

Bieber K's career-high 11 to lead Tribe over Rays

By Jordan Bastian MLB.com @MLBastian

ST. PETERSBURG -- The crowd inside Tropicana Field made rookie Shane Bieber feel right at home Tuesday night. As the pitcher headed off the field in the seventh inning, a rowdy section filled with Tribe fans rose to their feet and offered Bieber a standing ovation.

Bieber certainly looked like he felt at home on the mound, where he cruised through Tampa Bay's lineup and paved the way for a 2-0 victory for the American League Central-leading Indians. The right-hander piled up a career-high 11 strikeouts and continued to be precocious in terms of pitching years.

"I think he's getting better as he goes," Indians catcher Yan Gomes said. "He's probably throwing more innings than he has before and he's not showing any sign of slowing down."

With the win, the Indians (82-63) lowered their magic number to clinch a third consecutive division title to three.

Cleveland's lineup labored to solve Rays righty Tyler Glasnow, but the Tribe's few breakthroughs proved sufficient for Bieber. Gomes put the Indians on the board with a towering two-out solo shot in the fifth (No. 14 on the year for the catcher) and slugger Edwin Encarnacion followed suit with a monstrous solo blast in the sixth (his 30th homer in '18).

Those were the only runs relinquished by Glasnow in his seven frames for Tampa Bay (79-65).

Bieber logged 100 pitches in 6 2/3 innings, racking up all of his strikeouts via his four-seamer and slider. The rook worked effectively low-and-in to lefties, while enticing Tampa Bay's right-handed batters to chase offerings on the outer edges. The result was a shift from precision to power for Bieber, who struck out two batters in each of the first five innings.

Bieber said staying aggressive inside was a key aspect of the outing.

"That was big tonight," said Bieber, who took a loss against the Rays on Sept. 1. "Just going off the last time I faced them -- I think it was two outings ago -- they were pretty comfortable the second, third time around the order. I know we talked about that.

"Being able to establish in and being OK with missing breaking balls down and keeping them a little more uncomfortable was big. I think that allowed me to go deeper into the game tonight."

The performance marked Bieber's first double-digit strikeout game, but gave the Indians 27 individual showings with 10-plus punchouts this season. That extended a club record, surpassing the 25 double-digit games turned in by Cleveland pitchers last year.

Tommy Pham delivered a one-out single against Bieber in the first inning, but then the righty held the Rays to an 0-for-16 showing into the sixth. Tampa Bay managed to put at least one runner on in each of Bieber's final four innings of work, but the rookie -- with an assist from the bullpen in the seventh -- escaped unscathed.

"I thought he executed the game plan really well," Indians manager Terry Francona said. "He tried to get in on the lefties enough to open up the plate. But his fastball, through the zone, had a lot of life to it."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Thirty bird: Encarnacion's no-doubter in the sixth inning (107.7 exit velocity and 422 projected feet, per Statcast™) gave him at least 30 home runs in each of the last seven seasons, making him the lone Major Leaguer to achieve that feat. Over that seven-year run, the veteran slugger has taken his invisible parrot around the bases a Major League-leading 261 times. Prior to Encarnacion's active streak, Miguel Cabrera (2007-13) was the last hitter to have at least 30 homers in seven straight years.

"It's unbelievable, man," Encarnacion said. "It's something I never expected -- to have the season I'm having, and seven straight years with 30 homers or more, it's very impressive. I'm very proud with what I've been doing."

Sleight of Hand: One night after giving up a walk-off homer, Brad Hand was called upon with two on and two outs and Cleveland holding a 2-0 lead in the seventh. The late-inning lefty ran into trouble out of the chute, walking pinch-hitter Matt Duffy on four pitches to load the bases. Hand fell behind, 3-0 to Malle Smith, but then worked the count full and induced an inning-ending flyout. Hand worked a clean eighth to bridge the gap to Cody Allen in the ninth.

"That was rough for about eight pitches," Francona said. "But, [Hand] fights his way back and then he goes right back out there and gets them out."

DONALDSON'S DEBUT

There was a lot of hype surrounding the Indians debut of Josh Donaldson, who was activated off the disabled list prior to the game. The third baseman -- acquired in a trade with the Blue Jays on Aug. 31 -- made hard contact three times, but went 0-for-4 in his first game for Cleveland. Donaldson had an average exit velocity of 100.9 mph, but flew out to deep center and right, and grounded into a fielder's choice.

"He looked to me like Donaldson," Francona said. "By that, I mean he took some ferocious swings and he's on so many pitches. He squared up a couple, but he didn't have anything to show for it. But, he's got time. It gets exciting, man."

