dirt to Lowrie, Canha sprinted from first to second and Gomes made a quick throw to Lindor at the bag. At nearly the same time Canha's left hand reached the base, Lindor slapped a tag on the runner's arm. Second-base umpire Lance Barrett called Canha out and Lindor pumped a fist hard in celebration. The A's challenged the inning-ending call, which stood following a replay review, eliciting loud boos from the Oakland crowd.

"Gomer, I thought coming out and making that throw in the seventh [was huge]," Francona said. "They challenged it and we got out of the inning. At the time, it's a two-run game and they're coming at us pretty good. That slowed everything down."

#### SOUND SMART

The Indians have three players with 20-plus homers (Lindor, Ramirez and Encarnacion) before the All-Star break for the first time since 2001, when Ellis Burks, Juan Gonzalez and Jim Thome achieved the feat. That was the only other such occurrence in Indians franchise history.

According to the Indians, Lindor, Ramirez and Encarnacion are the fastest trio in MLB to reach 20 homers apiece since 2006, when Jermaine Dye, Paul Konerko and Thome did it in 80 games for the White Sox. The Tribe trio accomplished the feat in 82 games.

#### HE SAID IT

"He's a fantastic hitter from both sides of the plate. He can change the game with one swing, he can change a game with his legs and he can change it with his glove." -- Francona, on Lindor

"That was huge. He joked with me, he was like, 'Yeah, I knew how much time I had. I had to sit back on that one.' I was like, 'I was holding my breath!'" -- Clevinger, on Davis' diving grab

#### UP NEXT

Right-hander Corey Kluber (11-4, 2.54 ERA) is scheduled to take the mound for the Tribe on Monday, when the Royals host the Indians in an 8:15 p.m. ET tilt at Kauffman Stadium. The Cleveland ace spun seven shutout innings against Kansas City on May 13, but has gone 1-2 with a 6.59 ERA in his last three starts. The Royals will counter with righty Jakob Junis (5-9, 4.67 ERA).

#### **Plutko sent down; Carrasco returning Friday**

**OAKLAND** -- Adam Plutko packed up his locker, exchanged a few handshakes, hoisted his Indians equipment bag over his shoulder and headed out of the visitors' locker room at the Coliseum on Sunday morning. The pitcher was heading back to Triple-A Columbus, bringing some clarity to Cleveland's rotation situation.

With Carlos Carrasco scheduled to be activated from the 10-day disabled list on Friday for a start against the A's in Cleveland, Plutko will return to the minors and await another call. In the meantime, fellow rookie right-hander Shane Bieber will remain in the fifth spot in the Indians' rotation following a string of impressive outings.

"We've actually been impressed with both the kids," Indians manager Terry Francona said. "Plutko's done a pretty good job here. Bieber's done an outstanding job. But we told Adam he wasn't being demoted because of how he pitched. ... It's just, we've got Carrasco coming back."

After optioning Plutko to Triple-A Columbus, the Indians then selected the contract of lefty reliever Marc Rzepczynski from the same affiliate. In order to vacate a spot on the 40-man roster for Rzepczynski, Cleveland released minor league lefty Shawn Morimando.

The move comes one day after Plutko worked 5 2/3 innings in the Indians' 7-2 loss in Oakland. Plutko (4-2, 4.66 ERA in six starts) and Bieber (3-0, 2.22 ERA in four starts) have held down the back end of the starting staff, while Carrasco has rehabbed a right elbow contusion. On Saturday night, Carrasco worked four shutout innings in a minor league rehab assignment with Double-A Akron, ending with four strikeouts, one walk and hitting 97 mph, per Francona.

"He was good," Francona said. "He texted me this morning and said he's ready to go. So, that's good. So, what we did is we optioned Plutko and we got Zep here. So, we'll have to make a move when Carrasco pitches, but for [at least four games] we have an extra bullpen arm and getting the lefty here should help."

The Indians signed the 32-year-old Rzepczynski to a Minor League contract on June 18, following his release by the Mariners. The lefty posted a 9.39 ERA in 7 2/3 innings for Seattle this season, but held left-handed batters to a .222 average (.656 OPS) within that showing.

Rzepczynski posted a 2.70 ERA in 145 games for the Indians in parts of the 2013-15 seasons, and gives the Tribe a second lefty along with Oliver Perez, while Andrew Miller (right knee) and Tyler Olson (left lat strain) remain on the 10-day DL.

"Obviously, they know who I am here," Rzepczynski said. "Most of my success has been here, for the most part. It's a familiar clubhouse. That's one of the reasons why I signed back here. I know all the guys. I loved playing for Tito when I was here. And, at the same time, I know I've got a chance to pitch."

Worth noting

- One day after it was announced that righty Danny Salazar (60-day DL) would undergo exploratory surgery on his throwing shoulder on Monday, Francona said there were no details to add at the moment. Said the manager: "Let's just see what comes of it. We'll have time to talk about it more and see what the prognosis is and all those types of things."
- Olson worked through another bullpen session at the Coliseum on Sunday, following a 25-pitch mound working on Friday. Francona said the Indians have yet to determine whether the next step will be a simulated game or sending the lefty out on a Minor League rehab assignment.
- Miller continues to work through a flat-ground throwing program back in Cleveland, while focusing on strengthening his knee. Francona noted that the lefty reliever might be cleared to resume throwing off a mound during the team's upcoming homestand.

### **Tide finally turns for Cleveland Indians' offense against the A's, but will it continue?**

By Paul Hoynes,

OAKLAND - Maybe the Indians finally adjusted to the time change on the West Coast. Naturally, if that was the case, they did it just in time to head back to the Midwest.

Or maybe they just took manager Terry Francona advice to pass the torch and keep the line moving. Of course, it helps to have Francisco Lindor, Jose Ramirez and Edwin Encarnacion as members of that particular line. When they keep things moving things tend to jump three or four spots instead of one spot at a time.

Here are some of the things the Indians accomplished in their 15-3 victory over Oakland on Sunday afternoon at the Coliseum.

\*Their 13 extra base hits, including 11 doubles, are the most in the big leagues this year in one game.

\*They set team highs in doubles, runs, extra base hits and hits (20).

\*Their 11 doubles are the most since a club record 12 on July 13, 1996 against the Twins.

\*The 11 doubles are the most by a big-league club since Aug. 11, 2003 when the Royals hit 11 against the Yankees.

\*When Encarnacion hit his 20th home run, as part of a two-run seventh inning, it was just the second time in franchise history that the Indians have had three players with 20 or more homers before the All-Star break with Ramirez at 24 and Lindor at 21. Jim Thome, Ellis Burks and Juan Gonzalez did it in 2001.

\*Ramirez, Lindor and Encarnacion are the fastest trio to reach 20 homers since Jermaine Dye, Jim Thome and Paul Konerko did it for the White Sox in 2006.

\*The Indians are 7-1 this year when facing a sweep in a series finale.

Terry Francona on offensive revival by the Indians

Not to mention the Tribe's eight-run eighth inning in which they sent 13 batters to the plate. They first 10 all reached base, eight of them scoring, before the A's could record an out.

"It was great," said Lindor. "It was really good. Hopefully this gets us going in the right direction. Guys were on the right path. Guys were very comfortable today in the box. Hopefully, we can carry that approach into Monday's game and the whole series in Kansas City."

The Tribe's offense scored 10 runs in the first five games of this nine-game trip. So the hitters got a chance to exhale on Sunday.

Lindor had three hits and scored four runs. Two of the 11 doubles belonged to him as well as his 21st homer.

"He's a threat," said Rajai Davis, made two nice plays in center field on a windy Sunday afternoon. "Offensively, he just knows how to hit and drive the ball a quarter-mile. No matter what the ballpark, he makes the ballpark look small.

"A lot of guys with they could be that kind of hitter, but to watch it, it's amazing."

Today is July 1 aka the 1st day of July.

Frankie didn't reach 21 home runs until August 22 last year. #VoteFrankie | #RallyTogether pic.twitter.com/LxoYjIwIAj

-- Cleveland Indians (@Indians) July 1, 2018

Lindor is hitting .296 (99-for-335) with 70 runs, 27 doubles, 21 homers and 48 RBI.

Right fielder Lonnie Chisenhall had three hits and two doubles as well. Two of his hits came in the big eighth inning.

"You can feel the tide is turning," said Chisenhall. "Guys taste blood. They want to get up there in the box. That happens, but 15 runs doesn't always happen a lot."

As for the first five games of the trip, Chisenhall said, "After losing the first two in St. Louis, your back is against the wall, you don't want to get swept. Then you fly out to the West Coast and lose three hours. It feels like your body is playing at 10 o'clock at night."

"It was nice one to scratch one out here. We got swept here last year. They're a good team. They've been winning games. It wasn't easy."

Raise your hand if you thought @rajai11davis was gonna catch this. [?] [?]

Don't lie! [?] #RallyTogether pic.twitter.com/wBAuSpvCby

-- Cleveland Indians (@Indians) July 1, 2018

Like Davis, the wind gave Chisenhall fits in the outfield. He made a diving catch along the right field line to end the first inning with the bases loaded. Chisenhall tore his uniform pants and cut his leg on his spikes during the dive.

"It was tough to read," said Chisenhall. "It was blowing in different directions depending on where they hit it and when they hit it. Just keep your feet moving and hope the ball hits your glove."

As for the gash on his leg, Chisenhall said, "I did that chasing after the paper airplane."

Lonnie ran at this ball like his car was about to get toad. [?]

And yes ... we will get you Raj's insane catch too. [?] #RallyTogether pic.twitter.com/abZXdGadAS

-- Cleveland Indians (@Indians) July 1, 2018

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 07.02.2018

### **Logan Ice coolly delivers game-winner for Akron RubberDucks**

AKRON, Ohio -- Mark Mathias had a grand slam and Logan Ice's RBI single in the ninth was the game-winner Sunday for the RubberDucks, who twice rallied from deficits to defeat the Altoona Curve at Canal Park.

Tied at five in the ninth, Connor Marabell started things off with a single to right field. Tyler Krieger moved Marabell to second with a sacrifice bunt, allowing Marabell to score on Ice's single off Brett Helton (3-3, 3.72 ERA).

The Curve scored a run in the third, fourth and fifth innings to build a 3-0 lead, but Mathias' grand slam off Altoona starter Taylor Hearn in the sixth erased the deficit and gave the RubberDucks a 4-3 lead.

Altoona regained the lead with two runs in the seventh, but Akron tied the game in the bottom of the inning on a passed ball.

RubberDucks reliever Henry Martinez (1-1, 2.45) got the win, pitching one hitless, scoreless inning. Starter Jake Paulson gave up three runs and five hits in five innings.

Go here to see a box score from the game.

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 07.02.2018

### **Cleveland Indians hit 11 doubles in a 15-3 victory over the Oakland Athletics**

By Paul Hoynes,

OAKLAND, California -- Manager Terry Francona was talking about offense before Sunday's game and what the Indians weren't doing well.

He said they were chasing too many pitches out of the strike zone and not creating enough traffic on the bases. He said the Indians were at their best when everyone in the lineup reached base, showed patience and ran the bases well.

Francona seemed to say that too many players were trying to win games by themselves by hitting home runs.

On Sunday the Indians combined the good with the bad and everything in between in beating Oakland, 15-3, at the Coliseum to avoid a three-game sweep.

Of course, it was nice to see the uncramped Mike Clevinger (7-3, 3.11) return to form with six solid innings. Clevinger was felled by leg cramps in a 4-0 loss to the Cardinals at the start of this trip on June 25.

"Yes, I had pasta for dinner last night," said Clevinger after the win. "I was checking all the boxed."

Clevinger substituted steak for pasta before his last start and suffered from leg cramps through five innings.

There was stellar defense as well, as Rajai Davis made two fine catches in center field and Lonnie Chisenhall made a diving catch along the right field line to end the first with the bases loaded.

Then came the offense with the tone being set in the first inning.

Michael Brantley hit the first of 11 doubles by the Indians. He took third on a fly ball to center by Jose Ramirez. Then Edwin Encarnacion, instead of swinging for the fences, singled to right field for a 1-0 lead against Frankie Montas (4-2, 3.83).

The 11 doubles were the most the Indians have hit in one game since their club-record 12 against the Twins on July 13, 1996.

It's not like the Indians turned every one of those doubles into runs, but they sure sounded nice coming off the bat. Shortstop Francisco Lindor, who hit two doubles and a homer, was stranded in the third. Chisenhall was deserted at second in the fourth as Clevinger clung to a 1-0 lead.

Ramirez made it 2-1 in the fifth as he doubled home Lindor, who reached on his second double in as many at-bats. The A's used two doubles of their own by Khris Davis and Matt Olson to make it a 2-1 game in the fourth.

In the fifth, Yonder Alonso hit a leadoff double and moved to third on Chisenhall's sacrifice bunt. Yan Gomes struck out, but Jason Kipnis delivered with a two-out double to right center for a 3-1 lead.

"My job is to get him (Alonso) to third base (in the sixth inning)," said Chisenhall. "I think it was 2-1 at that point. So runs are important, getting him 90 feet closer. Pass the torch to the next guy and let him try. I was just trying to make sure I could get him to third."

Through six innings, the Indians had hit seven doubles. Then they really started hitting the ball hard.

Lindor started the seventh with his 21st homer and second in as many games. Encarnacion, two outs later, followed with No. 20.

With Lindor, Encarnacion and Ramirez (24 home runs), it's the first time the Indians have had three players with 20 or more homers before the All-Star break since 2001 with Ellis Burks, Jim Thome and Juan Gonzalez.

Then, to put the cherry on top of the sundae, the Indians scored eight runs in the eighth inning. All this from a team that scored 10 runs in the first five games of this nine-game trip.

The Indians' half of the eighth took 26 minutes as they sent 13 batters to the plate. The first 10 batters reached base before the A's registered an out. Oakland's Chris Hatcher started the inning and allowed four runs on four hits without registering an out. Josh Lucas, another right-hander, relieved and allowed four more runs, but managed to end the onslaught.

Just for the heck of it, they scored two more runs in the ninth.

"It's good," said Lindor, regarding the eighth inning. "It's fun. It means everyone is being successful. Everyone has the right approach. Everyone made the adjustment and everyone is successful."

The Tribe finished with 20 hits, including four by Alonso. Lindor, Ramirez and Chisenhall had three hits each.

What it means

In the first two series of this three-city trip, the first-place Indians have avoided being swept with victories in the third and final game of each series.

The pitches

Montas threw 89 pitches, 60 (67 percent) for strikes. Clevinger threw 106, 66 (62 percent) for strikes.

Double your pleasure.

Lindor, Chisenhall, Ramirez and Alonso had two doubles each. Kansas City was the last team with 11 doubles in a game. The Royals did it against the Yankees on Aug. 11, 2003.

The 11 doubles and 13 extra base hits are the most by a team in the big leagues this year.

Thanks for coming

The Indians and Royals drew 16,164 fans to the Coliseum on Sunday. First pitch was at 4:07 p.m. with a temperature of 68 degrees.

Next

The Indians open a three-game series Monday night against the Royals at Kauffman Stadium. Corey Kluber (11-4, 2.54) will face right-hander Jakob Junis (5-9, 4.67) at 8:15 p.m. SportsTime Ohio, WTAM/1100 and WMMS/FM 100.7 will carry the game.

Kluber, coming off the shortest start in his career, is 1-0 against the Royals this year and 10-6 in his career.

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 07.02.2018

### **Cleveland Indians option Adam Plutko to Triple-A; select contract of Marc Rzepczynski**

By Paul Hoynes,

OAKLAND -- The Indians have optioned right-handed Adam Plutko to Class AAA Columbus and selected the contract of left-hander Marc Rzepczynski.

The big winner of this move is Shane Bieber, who will now occupy the fifth starter's role with the Indians. Bieber (3-0) will start against Kansas City on Tuesday. The Indians released left-hander Shawn Morimando to make room for Rzepczynski on the 40-man roster.

The Indians signed Rzepczynski on June 18 to a minor league deal after he was released by Seattle on June 6. Rzepczynski pitched for the Indians from 2013 through 2015.

The Tribe now has two lefties in the bullpen with Oliver Perez and Rzepczynski. They have two other lefties on the disabled list in Andrew Miller and Tyler Olson.

Plutko started against the A's in Saturday's 7-2 loss. He retired 12 straight batters and had a 2-0 lead entering the sixth inning when the A's scored three runs on the way to their second straight win against the Tribe.

Rzepczynski appeared in six games for Columbus, posting a 3.38 ERA in 2 2/3 innings. He walked three and struck out one.

In 18 games with the Mariners, Rzepczynski went 0-1 with a 9.39 ERA. Right-handers hit .636 (7-for-11) and lefties .222 (6-for-27) against him. He struck out 10 and walked two in 7 2/3 innings.

Along the way, he allowed 11 earned runs and 13 hits.

Plutko is 4-2 with a 4.66 ERA in seven games, including six starts, with the Indians this year. He's struck out 25, walked nine and allowed 19 earned runs in 36 2/3 innings.

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 07.02.2018

### **Cleveland Indians, Kansas City Royals series preview, pitching matchups**

OAKLAND -- Here is the preview and pitching matchups for the Indians' series against the Royals

Where/when: Kauffman Stadium, Monday through Wednesday.

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

Pitching matchups and starting times: Series: RHP Corey Kluber (11-4, 2.54) vs. RHP Jacob Junis (5-9, 4.67) Monday at 8:15 p.m.; RHP Shane Bieber (3-0, 2.22) vs. LHP Danny Duffy (4-7, 4.94) Tuesday at 8:15 p.m. and RHP Trevor Bauer (7-6, 2.45) vs. RHP Ian Kennedy (1-8, 5.11) Wednesday at 8:15 p.m.