The highlight of Donaldson's Tribe debut came in the sixth inning, when Tampa Bay's C.J. Cron sent a sharp grounder up the third-base line. Donaldson used a slick backhanded grab to glove the grounder and then made a strong throw across the diamond to first baseman Yonder Alonso for an inning-ending out.

SOUND SMART

Each member of the Tribe's starting lineup Tuesday night has made an All-Star team at least once in his career. The last time Cleveland fielded a lineup featuring nine All-Stars was Oct. 2, 1999, against Toronto. That lineup included Kenny Lofton, Omar Vizquel, Roberto Alomar, Manny Ramirez, Jim Thome, Harold Baines, David Justice, Travis Fryman and Sandy Alomar Jr.

HE SAID IT

"That's unbelievable, man. Right after that, I looked at the umpire and I was like, 'Man, that's seven years he's done that.' I don't even know how that feels, man. It takes me two, three years to hit 30 and these guys do it on a regular basis. It's pretty unbelievable and I'm very honored to be playing with him and calling him a teammate." -- Gomes, on Encarnacion

"[Adam] Plutko came to me before the game and said I was the only guy in the lineup that wasn't an All-Star. And six of them being multiple-time All-Stars. That's pretty incredible. It's exciting to be a part of this team right now." -- Bieber

UP NEXT

Right-hander Carlos Carrasco (16-8, 4.31 ERA) is slated to start for the Tribe on Wednesday when the Indians wrap up the series with the Rays with a 1:10 p.m. ET tilt at Tropicana Field. In his past 12 outings, Carrasco has turned in a 2.24 ERA with 98 strikeouts against 12 walks in 72 1/3 innings. Tampa Bay will counter with lefty Blake Snell (18-5, 2.06).

Encarnacion mashes homer No. 30

By Jordan Bastian MLB.com @MLBastian

ST. PETERSBURG -- Edwin Encarnacion crossed home plate, turned and had a familiar face waiting for him Tuesday night. The Indians' slugger walked up to Josh Donaldson and the pair renewed a celebration they did often during their days together in Toronto's lineup.

Following Encarnacion's 30th home run of the season -- giving him at least that many in seven straight seasons -- the reunited teammates slapped hands and then put a finger to their lips. There was no silencing the considerable number of Tribe fans in Tropicana Field cheering the sixth-inning blast that helped propel the Indians to a 2-0 victory over the Rays.

"That's very fun, man," Encarnacion said about reigniting the post-homer routine with Donaldson. "That's how we try to have fun out there. It feels great to have him back in the same lineup together."

Donaldson -- acquired via trade from the Blue Jays on Aug. 31 -- was activated from the disabled list prior to the game.

With the Indians clinging to a 1-0 lead in the sixth, Encarnacion crushed an elevated first-pitch fastball from Tyler Glasnow to deep left field. The no-doubt blast soared a projected 422 feet and had an exit velocity of 107.7 mph, per Statcast™.

Dating back to 2012, Encarnacion has launched a Major League-leading 261 home runs. Seattle slugger Nelson Cruz ranks second with 251 over that seven-season span. The Indians' veteran designated hitter is the only player in MLB to have at least 30 homers in each of those seven campaigns.

Prior to Encarnacion's active streak, the last MLB hitter to belt at least 30 homers in seven straight years was Tigers first baseman/designated hitter Miguel Cabrera (2007-13).

"It's something I never expected," Encarnacion said, "To have the season I'm having, and seven straight years with 30 homers or more, it's very impressive. I'm very proud with what I've been doing."

Encarnacion is also at 96 RBIs on the season, putting him four shy of reaching the century mark for the sixth time in the past seven years.

"As long as he can stay on the field, which he has, he's going to hit 30 and drive in 100," Indians manager Terry Francona said. "Hopefully, a bunch more. It's important. You've got to have a certain amount of runs, and you know he's going to drive in 100."

Encarnacion also joined teammates Jose Ramirez (37 homers) and Francisco Lindor (34) in the 30-homer club this season. They are the first trio of teammates to each reach the mark in the same season since 2016, when the Mariners, Orioles and Red Sox had hitters achieve the feat. It marks the fifth time in Indians history -- and the first time since 1999 -- that the club has had three batters with 30 or more homers.

"That's unbelievable, man," said Indians catcher Yan Gomes. "Right after that, I looked at the umpire and I was like, 'Man, that's seven years he's done that.' I don't even know how that feels, man. It takes me two, three years to hit 30 and these guys do it on a regular basis. It's pretty unbelievable and I'm very honored to be playing with him and calling him a teammate."

Donaldson off DL, to debut for Tribe Tuesday

By Jordan Bastian MLB.com @MLBastian

ST. PETERSBURG -- The wait is over. Josh Donaldson, the Indians' blockbuster addition acquired a few hours before the calendar flipped to September, has been activated and is in Cleveland's lineup for Tuesday night's game against the Rays.