Series: The Indians are 4-2 against the Royals this season. The Indians lead, 362-330, overall.

Hot pitchers: Lefty Oliver Perez has allowed just one run in his last 14 appearances for the Indians. Duffy went 2-1 with a 3.30 ERA in five starts in June for the Royals.

Hot hitters: Francisco Lindor is hitting .329 (26-for-79) with 24 runs, seven homers and 13 RBI in his last 20 games. Whit Merrifield hit .298 (28-for-94) with eight doubles in June for the Royals.

Team updates: The Indians are 2-4 on this nine-game trip after avoiding a three-game sweep by the A's on Sunday with a 15-3 win. The Royals, who just posted their worst June in franchise history by going 5-21, have lost eight of their last 11 games after losing 1-0 to Seattle on Sunday.

Disabled list: Indians - RHP Evan Marshall (right elbow), RHP Carlos Carrasco (right elbow), LHP Tyler Olsen (left lat), LHP Andrew Miller (right knee), RHP Nick Goody (right elbow), LHP Ryan Merritt (left shoulder), RHP Danny Salazar (right shoulder) and RHP Cody Anderson (right elbow) are on the disabled list.

Royals - RHP Blaine Boyer (back), INF Cheslor Cuthbert (back), RHP Justin Grimm (right shoulder), RHP Jesse Hahn (right elbow), RHP Nate Karns (right elbow), LHJP Erik Skoglund (left elbow) and OF Jorge Soler (left foot) are on the disabled list. Kennedy (left side) is day to day.

Next: Oakland visits Progressive Field for a three-game series starting Friday night as the Indians open a 10-game homestand.

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 07.02.2018

### **Indians hit 11 doubles, 2 HRs in 15-3 romp over Athletics**

The Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. (AP) -- Francisco Lindor and the Cleveland Indians reached double digits, and then some.

Lindor homered and hit two of the Indians' 11 doubles Sunday as they ended the Oakland Athletics' six-game winning streak with a 15-3 romp.

"It was really good," Lindor said. "Hopefully it'll keep us in the right direction. Guys felt very comfortable today in the box. Hopefully we can carry that approach to tomorrow's game."

Edwin Encarnacion also homered and Jose Ramirez, Yonder Alonso and Lonnie Chisenhall each added two doubles. The Indians nearly matched the team record of 12 doubles set against Minnesota in 1996.

"We kept the line moving," manager Terry Francona said. "We hit the ball the other way, we hit the ball through the hole, we went first to third. That's a good recipe for us. They're grinding and grinding so it's nice to have something to show for it."

Alonso had four hits and three RBIs. Cleveland broke open the game with an eight-run eighth inning - its first 10 batters reached without an out.

Mike Clevinger (7-3) allowed three runs over six uneven innings as the AL Central leaders avoided a sweep.

Cleveland led 5-3 before its big eighth, getting five singles, two doubles, two walks and a hit batter before the A's recorded an out. When Yan Gomes hit a comebacker to pitcher Josh Lucas for the first out, the Coliseum crowd of 16,164 erupted in mock cheers.

Khris Davis had two hits for the A's. Oakland had won 12 of 14 going into the day, but left the bases loaded in the first and struggled to get much going after that.

"It's unfortunate that this game got completely out of hand for us because the guys felt great about not only playing well but coming back," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "We had some good at-bats and then it just got a little out of hand."

The Indians were outscored 10-3 in the first two games of the series and were on the verge of being swept for the second time this season before breaking out against A's starter Frankie Montas (4-2) and four relievers.

Lindor struck out in his first at-bat, doubled in his next two and hit his 21st home run in the seventh. The Indians leadoff hitter later drew a bases-loaded walk in the eighth.

Encarnacion also homered in the seventh, his 20th this season.

## THIS AND THAT

Cleveland's 13 extra-base hits are the most in the majors in a game this season. . The Indians are 7-1 when facing a sweep in the final game of a series. . Mark Canha has a 10-game hitting streak for Oakland.

## DEFENSIVE DOINGS

Chisenhall made a diving catch at the right-field foul line on Chad Pinder's sinking fly ball to end a bases-loaded threat in the first inning. Center fielder Rajai Davis made an equally impressive diving catch on Jed Lowrie's liner in the third, then threw back to the infield and the Indians completed an 8-4-3 double play.

"Those were huge," Davis said. "Those are rally-killers."

## TRAINER'S ROOM

Indians: RHP Carlos Carrasco (right elbow contusion) threw 58 pitches over four innings of a rehab start with Double-A Akron.

Athletics: 3B Matt Chapman (right thumb contusion) took batting practice before the game and will begin a rehab stint with Single-A Stockton on Monday.

## UP NEXT

Indians: RHP Corey Kluber (11-4, 2.54 ERA) pitches against the Royals in Kansas City on Monday, coming off the shortest start of his career.

Athletics: RHP Chris Bassitt (1-3, 2.82) faces the San Diego Padres on Monday in his second start since getting called up from the minors for the fifth time this season.

## Captains win, gain series split with TinCaps

Judging strictly by statistics, pitching has not been a strong suit for the Captains this season.

Going into the finale of a four-game series against the Fort Wayne (Ind.) TinCaps on July 1 at Classic Park, Lake County's team ERA of 4.33 was 13th in the 16-team Midwest League. In the first half of the MWL season, their team ERA of 4.40 was 15th.

But the Captains pitchers are beginning to find a semblance of good form, especially in the starting rotation.

In the 6-4 victory over Fort Wayne on July 1, Jean Carlos Mejia (1-2, 2.97 ERA) picked up the win with his best outing of the season.

The 21-year-old right-hander from the Dominican Republic limited the TinCaps to one run on three hits in six innings. He posted a season-high eight strikeouts and didn't walk a batter while throwing 85 pitches, 60 for strikes.

Tough luck has been Mejia's constant companion this season. Late in spring training, he was struck in the head by a batted ball while shagging flies during batting practice. He had two relief appearances in early April, then went on the disabled list for six weeks with nagging arm injuries.

He returned on June 7 and made four indifferent starts. Against the TinCaps, Mejia was light years better.

"This was the best we've seen him throw this season," said Captains manager Luke Carlin, who had Mejia last year as a reliever at short-season Single A Mahoning Valley.

Mejia's performance was reflective of the work of the other Captains starters in this series — Juan Hillman, Gregori Vasquez and Francisco Perez.

In the four-game series that ended with a split, Captains starters in 27 innings surrendered seven runs, six earned, on 16 hits. They notched 25 strikeouts and issued only two walks.

Carlin and pitching coach Joe Torres said they thought it was the best four-game sequence for Lake County starters this season. Making the performances all the more impressive was that they came against a good San Diego Padres affiliate that came to Eastlake riding a five-game winning streak.

Felix Tati followed Mejia to the mound and struggled. The 21-year-old right-hander gave up five runs on three hits in 2 1/3 innings. Kyle Nelson was summoned from the bullpen with one out a runner aboard in the bottom of the ninth inning. The 21-year-old left-hander induced a fly out and fanned Jack Suwinski to end the game and earned his fourth save.

Nelson, an MWL All-Star, is pitching his way out of Lake County. In 20 appearances covering 29 1/3 innings, he's piled up 42 strikeouts against one walk and has a microscopic 0.61 ERA.

Lake County's offense answered the ball in the series finale.

Shortstop Elvis Perez, making his Captains debut after being promoted from Mahoning Valley on June 30, was 3 for 4 with two RBI. Oscar Gonzalez and Nolan Jones continued to pound the baseball, each going 2 for 4. Jose Medina hit a two-run home run.

Captains batters spoiled the second homecoming this season for Fort Wayne starter and eventual loser Nick Margevicius. (5-5, 3.07 ERA). The former St. Ignatius High School and Rider University standout gave up five runs on seven hits in 5 1/3 innings.

## "It's like chasing two rabbits." Rajai on Rickey and the art of stealing bases

by Jordan Bastian

Rajai Davis walked by the lineup sheet hanging on a wall inside the visitors' clubhouse at the Coliseum on Sunday morning, spotted his name and flashed a smile. The veteran outfielder then walked up to reporters and posed a question.

"Are you here for the show?" Davis asked.

It's a line Davis has used in the past, but it again elicited laughter.

"Enjoy the show today," he added with a grin.

Davis did not get to flash his speed on the basepaths, but the center fielder did shine on defense. He made a diving catch in shallow center in the third to start an impressive inning-ending double play. In the sixth, he sprinted deep into the left-center gap, winding up at the wall, while racing down a long drive from Matt Olson.

Before Cleveland piled on 12 runs over the final three innings to run away with a 15–3 win, those defensive plays loomed large in what was—for most of the afternoon—a close game.