As Indians manager Terry Francona announced on Monday, Donaldson was activated from the disabled list following a three-month comeback from a left calf issue. Donaldson got the start at third base, completing a saga that reportedly had multiple teams upset and inquiring with Major League Baseball about why the unique deal was approved.

"We didn't do anything different than any other team could've done," said Chris Antonetti, the Indians' president of baseball operations. "And, in fact, there were a lot of other teams that were negotiating with Josh at the time of the trade. Now, we can only see the one reality of what played out, because only one team can end up getting the guy."

"And there's only one thing to assess, and that's what happened in the time that we had Josh with us. But, had he been traded to another team, the very same process very well could've played out with them."

Citing multiple Major League sources, Ken Rosenthal wrote on The Athletic on Sunday that the Yankees and Red Sox "voiced displeasure" with MLB about the sequence of events before and after the trade that sent Donaldson from Toronto to Cleveland. The Astros reportedly sought clarification from the Commissioner's Office about why the deal was approved and were satisfied with the league's reply.

The source of the reported complaints is the fact that Donaldson -- activated on Sept. 1 and placed back on the DL two days later -- was deemed healthy enough by the Blue Jays and MLB to be exposed to revocable waivers prior to the Aug. 31 playoff roster deadline. After the 2015 American League MVP cleared waivers, it opened the door for Toronto to discuss a trade with any team.

Prior to acquiring Donaldson and \$2.7 million in exchange for a player to be named later (reported to potentially be pitching prospect Julian Merryweather, who is coming back from Tommy John surgery on his right elbow), Antonetti received permission from MLB to speak directly with the third baseman to discuss his comeback. They agreed to hold a medical assessment upon Donaldson's arrival to Cleveland. "Josh was comfortable with that approach," Antonetti said. "So we went forward with the trade."

Antonetti said that, while the Blue Jays and MLB declared Donaldson healthy enough to be traded and activated, the Indians wanted to make their own evaluation via a workout at Progressive Field. Donaldson went through a series of baserunning, fielding and hitting drills on Sept. 2 and the Indians decided he still needed more time to return to full strength.

"Each team assesses things differently," Antonetti said. "So, I think in the end, what we were focused on was, what's our assessment? And then, once Josh was with us, how do we work with him to figure out what the best plan might be to get him back to performing at the level that he's capable of at the Major League level? And that's what we did."

Donaldson, who has not played in an MLB game since May 28 with Toronto, played for Triple-A Columbus on Sept. 3 and belted a grand slam in his first rehab game for the Tribe. In three games for Double-A Akron over the past week, he has gone 2-for-10 with one home run.

With Donaldson set to take over at third base for the Indians, AL MVP candidate Jose Ramirez will slide to second. That will force veteran second baseman Jason Kipnis to shift to center field -- a move he also made in late September and in the playoffs a year ago. Indians manager Terry Francona noted that once they move to accommodate Donaldson's arrival, Ramirez and Kipnis will stay put at their new positions.

"They won't go back to where they were," Francona said. "Kip has had four really good days [working with the coaches] in center field and he's ready to go. Josey said he was ready to go last week."

After Donaldson's Indians debut Tuesday, Francona said the third baseman would be available off the bench Wednesday and then back in the lineup Friday, following the team's off-day Thursday. Francona will keep working closely with Donaldson to map out his schedule in preparation for the postseason.

"I'll probably just check with him every day," Francona said. "I told him when we get some of these longer games, I'll probably take him out early. We want to watch his volume early on, but he promised he'd communicate with me, too. We'll check with him every day."

Donaldson's communication with the Indians has been an integral part of his comeback, dating back to his talks with Antonetti shortly before the trade came to fruition.

"We didn't know exactly what our assessment would be when Josh got here," Antonetti said. "And also what Josh felt might be the best way to get him fully healthy and back to Major League games. I think what we agreed to that night was we would sit down -- if we went through with the trade and everything played out -- that we would just sit down together and come up with a plan.

"And that plan may very well have been just keep him active, but in the end, that's not what we or Josh felt was best."

Eyes on Oct., Kluber to have start pushed back

By Jordan Bastian MLB.com @MLBastian

ST. PETERSBURG -- The Indians have yet to pop a cork on a bottle of champagne, but the club is already starting to map things out for the postseason.

Step one in Cleveland's October preparations will be pushing ace Corey Kluber's next start back to Sept. 18 against the White Sox, meaning he will have seven days off between outings. The reason behind the decision is to meet Kluber's request of having one extra day of rest prior to a potential Game 1 start on Oct. 5 in the American League Division Series.

"He's going to get a week [off] this week, which is too long," Indians manager Terry Francona said prior to Tuesday's game against the Rays. "Now, the good news is, he can throw a good side and all that, but barring anything crazy, he can go into a playoff game with one extra day's rest, which is what he wants. And that was the only way to do it."

If nothing unexpected takes place, Kluber's final regular season start will fall on Sept. 29 on the road against the Royals. In order to make the schedule work, Cleveland will have the flexibility of starting Kluber on Sept. 23 against the Red Sox or on Sept. 24 against the White Sox. That will depend on whether he wants an extra day off after the Sept. 18 outing or prior to his last start of the regular season.

To accommodate Kluber's schedule, the Indians' probables for the upcoming weekend series against the Tigers will consist of Josh Tomlin (Friday), Mike Clevinger (Saturday) and Shane Bieber (Sunday). Francona noted that Kluber -- after discussing the situation with pitching coach Carl Willis -- preferred to get the extended break out of the way now, rather than right before October.

A year ago, Kluber took the ball against the Yankees in Game 2 of the AL Division Series, allowing him to return for Game 5, which Cleveland ultimately lost. In that series, the Indians utilized a three-man rotation. Francona was asked if last year's chain of events -- the Tribe lost three straight after taking a 2-0 lead in the ALDS -- would influence the team's decision on whether to go with three or four starters in the postseason this time around.

Francona said Cleveland's preference right now would be to use a four-man rotation come the postseason.

"Every time we do something, we try to learn," Francona said. "I think every experience is different. As we sit right now, I'd say we'd probably go with four. We have three weeks left. Things happen. We're going to try to put our team in the best position, we think, to win. We were kind of up against it a little bit, but I think we'll go with four. That would be our first choice."

Quotable

"For the first time probably all year, we're getting close to where we have our team, and hopefully, nothing else happens and we can work towards becoming a team that could be a factor. We've had a lot of ups and downs, a lot of bumps in the road. And things look like they're kind of coming together. Now, we've got some work to do, but it's nice to kind of have everybody where they're going to be and we can see if we can get better." -- Francona

Worth noting

- Francona talked about the team's recent lackluster play Tuesday with shortstop Francisco Lindor. The Indians headed into Tuesday's game with a 15 1/2-game lead on the Twins in the AL Central, but the Tribe have gone 4-6 in its previous 10 games. The manager was asked if it has been challenging to keep the players focused in light of having such a large advantage in the division.

"I was actually talking with Frankie about that today," Francona said. "What, am I going to go in there and start screaming when we play a mediocre game? We're up 15 games. They're not idiots. They know. I mean, shoot. So, I think we're kind of in competition with ourselves to see how good we can play, despite whatever the standings say."

- As Jason Kipnis gets acclimated to center field again, Francona said there will be times when rookie Greg Allen heads in for defense late in games. That said, the manager plans on giving Kipnis ample innings to adjust to the transition back to the outfield.

"I am aware that the first couple games might not be what he will be [capable of]. So, I fully understand that," Francona said. "I want Kip to get enough reps. I want to take care of him a little bit, too."

- Right-hander Trevor Bauer (10-day disabled list, stress fracture in right fibula) remains on target to throw off the mound in a bullpen session Wednesday back in Cleveland. There remains no established timetable for Bauer's return to the pitching staff.

Diamond Dialogue: Examining (and rambling on about) potential Indians playoff roster scenarios

By T.J. Zuppe Sep 11, 2018 11

The following is a recent email exchange between The Athletic Indians writers T.J. Zuppe and Zack Meisel. You can also catch their weekly conversations about the Tribe on their podcast, The Selby Is Godcast.

TJ: For five months, major-league teams are confined to 25-man rosters. Then, with races to be decided in the final month — arguably the most important games of the season — baseball throws up a shrug emoji and expands those rosters to 40 players, becoming a strategist's dream and pace-of-play nightmare.

Personally, I love the additional matchups and pinch-running and defensive replacements and bullpen days and extra catchers and *gasps* OK, OK, I'll stop. But isn't it odd that September is full of young rookies and shared lockers and cramped clubhouses, then clubs fortunate enough to make the postseason must dwindle their rosters back down to 25 players?

With the American League Central all but officially clinched, I'm sure the Indians' decision-makers have already pulled out scraps of paper and begun to doodle different scenarios.

Let's face it, there are a handful of directions this could go, most of those tied to the availability and health of Josh Donaldson. His presence forces José Ramírez to second, Jason Kipnis to center and probably cuts into Yandy Díaz's playoff chances. But until we see Donaldson prove his standing (he's scheduled to be activated later today), it's tough to whittle things down to 25.