"The one, he ran three football fields for," Indians pitcher Mike Clevinger marveled. "It felt like that ball started in right-center and just carried and carried and carried and he was just running and I look up and he's right underneath it. Things like that save the game."

As a 37-year-old veteran, Davis takes great pride in doing things on a diamond that you'd expect to see from much younger players. At the top of the list is stealing bases.

Heading into Sunday's game, here were the American League leaders in stolen bases:

21: Dee Gordon  
17: Tim Anderson  
16: Whit Merrifield, Delino DeShields and Davis

Let's frame things in a different manner, though, Let's take a look at the same group, but sort them by the percentage of steals within the players' total times on base:

38.1%: Davis  
21.4%: Gordon  
18.6%: DeShields  
17.5%: Anderson  
12.9%: Merrifield

When Davis gets on, his mentality is that he's going. During his time in an Oakland uniform, Davis spent a lot of time with all-time stolen base king Rickey Henderson, getting to know the legend and picking his brain about the art of stealing bags.

The biggest lesson Davis said he learned is to go. And, just for a bit of perspective, using the same raw method for the 2018 AL leaderboard, here's the percentage of steals per times on base for Davis vs. Henderson:

29.3%: Davis  
26.3%: Henderson

Davis is one of the best basestealers of the current era with 410 and he's done so mostly as a role player, doing all he can to maximize the moments he reaches the bases. He's still nearly 1,000 thefts behind Henderson's 1,406. The days of Henderson, Vince Coleman and Tim Lincecum are long gone, but Davis remembers watching them and wanting to become them.

Steals are not in vogue like they were back in the 1980s or even in the '90s to a lesser degree. Pitchers may more attention to that aspect of the game. Catchers are getting better than ever. Front-offices increasingly do not like risking giving away outs unless it's opportunistic.

Consider this: While steals per game have decreased every decade, the stolen-base success rate has climbed.

1970s: 1.24 SB/game (64.2%)  
1980s: 1.54 SB/game (67.7%)  
1990s: 1.45 SB/game (68.3%)  
2000s: 1.15 SB/game (70.7%)  
2010s: 1.14 SB/game (72.4%)

When a player decides to take off, teams want him to be extremely confident that the situation lends itself to success. But, it's not just about speed. It's about reading pitchers, taking advantage of certain catchers, knowing the strength of the middle infielders, understanding which counts are most opportunistic and so on.

Before the show on Sunday, Davis had a lengthy discussion about Henderson and the nuances of stealing in this era.

Q: How often did you get a chance to talk to Rickey about stealing?

RD: "I talked to him a lot."

Q: Did he refer to himself as Rickey?

RD: "No, maybe he was different with me." (laughs)

Q: You grew up idolizing Rickey, so what was it like to actually have the opportunity to learn from him and apply some of that knowledge to your own game?

RD: "You're getting the best of the best. It's like the guy who invented the whole thing and then had to obviously adjust with the pitchers. He obviously had the mindset to be great and to steal bases. He'd always find little keys—the little keys that most people don't pay attention to, but he was focused on when he got out there. He didn't have to look at film, because he's done it so many times. He could just go out there and see it when he's out there. He's studying while he's out there. He was just a very good student of the game. Some people have a masters. He's well beyond that. Just look at how many stolen bases he has compared to anybody else."

Q: It's hard to fathom having 100, 110, 120, 130 steals in a single season, especially given the way the game is now...

RD: "He did those in his first four years. I could see that happening. Your first four years, when you're 21, 22, 23. And now you just don't get that kind of opportunity [to run freely], unless you're just a freak of nature and you're just above and beyond, super fast, and nobody can catch you. It's going to take a really special being to be able to do that now, in my opinion."

Q: Pitchers and catchers have learned how to control the running game better, too...

RD: "[It's more difficult now] with as much attention as they pay to it. Obviously, you have to get on base a lot. So, you have to have two skills that have to be outstanding. You have to be able to hit, have a great eye at the plate to get on base and then you have to be quick enough and just mentally prepared to go get it."

Q: Do you ever wonder what you could've done in Rickey's era?

RD: "Man. Those guys would be very intimidating. The Vince Colemans and Rickey and Kenny Lofton. Obviously, Rickey never got content. Some guys, they hit homers. Lofton was on base a lot. He was the closest thing to Rickey to me. He was on base like .380. Those guys stole bases, but they still didn't do what Rickey did and they played a lot of years. That just tells you that he wanted it."

Q: How important is it for younger players to learn how to read pitchers and pick up on little things that help with stealing?

RD: "Guys have to want it, though."

Q: First-base coach Sandy Alomar Jr. seems to have a knack for picking up on things that help the runners take advantage...

RD: "Sandy is very good. He pays attention."

Q: It's not just about being fast...

RD: "You can't just run at this level. Guys get thrown out at this level, because our arms are unbelievable. The catchers, they're quick and they have great arms. Most of them. And the pitchers at least give a lot of their catchers a chance to throw you out. A catcher obviously has to have a good throw and a transfer and, obviously, there's the tag. Three parts over there on that side. But, it's hard to out-run that ball nowadays, especially if you don't know in advance [what they do]. Little things give you an edge."

Q: Is it more about reading a pitcher than beating the catcher?

RD: "It helps. Mentally, it helps, because you're prepared. And then there's some strategy in how you're able to get off the blocks quick, so to speak. Out from your stand-still to a dead sprint. There are obviously some techniques. I couldn't perfect the one that Rickey teaches. That's just a tough one."

Q: Carl Crawford would talk about leading and planting with the right leg rather than crossing over with the left leg...

RD: "Yeah, there's that, if it works for you. That's the only thing. If it doesn't work, if you can't do it with the pressure on, then it's hard. That's the key. You can do it in practice all the time. But, when the pressure's on, then you do something different. That's the hard part, transferring into the game."

Q: It seems like they give you the freedom to just go here...

RD: "I suppose I've earned that. Of course, at the beginning, you have to take it. You've got to take it. And then you'll earn it."

Q: There are times we see you jumping around and moving when you get a lead. Pitchers vary their looks. Is it also important for you to vary what he sees when he looks over?

RD: "I do that occasionally. I just like stealing from the stand-still, though, now. I'm just gone. I've gotten accustomed to it. But, sometimes I will. I do sometimes, depending on the pitcher, the circumstances, the situations. You're just kind of evaluating what's going on and seeing what he's doing. What's he telling me? Body languages speaks. You just have to recognize it."

Q: What is that dynamic like when you reach first base and Sandy comes over to relay information?

RD: "That's the hard part, because you get on base, you just got a hit, now you've got to try to take that at-bat—whatever it may have been, it may have been very stressful—now you've got to try to change your mode. OK, now I'm a baserunner or a basestealer. Now, I'm focusing on this, which is hard to do really quick. And, at that moment, you're taking all your stuff off and he's speaking to you. So, it's like, you're taking all that in, processing all that at one time. That's a lot to process at one time. I think that's the toughest part, especially for a young guy, if they don't have the experience of actually doing it already."

Q: You don't want to overwhelm them...

RD: "That's the thing. And that's the hard part, just getting to that point. That's why some guys have to wait a few pitches. And sometimes that first pitch is the one you were supposed to go, you know? They show you a big one and then they go quick."

Q: Do you like to run quick after you get on base?

RD: "I try to be ready from jump one from Day 1 and pitch one, but I'll mix it up just so you don't get into a routine. And then, OK, they can predict when I'm running. They don't know what pitch I'm going to go. I try to go on the best pitch that's going to have the best success rate for me."

Q: How important is the count?

RD: "That is important. The pitcher is important. Does he care about the runner? Does he? Or, does he care about the hitter more? Some pitchers are just good at being quick to the plate. They try to shut it down."

Q: Some pitchers will live with giving up stolen bases in order to channel their focus on the batter...

RD: "If they make quality pitches. I guarantee you they'll make more quality pitches than pitchers who are concerned about the runners, because he's focused on one thing. If you focus on two things, it's like chasing two rabbits. As soon as they split, what're you going to do?"

Q: What's the biggest thing you learned from your talks with Rickey?

RD: "To go. That you've got to go. To experience, to learn. You can't steal a base if you don't go. You don't learn anything if you don't go and get out. You can learn something even if you don't get out, but chances are you're going to learn more when you do get out. What could I have done better? You're going to look and say, 'What could I have done better?' The good ones, I think, will look and evaluate, 'What did I do?' OK, did I look up? Oh, I looked too long. Oh, my jump. I didn't get into a sprint. I put my head up. It's the little things that you may not be able to see, but you can see when you go back and look. This is what I felt. This is what I think I did. It's not what I did. So, you figure out, OK, I was looking too long. Those little things."

Q: When you say you looked too long, what exactly do you mean? Just watching the pitcher too long?

RD: "Yeah, sometimes that happens. You just don't get the right jump or there's a little key that you're looking for and you were looking at the wrong one. Maybe it was his shoulder that was leaning, not his leg dipping, or whatever it may be. But, I think, the more you see it, the more experience you have, I think the better chances you have of being successful, because you recognize that you've done that before. You can pull from that."

Q: How much fun is it when you see identify something and then take advantage? Like when you guys stole eight in game against the Angels in 2016 or a few games ago when you stole three in an inning against the Tigers...

RD: "Yeah. That's the best part. It's like, 'Oh, you can't steal off him? Let's try. Let me try first.'"

Q: And then the next guy tries...

RD: "Guys get more confidence. And then if they see it, it's, 'Oh, it can be done.' Because you don't think it can be done, until it's done, you know? I don't know how many people thought Rickey could steal 1,406 bases. But, he did it. Now, you know it can be done. But, who's going to do it, though?"

Q: We may never see that again in our lifetimes...

RD: "Obviously, you've got to get in early. A little bit like a Jordan Michael. You've got to have somebody who's going to help you along the way."

Q: Isn't that your son?

RD: (laughs) "Yeah, that's my son."

Q: He has a good mentor...

RD: "Yeah, he will have an advantage. He's three. He's got some talent."

Q: Do you see improvement in Francisco Lindor and Jose Ramirez on the bases compared to when you were here two years ago?

RD: "Oh yeah, absolutely."

Q: In the last game in St. Louis, Ramirez wanted to steal against Yadier Molina and he went out and did it...

RD: "Yeah, he got him. Easy, too. I was like, 'Wow.' I was impressed. I was telling him, 'Hey man, you got a good jump. Woo.' The pitcher was not too slow, either. It was a good jump. He was patient. He waited. The right time. And he went."

Q: Jose had that just-go mentality...

RD: "Yeah. That's part of it. You have to. You have to. You have to believe that you're going to be safe every time you go. That's the biggest hurdle I think for guys who don't run. They're scared of getting thrown out. They're scared to make a mistake. If you're afraid to make mistakes, then that's not your cup of tea. You're going to make some mistakes. Just learn from it."

Q: How much have the new rules around the bag changes things? Now, if you come off slightly and they keep a glove on you, replay might lead to you being out...

RD: "That's a major adjustment I had to make, especially wearing the [protective] glove. You can't grip with that thing. So now, I had to just go back to the Rickey days. I stopped using the glove. Hey, Rickey did it. He slid, there's a way he slid to help the matter, but I said, 'He did. And he got 1,406 without one.' I can do it." (laughs)

### **Tito's pregame minutiae: July 1 by Jordan Bastian**

Q: You guys announced that Danny Salazar was going to have exploratory surgery on his right shoulder on Monday. Is there anything else you can say about that yet?

TF: "I don't know anything more than what I kind of told you. What was put out is all we know. It's not like we're hiding anything. It's just, how do you know? Until you actually go into somebody's shoulder... And that's the hard thing when somebody says they hurt. One, some guys can pitch with the same exact thing somebody else has and it's not always just pain threshold. We've all heard the stories, guys pitching without a ligament and it calcifies over and they pitch for 15 years. Some guys have the same thing and it hurts. So, again, until you actually get in there and find it... So, we'll find out. I just think that's the last thing you do, because when you go inside somebody's shoulder, that in itself is difficult."

Q: How frustrating has it been to have Salazar struggle to stay on the field over the past two years and not realize his potential?

TF: "There's been a handful of times where we've tried to corral Danny, because his frame isn't very big. And to pitch with that velocity he throws at and to hold it and to not get hurt... that's why we used to talk to him so much. But, let's just see what comes of it. We'll have time to talk about it more and see what the prognosis is and all those types of things."

Q: Will Carlos Carrasco start on Friday against the A's?

TF: "Yes. He came through everything real well last night [in his rehab start with Double-A Akron]. He threw 65 pitches. I think he went out in the bullpen and threw a few more. He touched 97. They said he was pretty good. He picked off a couple guys. He was good. He texted me this morning and said he's ready to go. So, that's good. So, what we did is we optioned [Adam] Plutko and we got Zep [Marc Rzepczynski] here. So, we'll have to make a move when Carrasco pitches, but for [at least four games] we have an extra bullpen arm and getting the lefty here should help."

Q: This means Shane Bieber stays on as the fifth starter. He's clearly impressed you guys in a short period of time...

TF: "We've actually been impressed with both the kids, with Plutko, too. Plutko's done a pretty good job here. Bieber's done an outstanding job. But, we told Adam he wasn't being demoted because of how he pitched or because he gave up runs in the sixth [on Saturday]. It's just, we've got Carrasco coming back. Like he said, yeah, it sucks a little bit. But, I said, 'Your career is going [up].' And I think he's smart enough to understand that."

Q: Zep said he's happy to come to a team that is familiar with him. How much does it help from your end that there's familiarity with his personality, what he does and how to use him?

TF: "It's so fun. He walked down the hallway and I broke out in a big smile. And I've been kind of going back and forth with him while we were signing him and stuff. And he said, he goes, 'I had so much fun in Cleveland.' We enjoyed Zep. Just because a guy signs somewhere else doesn't mean you cut ties or you lose fondness. Hopefully, sometimes, we've all seen with relievers, how volatile it can get. You get a guy on a roll... You've seen what happened with [Neil] Ramirez here and Oliver [Perez]. Shoot, they've changed our bullpen. But, even just this week, not having to get Perez up every [game]. I've been fighting that the last couple games. We're down a run and you're trying to stay in a game. When you only have one [lefty], it can get a little hard."

Q: Well, it helps with Perez throws zero pitches...

TF: [laughing] "But, he still had to warm up. But, I know what you're saying. If I would've known that was going to happen, I wouldn't have had him warm up."

Q: How's Tyler Olson doing?

TF: "He's doing really well."

Q: After his bullpen session today, what's the next step? A simulated game or a Minor League rehab?

TF: "One or the other here coming pretty soon."

Q: What has been your take on the offense's production on the road trip?

TF: "You know, everybody asks and I understand it. The home-away thing, I still fall back on game to game. I just feel like I'll always look at it that way. We get a little impatient. Like the other day, the first game, we had 50 pitches the first two innings. We didn't have anything to show for it, but we had good patience. And then we lost patience. When we're at our strength, in my opinion, we get a line moving and we run the bases real well, we create some energy. You force teams into mistakes. Yesterday, we had the two solo homers. That's what I was trying to say last night. After a game, how many times do you hear me say, 'Kluber gave up two solos, but pitched his [butt] off.' That's what it ended up being. You don't look at it like that during the game, but we've got to create some traffic and make guys pitch out of the stretch and put some stress on them."

Q: The hitters seem to have been chasing more pitches out of the zone...

TF: "Sometimes, yeah. And that's human nature. You want to do it, but you get a little long and what you end up doing is playing right into their hands."

Q: This season, you guys have seen one of the lowest percentages of fastballs in baseball...

TF: "I think that's also what I was saying last night. You've got to earn it. If you keep chasing, they're not going to throw it. And we've chased a number of pitches out of the zone these last four or five days."

Q: On the road trip, it's almost been 50/50, fastballs and other pitches, from the starters you've faced...

TF: "And it looks like it. I didn't know that, but I would've guessed that it was close."

Q: Might Andrew Miller get back on a mound during the upcoming homestand?

TF: "Yeah."

Q: In talking to Rajai Davis today, he mentioned again how good first-base coach Sandy Alomar Jr. is when it comes to reading pitchers in order to help the running game. How much can that help some of the younger guys who are still developing their skills as baserunners?

TF: "If guys are willing to listen, which most of them are, Sandy really can help them. So, what it does is that frees me up to think, 'OK, is this a good time to go?' And, if it is, then Sandy can kind of help take over. It works pretty well. There's very seldom that somebody will run and I'll be like, 'Damn.' And, when it happens, we talk about it right away. But, I like the idea. I want our coaches to have freedom to coach. I think it helps them. I think it makes them feel like they're doing something. But, you have to be able to carry your load. In Sandy's case, he's taken that and run with it, which is exactly what you want to see. You see somebody get excited about an area. This is back a few years, but we were thinking of putting him at third and he said, 'I love being at first.' He doesn't view it as being somebody that stands there. He does things to help us win games. And I know when things don't go well, he comes in and he gets upset, because he cares."

Q: That seems like it can be a real advantage to have someone who's good at picking up on tendencies of pitchers...

TF: "And Sandy's really good. He spends a lot of time. He's just got a good eye for that stuff. Everybody kind of sees things a little differently. And I don't know if it's maybe from catching all those years, but he sees things pretty good."

Q: Will Rzepczynski just be a left-on-left guy for you?

TF: "We'll see, it depends on the score and the game. He's been different in his career. Like, he came up as a starter with Toronto, so he could sink it and he could go obviously multiple innings. Then, when he kind of came to us from St. Louis, we kind of had him as left-on-left. It kind of depends on how he's throwing the ball. We told him before he came that we know we have to make a move in like six days, so it might not be perfect. But, we have such good history with him. It just seemed like a good time to get him here rather than he could sit in Triple-A and keep throwing. It just seems like sometimes you use your past relationships to help your future performance."