But why wait? Let's speculate, Zack.

Let's assume Donaldson is healthy enough to play every day in the playoffs. What are the first things we can etch in stone about the 25 men they'll use in the Division Series?

Zack: Naturally, the team with the 15.5-game advantage in its division still has a roster as incomplete as a Tyrod Taylor rain-soaked heave. (Too soon?) (I still can't get over the fact the Browns and Steelers tied. What a time to be alive.)

Anyway, I'm confident in scribbling the following names in Sharpie: Corey Kluber, Carlos Carrasco, Mike Clevinger, Brad Hand, Cody Allen, Oliver Pérez, Francisco Lindor, José Ramírez, Michael Brantley, Edwin Encarnacion, Yonder Alonso, Yan Gomes, Roberto Pérez. I'll write Jason Kipnis and Melky Cabrera in colored pencil.

That's only 15 names. Not even 15.5. Just 15. That's incredible.

TJ: Mentioning the Browns once so this shows up in Google searches. Nice work.

OK, so 10 to go. If Donaldson is healthy, he makes 16. That would also mark their 10th position player. They need an actual center fielder, so that comes down to Rajai Davis or Greg Allen. For the sake of this, let's say they pick the veteran over the switch-hitter. That's 11. Brandon Guyer would make it, right? He does have an .825 OPS against lefties, but Cabrera has actually crushed lefties this year (.937 OPS). Is that spot redundant? Would they need two outfielders on the bench? If so, that's 12 (That's not Brandon Barnes' music I hear, right?).

Then, who becomes the backup infielder? Is that still Erik González? And if he's on the roster, how do I find a place for Yandy Díaz? Tell me it's possible.

Zack: They'll want Guyer on the roster as another right-handed stick and the guy who can replace Cabrera and his concrete-filled cleats in right field late in games. So, what you listed is fine, though I'm not convinced Davis will beat out Allen.

In the postseason, teams often settle on 14 position players and 11 pitchers. The Indians could keep Díaz and use him as a platoon partner for Alonso. Is that more valuable than, say, a spot for Neil Ramírez or Tyler Olson? (Nod your head.) Honestly, I'm not sure Erik González is necessary, since the infield is set. He'd essentially serve as an emergency backup to Lindor. It's not as though they need a late-game defensive replacement at second base once Ramírez takes over at that spot.

TJ: I don't think they'll pass on his versatility, though. And if Lindor did get hurt (but not to the extent that he needs the DL), you're really hurting. I'm going to say González makes it and Davis-Allen is a coin flip.

So, let's find a spot for Díaz. That means 11 pitchers. First, are we assuming Trevor Bauer is back?

Zack: Bauer is the fulcrum upon which this entire roster is balanced. Can he throw 100 pitches without issue? Can he fill a durable relief role in which he covers a couple of innings in each game? Without knowing what his arm and leg will permit him to do (if anything), this task you've forced us to complete seems rather challenging. Bauer's status will likely influence the team's decision on the number of starters in its playoff rotation and the makeup of the bullpen. And, perhaps with uncertainty surrounding Andrew Miller's workload and reliability, the Indians might prefer to stack the roster with 12 pitchers, just to have some insurance. This is the most pressing question for the Indians and one that might not have an answer until the final week of the regular season.

So, we've hit a dead end — unless your GPS is showing a different route to Rosterville.

TJ: Well, that's the thing. The idea is you've got to create backup plans and then backup plans for those contingencies.

If Bauer is able to start games in October, then the option of a four-man rotation is in place, paving the way for Hand, Allen, Miller, Pérez to make it. That leaves Ramírez, Olson, Dan Otero, Shane Bieber, Adam Cimber, Adam Plutko and Josh Tomlin (did I forget anyone?) left to fight for three spots. And if you're kicking Díaz or González off the roster, then you'd have four slots.

But if Bauer isn't able to start, then would they use a three-man rotation? I'm not a fan of that. Would they use Bieber as a starter and deploy him like they did Tomlin in 2016? Does Bauer still start but toss a fewer amount of pitches? Does he come out of the bullpen? Is he even healthy enough to be on the roster?

My head is spinning faster than an Astros pitcher's curveball.

Zack: Your spin rate joke just healed Bauer's stress fracture.

For the sake of this, let's stick Bauer in the rotation. I'd imagine that would be his preference and, until they tell us he can't start games, we might as well assume the guy who was throwing fastballs from his knees in the outfield grass days after his injury will make himself ready to pitch. The Indians have discussed these same plans and contingencies, debated the merits of a three- and four-man rotation. They have a few weeks to lock in their approach.