Q: He had some struggles with Seattle this season...

TF: "And we talked about that a little bit. He said, he goes, 'When you struggle, sometimes you don't pitch as much as you want.' And he goes, 'I need to.' And I get it, but I also get their point, too. [Expletive], the guys they have are dealing."

Q: As a manager, how hard is it on you when you're dealing with an entire bullpen struggling?

TF: "It's really hard. That's like what happened in May. That's the first time in a long time for me where... I didn't like that feeling. Whether it worked or not, we always had a reason. And, hoo boy, we were all spinning a little bit. That's hard. I went back to my Philly days where you just don't know. But, they start to kind of reel it in and Oliver came and he helped and Neil started pitching the way he could. So, that really helps."

Q: Carrasco hit 97 mph in his rehab start?

TF: "Yeah, he did well. He did. It seems like his spirits are good. You know what? Last time, remember he had the hammy and he came out [expletive] firing. This might end up—not that we didn't miss him—but maybe he can come back and have a little [something extra]. I think once he got [past the swelling], it's like the rest kicked in. And, you know what? It ends up giving Bieber or Plutko, or both, they end up getting starts, which is good for them. We tried to tell Plutko it was not an indictment on him giving up runs in the sixth."

Q: We've seen a few times with Plutko where he will start off great and then kind of hit a wall. What have you seen there?

TF: "You know, [pitching coach Carl Willis said something ]interesting. [Plutko] is so long-waisted that he's kind of got to work to leverage the ball down. And it's a little harder for him, so when he starts to get a little fatigued, it starts to creep up."

### **MiLB | Clippers 8, Indians 3 | Late rally lifts Columbus to win**

Adam Rosales hit a two-run homer to kick-start a five-run eighth inning, and the Clippers beat the Indianapolis Indians 8-3 on Sunday afternoon before a crowd of 7,835 at Huntington Park.

The Clippers won all four games against the Indians for their first series sweep of the season.

Rosales' drive to left-center with one out broke a 3-3 tie and drove in Francisco Mejia. It was Rosales' team-leading 11th home run of the season.

Eric Haase added a two-run single with two outs in the eighth, and Drew Maggi added an RBI single.

Reliever Robert Zarate (3-1) pitched one-hit ball for two innings to pick up the win.

Starter Mitch Talbot gave up one run on six hits in six innings and left the game with a 2-1 lead. But he didn't figure in the decision when Cole Sulser gave up a two-run homer to Ryan Lavarney in the seventh to give the Indians a 3-2 lead.

The Clippers tied the score in the bottom of the seventh when Brandon Barnes drew a base-loaded walk.

The Clippers took an early lead, scoring two runs in the first against Indians starter Tyler Eppler when Greg Allen, Yu Chang and Yandy Diaz hit consecutive doubles to lead off the inning.

### **The Cleveland Indians Trade Deadline Manifesto**

Zack Meisel 1h ago 5

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Mike Chernoff scribbles on the whiteboard in the central meeting room on the fourth floor of the Indians' offices at Progressive Field.

Trevor Bauer pitches in relief on days he doesn't start

Shane Bieber plays center field three times a week

Jason Kipnis assumes the role of assistant to the assistant hitting coach

Chris Antonetti enters the room. Chernoff scrambles to locate the eraser and wipe away every hint of his off-the-wall brainstorm session.

"Wh — what did that say?" Antonetti questions.

"Nothing. Nothing at all," Chernoff replies. "I was, uh, just seeing if the marker had ink."

The Indians might have to get creative this summer as they attempt to fortify their roster in advance of another plunge into the choppy, unforgiving waters of October. OK, so maybe they don't have to get that creative. (Disclaimer: Scenes from the Indians' headquarters might be dramatized or, put more accurately, completely imagined.)

No, Bieber doesn't need to borrow Rajai Davis' glove. But the Indians are in a precarious position. The front office isn't backed with the financial wiggle room to act without consequence. They don't have the prospect capital to overpay for the top available commodities on the trade market.

Somehow, though, they must fill as many of the leaks onboard. In a few months, they'll shift away from the AL Central and wade toward the deep end. The non-waiver trade deadline sits four weeks from now, and there's already a divider separating the buyers and sellers. Unlike in previous years, this doesn't have to be a mad dash July 31.

A few things to remember:

1. The sorry state of the AL Central helps the Indians, but only to an extent

The Indians have distanced themselves from the Twins (35-45), who would be wise to sell off their spare parts, such as Brian Dozier and Fernando Rodney. The Indians have the benefit of experimentation, but they need to actually use it to their advantage. That means trial-and-error sessions with Yandy Diaz and Francisco Mejia (unless either is dealt), to learn if either can provide a consistent boost to the lineup. The Yankees, Red Sox, Astros and Mariners can't afford to test out certain strategies, since they're stuck fighting for their respective division thrones.

2. Variance does still reign supreme in October

Last postseason's results have no bearing on this season, other than the Indians' title drought now stands at a league-high 70 years. It's all about playing well at the proper time. The Indians collapsed against the Yankees because Francisco Lindor, José Ramírez and Corey Kluber faltered when it mattered most and because Edwin Encarnacion and Michael Brantley were hobbled. Now, a betting person would likely prefer the other AL titans if the playoffs commenced today. But many pegged the 102-win Indians as the imposing favorite last October, and we saw how that unfolded.

### 3. The Indians' roster is mighty top-heavy

The club could send five or six All-Stars to the nation's capital in a couple of weeks. The Indians are the only team to feature three hitters with 20 or more home runs. Ramírez and Lindor deserve runner-up MVP consideration (Mike Trout is in another stratosphere this year). Bauer, Kluber and Mike Clevinger all rank in the top 12 in WAR among pitchers. That could all bode well in October, should those stars perform like, well, stars. It always helps to have a strong supporting cast, though, and that's been lacking in the first half. They could benefit by replacing some Fs with Cs (but enough about my seventh-grade algebra nightmare).

OK, before we declare the routes the front office should take, let's stress a few team beliefs that must be considered with every scenario.

The contention window, in the eyes of the front office, extends beyond 2018

Yes, Andrew Miller and Cody Allen will become free agents this winter, and the odds of signing either reliever are slim. But with Lindor, Ramírez, Encarnacion, Kluber, Bauer, Clevinger and Carlos Carrasco under team control through at least 2020 — and with no other AL Central team threatening their grip on the division crown — the Indians aren't planning to curl up and hibernate until the cicadas return.

Therefore ...

Players with multiple years of control remain the top target

The front office aimed to acquire players signed for multiple years last summer — Zach Britton was a primary target — but nothing panned out. Instead, they settled for rentals Joe Smith and Jay Bruce, for minimal prospect costs. The volatile bullpen has trimmed a few years off the lives of every member of the coaching staff and front office this season. Now imagine it next year, sans Miller and Allen. The Blair Witch Project has nothing on that frightening thought. So, the Indians will lean toward relievers with multiple years of control.

Of course, that means a higher price tag, in terms of prospects. And on that matter ...

The top prospects won't be traded for a rental

Everything must be weighed. Is it more worthwhile to trade, say, Francisco Mejía for a skilled reliever under contract for a few more years, than to deal a low-level youngster for a hurler who will leave in a few months?

One front office member said he has been bombarded by relatives and friends with questions about the Indians acquiring Manny Machado. If the Orioles would accept a modest return, sure, maybe that would fit into the Indians' plans. But they aren't in the business of sacrificing six-plus years of Mejia or Triston McKenzie for two months of Machado, especially given the unpredictable nature of a five-game series against a quality opponent in October.

Remember, while the Indians are desperate to improve the roster during the next few weeks, they also have to be mindful of maintaining the talent level on the roster in 2019 and 2020. They have made bold moves in the past; they dealt two first-round picks to the Rockies for Ubaldo Jimenez in 2011, a swap that didn't pay dividends until the tail end of 2013. They swapped four prospects, including two more first-rounders, for Miller two years ago. They had agreed to ship out another four-prospect package for Jonathan Lucroy, before the catcher exercised his veto right. Jimenez, Miller and Lucroy were all under contract for multiple years.

The Indians' needs are pretty clear.

- The bullpen

This is shocking, but stick with me here. Oliver Perez and Neil Ramírez have been godsend for Terry Francona, who no longer has to feel obligated to patch together nine innings with 117 Clevinger pitches, two innings of Allen and 12 wads of Dubble Bubble. The Indians have slow-played Miller's return from injury because there's no need to rush him back, especially if they're going to turn him loose in October. And, as previously mentioned, while the focus is on 2018, the Indians can't ignore the elephant in the room (wait, can the elephant play center field?): Allen and Miller could leave this bullpen even more barren than it has seemed at certain points this season.

Rentals: Zach Britton, Brad Brach, Adam Ottavino, Jeurys Familia, Tyler Clippard, Jake Diekman

Multiyear guys: Brad Hand, Raisel Iglesias, Jared Hughes, David Hernandez, Kyle Barraclough, Keone Kela, Mychal Givens, Ryan Tepera, Kirby Yates

- Center field

Brantley owns left field. The Lonnie Chisenhall/Brandon Guyer platoon can work if deployed properly. (Can Guyer please stop facing right-handed pitching? He's 1-for-40 this season. He has an .832 OPS against lefties.) Center field has been a mess, with Davis, Bradley Zimmer, Greg Allen and Tyler Naquin all seeing time at the position. Zimmer is expected to miss at least another few weeks with a shoulder injury, and then he'll begin his search for a solution to his sky-high strikeout rate. Davis can't hit. Naquin can't field. Allen was overmatched the past few weeks of his most recent big-league stint. There's no perfect answer on the roster to the center field question.

Brantley and Chisenhall can become free agents at the end of the year, so another body in the outfield wouldn't hurt. It's a pretty weak market for outfielders, though.

- Second/third base

The Indians don't want to abandon Jason Kipnis (or his hefty salary). He owns an .833 OPS in his past 30 games. But if they do want to make a change, they could shift Ramírez to second base. Maybe Yandy Diaz would merit some regular at-bats. (For what it's worth, Diaz has played some first base recently at Class AAA Columbus.)

Machado, Adrian Beltre, Mike Moustakas, Scooter Gennett, Yangervis Solarte, Starlin Castro and Asdrubal Cabrera could all be available.

Or, you know, the Indians could try Bieber in center field (he boasts a career 1.000 OPS) and Bauer in the bullpen on the days between his starts. Whatever works.

## **How good is the Royals' Brad Keller? From Rule 5 pick to dark-horse Rookie of the Year candidate**

By Rustin Dodd Jul 2, 2018

SEATTLE — Here was Brad Keller late Sunday afternoon, folding his gray road jersey and organizing his clothes at his locker after the first complete game of his career. Here was the most pleasant surprise of this dreadful Royals season, cleaning up in a quiet clubhouse.

Keller had just allowed one run in eight innings in a 1-0 loss to the Mariners, with the Royals absorbing a three-game sweep at Safeco Field, and now he was packing up a blue duffel bag before an evening flight back to Kansas City.

They have people to do this for ballplayers in the major leagues, of course. Keller, a 6-foot-4, 235-pound rookie, did not mind.

"Guy throws a complete game, and he's got to pack his own bag," reliever Brian Flynn said, looking one locker to his right.

A moment later, a clubhouse attendant approached and offered to finish the job. Keller was almost done, so he neatly picked up his folded clothes and placed them inside his bag.

Keller, 22, had done everything else Sunday. He had scattered six hits across eight innings, his longest outing since joining the Kansas City rotation on May 30. He had lowered his ERA to 2.14 in six starts. He had dueled with Seattle lefty James Paxton for eight innings in a game that took just two hours, and he had become the youngest Royals pitcher to record a complete game since Zack Greinke in 2005.

"Pretty much in control," Royals manager Ned Yost said.

Keller was so effective in the loss, so efficient against a possible playoff team, that it was easy to wonder about what is real and what is not. Here is a Rule 5 pick pitching like one of the best starters in baseball across the past three weeks. Here is a rookie who will not turn 23 until July 27. Here is a pitcher with a 2.09 ERA in 56 innings, including 22 1/3 innings in relief.

And yet, the question still hangs in the air: How much of this is sustainable? How good is Brad Keller?

"He's out there attacking with his fastball, slider, throwing strikes," Yost said. "He's really commanding his pitch count. He's doing everything you want a starting pitcher to do."

So let's start with the good: If Keller had recorded enough innings to qualify for the ERA title, his ground-ball rate (60.7 percent entering Sunday) would rank first in baseball among major-league starters. His style is well suited in this era of launch angle, power and baseballs that fly.

The Royals have allowed a major-league-worst 119 homers this season. Keller has served up just one, in a relief outing on April 20. His ability to both sink and cut a fastball has left hitters pounding weaker grounders into the dirt. His slider has emerged as a secondary weapon. And then there's his power — a cutter that regularly clocks in at 96 mph.

It is the pure stuff of a promising workhorse, his teammates say. And yet, the other peripheral numbers inspire a modicum of skepticism. Keller has struggled to induce swings and misses, striking out just 20 batters and issuing 11 walks in 33 2/3 innings since becoming a starter. He's allowed opponents to hit .276 on balls in play, which suggests a small degree of luck. He's also yet to allow a homer, which sounds like a positive until you consider that he allowed 31 homers in 478 2/3 innings from 2014 to 2017.

It is possible, of course, that Keller's pitch mix has developed to the point where he will continue to suppress homers at this rate. It is just as likely, perhaps, that he is due for some regression.

Seven months ago, the Arizona Diamondbacks thought so little of Keller's future that they failed to protect him on their 40-man roster entering the Rule 5 draft. On Sunday, he continued to emerge as a dark-horse candidate for Rookie of the Year. This is his new reality.

On Sunday, as he faced a Mariners lineup that ranked eighth in the American League in runs scored, he yielded just one run on three soft singles in the second inning. He survived a career-high eight innings on 102 pitches as the Royals lost for the 22nd time in 27 games.

"My sinker was working really well," Keller said. "Anytime I fell behind in the count, I went to it. I really tried to jam these guys inside."

This was Sunday afternoon at Safeco Field. As Kansas City prepared for a flight back home, it remained on pace for a club-record 113 losses. In a season that felt dead and buried well before the July 4th holiday, Keller has emerged as a needed salve.

Maybe he is not this good, of course. But perhaps he is something close. He is still just 22. He is still learning how to pitch at this level, he says, working on pitch sequences and setting up hitters in different ways and at different counts.

In moments like this, you need something to hold on to, and on late Sunday evening, Keller stood inside the clubhouse. He did not realize he had thrown a complete game until a couple teammates congratulated him. He still felt disappointed, he said. Another tough loss. Still, it was something.

"I've never had one before," he said. "It's pretty cool."

The Athletic LOADED: 07.02.2018

## **Out-dueled by the Mariners, Royals rookie Brad Keller continues to impress**

BY MARIA TORRES

When a team plays a first half like the Royals did, staggering to a record 31 games under .500, you try to mine the roster for positives.

And the one component that continues to impress as the All-Star break approaches is rookie pitcher Brad Keller, the Royals' 22-year-old Rule 5 acquisition.

He'd been a revelation in the Royals' bullpen, posting a 2.01 ERA in 22 1/3 innings while allowing a .207 average, and has continued to demonstrate poise since moving to the rotation at the end of May.

You could see it last Monday, when he won his first game as a starter by holding the Angels to two hits across seven scoreless innings at Kauffman Stadium.

Even as he was out-duel in a 1-0 loss to the Mariners at Safeco Field, you could see it on Sunday afternoon, too. Keller allowed one run and six hits in a career-high eight innings. The only lasting damage was done in the second when Kyle Seager poked a single down the right-field line and scored on Ben Gamel's broken-bat bloop to center field.

Otherwise, Keller did what he does best. He effectively managed his pitch count, only arriving at his total of 102 as he induced a ground-out from Jean Segura, the Mariners' final batter of the game. He pounded the strike zone with a sinking fastball that hovered around 94 mph and produced ground ball outs all over the left side of the diamond.

One of them ended the Mariners' second-inning threat after Gamel's hit, which was the third straight allowed by Keller in the frame. Mike Zunino chopped a ball right to Mike Moustakas, who snared it, stepped on his bag and fired a strike into Hunter Dozier's glove at first base.

"That's what you look for," Royals manager Ned Yost said. "You look for pitchers that can get ground balls. That's important. Our park, we've kind of built it around fly ball pitchers because it's a big park. But he's a very strong ground-ball type and that's exactly what you look for. That's what you want."

Although he only struck out three Mariners, Keller didn't issue a walk for the first time since joining the rotation.

"(This start) felt good. Tough lineup," said Keller, who in six starts has posted a 2.14 ERA (eight runs in 33 2/3 innings). "A lot of good hitters over there. I just tried to stay on the attack, trying not to fall behind too much and really go at 'em."

But Keller couldn't reap the benefits of his third consecutive quality start.

Still foundering after the .193 batting average they posted in June, the Royals' offense was easily throttled by Mariners starter James Paxton. Whit Merrifield and Salvador Perez got the only hits off the 29-year-old left-hander, who also issued a walk each to Jorge Bonifacio and Drew Butera and struck out 11 batters.

Not once did the Royals reach third base as they ended their road trip having lost three in a row. The Royals (25-58) return to Kauffman Stadium to face the American League Central division-leading Indians at 7:15 p.m. Monday.

"He was more than we can bear," Yost said.