I'd add Cimber to the mix. If he keeps the ball down, he can help you wiggle out of a jam by inducing a softly struck double-play ball. And I figure Bieber can help in one way or another. Tomlin came up clutch with some flawless extra-inning work in Game 2 of the ALDS last year. Bieber can fill that role (or, he can start — on a leash fit for a Chihuahua — if Bauer isn't able).

TJ: Did you just call Bieber a tiny dog?

Despite how tough his transition to Cleveland has been, I agree on Cimber. And just when I want to give Otero some credit for his positive platoon split against righties, he has a tough outing (or two). Ramírez hasn't offered much more confidence, either. If I had to pick today (assuming Bauer is on the roster and Miller proves ready), I'd probably go with Kluber, Carrasco, Bauer, Clevinger, Bieber, Hand, Miller, Allen, Pérez, Cimber and Otero. If all things were equal, I'd probably select Olson over Ramírez for the 12th man, but do they really need four lefties in the bullpen?

Then, for the position players, I'd go Brantley, Kipnis, Cabrera, Ramírez, Lindor, Donaldson, Alonso, Encarnacion, Davis/Allen, Guyer, Gonzalez, Gomes, Pérez and Díaz. So, 14 position players, 11 pitchers. And if Donaldson or Bauer isn't able to play? Well, then, I'll add an extra pitcher and use Bieber for two trips through the order. Then I'll take this conversation out back, throw it in a dumpster and light it on fire.

How about you?

Zack: I agree with your choices. But remember: They threw a few curveballs our way at the end of September last year when they kicked Clevinger, Tomlin and Danny Salazar to the bullpen and Otero, Nick Goody and Zach McAllister to the curb. I anticipate that we'll be revisiting this prompt on a daily basis over the next three weeks. Feel the intrigue!

Donaldson hitless in Indians debut, 2-0 win over Rays

The Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. (AP) -- Josh Donaldson and Edwin Encarnacion are back together again and got a chance to celebrate a home run like old times in Toronto.

Donaldson went hitless in his Cleveland debut, Encarnacion reached 30 homers for the seventh straight season and the Indians beat the Tampa Bay Rays 2-0 on Tuesday night.

Donaldson was on-deck when Encarnacion went deep and the pair exchanged a high-five afterward.

"We try and have fun out there," Encarnacion said. "It's good to have him back in the same lineup together."

Cleveland lowered its magic number to three for a third straight AL Central title. Second-place Minnesota was hosting the New York Yankees.

Acquired from Toronto on Aug. 31, Donaldson went 0 for 4 in his first big league game since May 28, a layoff caused by a strained left calf. The 2015 AL MVP flied out to deep center and deep right, struck out and grounded into a forceout. The third baseman made a nifty backhand grab on C.J. Cron's sixth-inning grounder.

"He looked to me like Donaldson," Indians manager Terry Francona said. "He took some ferocious swings, and he was on so many pitches. He squared up a couple and had nothing to show for it. He's got time and it gets exciting."

Jose Ramirez moved from third to second, and second baseman Jason Kipnis moved to center.

Yan Gomes also homered and rookie Shane Bieber (10-3) struck out a career-high 11 in 6 2/3 innings, allowing three hits and three walks.

Tampa Bay had its franchise record 12-game home winning streak end and lost for just the fourth time in 21 games overall.

The Rays dropped to 8 1/2 games behind Oakland for the second AL wild card with 18 games remaining. The teams will meet in a three-game series this weekend.

"The odds are against us but I'm very excited," Rays ace Blake Snell said. "This team is special."

Gomes homered in the fifth and Encarnacion in the sixth against Tyler Glasnow (0-4), who allowed six hits in seven innings.

Encarnacion, Ramirez (37) and Francisco Lindor (34) are the fifth trio of Indians to reach 30 homers in the same season.

"It's unbelievable, something I never expected to happen," Encarnacion said of his streak. "I'm proud of what I've been doing."

Bieber allowed three hits and three walks. Brad Hand relieved with two on and two outs in the seventh, walked pinch-hitter Matt Duffy, then fell behind Mallex Smith 3-0 before getting him to pop out on a full-count pitch.

"That was rough for about eight pitches but he fights his way back," Francona said.

Cody Allen pitched a one-hit ninth, completing a four-hitter for his 27th save in 32 chances.

Tampa Bay's Tommy Pham singled in the first and has a career-best 15-game hitting streak.

Rays manager Kevin Cash was ejected in the eighth for arguing a balk called on Vidal Nuno.

SETTING UP THE ACE

The Indians will skip 18-game winner Corey Kluber's start this weekend to give him a couple extra days off to get lined up for the playoffs.

NUMEBRS

Bieber is 6-0 in 10 road starts. ... Cleveland pitchers have 29 strikeouts, including 13 Tuesday, through the first two games of the series.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Indians: RHP Trevor Bauer (right fibula stress fracture) is to throw off a bullpen mound Wednesday. ... RHP Cody Anderson (right elbow surgery) made 27 pitches over two-thirds of an inning for Double-A Akron against New Hampshire in Game 1 of the Eastern League Championship Series.

Rays: CF Kevin Kiermaier (illness) was out of the lineup for the second consecutive game but was in the on-deck circle when the game ended. ... RHP Jose Mujica had Tommy John surgery.

UP NEXT

Indians: RHP Carlos Carrasco (16-8) starts Wednesday.

Rays: Snell (18-5) seeks to take over the big league lead in wins after going 5-7 last season. "It's amazing how much better he's gotten in one year," Francona said.

Indians to skip Corey Kluber's start to prepare for playoffs

The Cleveland Indians have decided to skip ace Corey Kluber's weekend turn in the rotation as they begin setting up their pitching rotation for the playoffs.

Kluber lasted just 1⅔ innings -- matching his career low -- and gave up four runs and five hits in a 6-5 loss to the Tampa Bay Rays on Monday night. The right-hander and Tampa Bay's Blake Snell are tied for the most wins in the majors with 18.

Manager Terry Francona said Kluber is fine physically and that his decision is based on wanting to rest his key starters down the stretch and better set up his rotation for the playoffs. Francona is leaning toward using a four-man playoff rotation.

"Barring anything crazy, he can go into a playoff game with one extra day's rest, which is what he wants," Francona said.

Josh Tomlin will start Friday night against the Detroit Tigers.

Francona said his plan is for Kluber to miss one turn, pushing his next start back a couple of days.

Kluber is 18-7 with a 2.91 ERA in 30 starts this season after going 18-4 with a 2.25 ERA last year. He has a career record of 94-55 with a 3.09 ERA.

MLB teams should quit complaining about Josh Donaldson trade: Terry Pluto

Terry Pluto

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- I wonder how many teams will be complaining about the Indians adding Josh Donaldson if the third baseman pulls another calf muscle.

That can happen.

If any team knows the danger of a player who has significant problems with his calf muscles, it's the Tribe.

Think Lonnie Chisenhall.

Chisenhall has dealt with calf muscle problems for more than two years. He has played only 47 games since the 2017 All-Star break. He last played this season on July 1.

Set to be the Tribe's starting right fielder, Chisenhall has batted only 84 times this season. He is a free agent at the end of the year, so he has had millions of reasons to return to the field.

But he can't stay healthy.

Donaldson hasn't played in a big league game since May 28. He had some shoulder problems in the spring, then came the cranky calf muscles.

The Indians obtained the 2015 American League MVP from Toronto on a waiver-deadline deal of August 31.

According to the Athletic's Ken Rosenthal, Boston and the New York Yankees are unhappy with Donaldson ending up with the Tribe. Those teams believe Donaldson should not have been allowed to go on the disabled list after the Indians traded for him...

Or something.

I have read Rosenthal's story and some other accounts of why teams have privately objected to the trade between the Indians and Toronto -- and I don't understand it.

If they wanted Donaldson, they could have claimed him on waivers -- and paid the \$3.7 million remaining on his salary.

Or they could have worked out a better deal with Toronto for Donaldson.

The Indians traded minor-league pitcher Julian Merryweather and agreed to pay \$1 million in Donaldson's salary to make the deal work. Merryweather opened the 2018 season as the Tribe's No. 17 prospect (Baseball America), but he has since had Tommy John elbow reconstruction surgery.

TRIBE & TORONTO

When I first heard of the objection, I thought the issue was the close relationship between the Tribe and Blue Jays. Toronto President Mark Shapiro and General Manager Ross Atkins worked with the Tribe until 2016.

But no one is claiming inside baseball trading.

Executives who know each other often make deals. Teams know that.

In 2017, the Indians obtained reliever Joe Smith from the Blue Jays for a prospect.

Who was that pitcher?

Thomas Pannone, who beat the Indians Sunday. He allowed only two runs in 6 1/3 innings. He is 2-1 with a 4.13 ERA since coming up from the minors.

That a good return on Smith, who left the Tribe for Houston via free agency after the 2017 season.

The Blue Jays believe Merryweather is a promising long-term prospect if they are patient as he recovers.

The point of contention has nothing to do with the Tribe and Toronto.

It has to do with Major League Baseball approving the trade.

THE REAL DEAL

Here's the real deal about the trade -- the Indians know a lot can go wrong.

And they are correct when saying they did nothing wrong.