## **Cardinals, Nationals both face real possibility of missing playoffs**

There were a couple of good games in the National League on Sunday involving four playoff contenders. In Philadelphia, the Phillies beat the Nationals 4-3 on Andrew Knapp's 13th-inning, walk-off home run:

Knapp was pinch-hitting for Nick Pivetta, the starting pitcher who had worked the top of the 13th for the Phillies. After the game, Knapp said his dad was in town this week for July 4 and that Knapp had texted him before the game to say he wasn't in the starting lineup. "That's OK," Knapp's dad said, "you'll hit a walk-off home run." It was the first walk-off hit of Knapp's career.

In St. Louis, the Braves scored five runs in the sixth to take a 6-0 lead, including sweet-swinging MVP candidate Freddie Freeman hitting a towering fly ball for his 16th home run:

The Cardinals roared back with five runs in the bottom of the seventh, but Dan Winkler and A.J. Minter retired the final six batters to close out the 6-5 Braves win.

The Phillies took 3 of 4 from the Nationals, losing 17-7 on Friday but winning the other three games by one run. The Braves completed an impressive, three-game sweep on the road. Good job to those two clubs on their big weekend. Bad job to the Nationals and Cardinals, who both sit 42-40 and would be hitting the links if the playoffs started on Monday. The Nationals and Cardinals not only trail the Cubs and Phillies in the wild-card race, they now sit behind the Dodgers and Giants.

Are they in trouble? There are definitely troubling signs.

### **1. Mediocre offenses**

This is maybe the most disappointing aspect of both teams. NL teams are averaging 4.38 runs per game. The Cardinals are 10th at 4.27 runs per game, and the Nationals are at 4.24. They're also trending in the wrong direction. While scoring across the NL was up in June at 4.52 runs per game, the Cards and Nats both averaged an even 4.0 per game.

Bryce Harper certainly deserves some of the blame in Washington. He has hit .193/.332/.404 over 64 games (since April 17) and .180/.333/.326 since June 1. The Nationals also have the worst production in the majors at catcher -- hence the J.T. Realmuto trade rumors -- and since Howie Kendrick went down, their second basemen have hit .232/.246/.341.

For the Cardinals, Marcell Ozuna was supposed to be their Harper, and while he's hitting .285, his .746 OPS and his on-pace total of 20 home runs are well below his .924 and 37 figures from 2017. Matt Carpenter was cold in April and is hot now, while Tommy Pham was hitting in April and early May but has cooled off big time since (he had a 1.042 OPS through May 11, but is .548 since). Paul DeJong got injured and Dexter Fowler has lost his starting job to Harrison Bader. A lineup that looked deep at the start of the season is now thinner and lacks that big hitter in the middle.

What happens moving forward? FanGraphs projects the Nationals at 4.63 runs per game the rest of the season and the Cardinals at 4.35. That makes sense, as you would expect increased production from Harper and Daniel Murphy, while being less certain about guys such as Pham or Ozuna. The answer for the Cardinals, of course, could be a trade for Manny Machado.

## 2. Back of the rotation

We're nitpicking a bit here because both rotations have been very good overall, ranking third and fourth in the NL in ERA. But since both teams are now playing from behind, they need production from all five spots in the rotation. With Stephen Strasburg sidelined, the Nationals have tried the likes of Jefry Rodriguez and Erick Fedde of late, and those two have combined for a 6.03 ERA in seven starts. It helped getting Jeremy Hellickson back for the No. 4 spot, but Strasburg remains out indefinitely.

I expected Luke Weaver to be a big breakout starter this year for the Cardinals, but he has struggled with a 5.16 ERA, hurt by home runs, walks and the big inning. I still believe in his upside, and he's in the rotation for now with Michael Wacha out with an oblique strain, but he needs his results to match the stuff and potential.

Factoring in the bullpens -- and both teams have had some issues in middle relief -- FanGraphs projects the Nationals to allow 4.06 runs per game the rest of the way (up from 3.85 so far) and the Cardinals to allow 4.19 runs per game (same as the 4.20 they've given up so far). Of course, that Nationals figure depends a lot on Strasburg's return, and his health could determine whether the Nats make the playoffs.

## 3. Fielding

Here's where the numbers don't match the critics, particularly with the Cardinals, who get bashed for their defense (and have for a few years now). I'm not watching every game, so the eye test is clearly providing a different result than the advanced metrics, which have the Cardinals at plus-12 Defensive Runs Saved, which is 12th in the majors. That's nowhere near the Brewers, Diamondbacks or Cubs, who are all at plus-43 or better, but it suggests the Cardinals' defense hasn't been terrible.

They do lead the majors in errors (which are incorporated into DRS) and have allowed 34 unearned runs, which is third-most in the majors behind only the Rangers and Padres, so it appears the pitchers haven't cleaned up very well after the errors. The Cardinals do have a couple of supreme defenders in Bader (one reason he'll continue to play) and Kolten Wong, while Jose Martinez is bad at first and Pham's metrics in center haven't been great (minus-7 DRS). Yairo Munoz, filling in for DeJong at shortstop, has been a problem with eight errors in 28 games started.

## 4. Managers

This could be the third straight playoff-less season for the Cardinals. Hey, there are high standards here. That hasn't happened since 1997-99. For whatever reason, and maybe Mike Matheny is part of the "whatever," the sum of the parts hasn't added up as well as it might have the past three seasons.

Dave Martinez is more of an unknown, but he has taken a team that had 95 and 97 wins under Dusty Baker and has them on pace for 83 wins. Some of that is the result of Nationals beating up on a weak division the past two years -- 47-29 in 2017 and 51-25 in 2016. In 2018? They're 13-16.

That might be the telling statistic. It could be that we're headed for no Nationals and no Cardinals in the postseason for the first time since 2010.

Quick notes: Blake Snell had to have locked up a spot on the All-Star team with another gem on Sunday, holding the Astros to one run and four hits with 10 K's over 7 1/3 innings. He lowered his ERA to 2.24, and since May 18, he has a 1.43 ERA and .157 average allowed. Wow.

- It was Canada Day, and Canadian James Paxton started for the Mariners on James Paxton bobblehead day (the bobblehead featured an eagle on Paxton's shoulder to commemorate Opening Day, when an eagle landed on his shoulder). All Paxton did was toss eight scoreless innings with 11 strikeouts (all swinging) in a 1-0 victory for the Mariners, their seventh straight win and 26th by one run (tying the mark for most ever through 85 games). Yes, Edwin Diaz closed it out, striking out the side for his 32nd save.
- Jon Lester homered for the second time in his career as the Cubs won 11-10, scoring double digits for the fourth game in a row:
- Finally, the Yankees bombed David Price for five home runs in Sunday night's 11-1 blowout -- and Luis Severino put an exclamation point on his bid to start the All-Star Game.

It's July! OK, Monday is actually July 2, but Sarah Langs of ESPN Stats & Information passes this along:

- Since 1996, 15 of 22 World Series winners led their divisions entering July 1. The 2014 Giants and 2011 Cardinals each had a share of their respective division's lead at that point and did not win the division but did win the World Series.

- Since 1996, the six division leaders on July 1 all finished in first place just three times: 1996, 1997 and 1999.

- Does it feel like there are more good teams than usual? In one league? The Red Sox, Yankees, Astros and Mariners all have .600 or better winning percentages. From Elias: This is the first time in a non-strike-shortened season in the modern era (since 1900) that four or more teams from a single league entered July with a winning percentage of .600 or better.

LeBron to the Lakers: In honor of LeBron James' leaving Cleveland and heading west, we offer the best players to play for the Indians and the Dodgers or Angels:

Manny Ramirez: He led the AL twice in slugging and OPS with the Indians and had a 165-RBI season. He came to the Dodgers in 2008 and hit .396 with 53 RBIs in 52 games and finished fourth in the MVP voting, leading to the creation of Mannywood at Dodger Stadium.

Kenny Lofton: He was one of the best all-around players in the game in the '90s, spending nine seasons with the Indians sandwiched around one season in Atlanta. He then entered the vagabond phase of his career and hit .301 for the Dodgers in 2006.

Luis Tiant: He's remembered for his Red Sox days, but he was a dominant flamethrower when he came up with the Indians in the '60s, including a 1.60 ERA with nine shutouts in 1968. His final season came with the Angels in 1982.

Orel Hershiser: He was a World Series MVP for the Dodgers in 1988 and pitched in two World Series with the Indians.

Tommy John: He's not just a surgery! John came up with the Indians and won just two games with them before he was traded to the White Sox, who then traded him to the Dodgers for Dick Allen. He later played for the Angels, as well.

Chuck Finley: Arguably the best player in Angels history before Mike Trout, Finley won 165 games with them and had over 50 career WAR. He also won 28 games with the Indians.

Brett Butler: An underrated star in the '80s and early '90s, Butler was a Lofton-type presence at the top of the lineup with his speed and on-base ability. He averaged 99 runs in four seasons with Cleveland and scored 112 his first season with the Dodgers.

OK, that's seven good ones. A starting five and two guys off the bench.