Donaldson is coming off the disabled list Tuesday. They know he can pull a muscle the first time he runs down to first base or chases a pop up in foul territory as he plays third base.

And they know that could end his season.

They have seen it with Chisenhall.

The uncertain status of Donaldson's calf muscles are why a star of his caliber was traded for a prospect recovering from elbow surgery.

The Tribe is moving Jose Ramirez from third to second base. And Jason Kipnis is going from second to the outfield.

All to make room for Donaldson.

I've written a lot about this deal, including an inside look at how it took place. I highlighted how the Indians know it could go wrong, but they also hope Donaldson stays healthy and pays off big in October.

They are taking the risk.

Other teams could have done the same, but they decided against it.

End of story.

Cleveland Indians officially activate Josh Donaldson; starts at third base tonight vs. Rays

Paul Hoynes

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. - The Indians rolled the Mercedes out of the garage on Tuesday afternoon. They topped off the gas tank, detailed the interior and put it in idle for 7:10 p.m. at Tropicana Field.

Yeah, Josh Donaldson has officially been activated. The three-time All-Star and 2015 AL MVP will start at third base against the Rays. It will be his first big-league game since May 28 when he was still playing for the Toronto Blue Jays. He been on the disabled list since with a strained left calf muscle.

Manager Terry Francona hit Donaldson fifth behind Francisco Lindor, Michael Brantley, Ramirez and Edwin Encarnacion. Yonder Alonso, Melky Cabrera, Kipnis and Yan Gomes will hit behind Donaldson.

"He can hit anywhere. He's a good hitter," said Francona. "He hasn't been in the lineup, since what, May? I just thought displacing those first four [wasn't the way to go]. Let's let him swing the bat a little bit.

"Plus, it gives Yonder a spot where, you know, if Yonder drives in runs, he's going to drive them in anywhere. It moves some of his lack of speed down a little bit, which is good."

Josh Donaldson excited to play Tuesday night for Indians

The Indians acquired Donaldson just before the Aug. 31 waiver deadline. Donaldson's addition has forced the Indians to re-arrange their infield, pushing All-Star third baseman Ramirez to second base and Kipnis to center field.

Asked if had talked to Ramirez and Kipnis about their moves, Donaldson said, "No. They're still trying to get to know me a little bit and I'm trying to get to know them as well. I feel like a lot of the conversations that we have aren't necessarily about baseball. They're more about trying to get to know everyone.

"When you're out on the field, that's our job and what we're required to do. I spoke on it earlier: There are sacrifices that guys have made in order for me to be here and I do appreciate that. At the same time, it's not my decision."

Donaldson, 32, is a free agent at the end of the season. After completing the deal, the Indians put Donaldson back on the disabled list so he could play four rehab games in the minors.

The move drew the ire of some other teams, but MLB approved the deal and the move to the DL.

Donaldson said he was mostly glad just to get a chance to get back on a big league field again.

"Yeah, I would say there's an energy boost," said Donaldson, when asked if he felt different waking up Tuesday morning. "It's a good thing. The entire time, I've tried to stay positive through this. There have been some down moments throughout this rehab process that have been very difficult for me, but to get here today and feel the way that I do, I'm excited about going out there and playing."

Francona feels his meandering team may draw their own jolt of adrenaline from Donaldson's addition and the subsequent moves of Ramirez and Kipnis. The Indians, who have posted a winning record every month from April through August, are 4-6 in September.

"We're up 15 (15 1/2) games," said Francona. "They're not idiots. They know. So, I think we're kind of in competition with ourselves to see how good we can play, despite whatever the standings say.

"I do think this will give us a little juice, like the guys moving around. And it may not be our best baseball -- I hope it is -- but I think it will be good, because they're working toward something now. Like, I think when we get back off this trip, the weather will be a little cooler, they'll have a day off. I think they'll catch their stride."

The Indians went into Tuesday night's game with a magic number of four to clinch the AL Central.

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 09.12.2018

Shane Bieber strikes out 11, Yan Gomes, Edwin Encarnacion homer in 2-0 win over Rays

Paul Hoynes

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. -- Power and good pitching will carry a team a long way. Even a team that seems to be stumbling toward a postseason spot that has been guaranteed them almost since opening day.

Yan Gomes and Edwin Encarnacion hit home runs and rookie Shane Bieber struck out a career-high 11 batters as the Indians beat the Rays, 2-0, Tuesday night at Tropicana Field. The win reduced the Tribe's magic number to clinch its third straight AL Central title to three.

The Indians have won just five of their last 11 games.

Gomes gave Bieber a 1-0 lead with a two-out homer in the fifth. It was his 14th homer of the season, matching his total from last season.

Encarnacion made it 2-0 with one out in the sixth. It was Encarnacion's 30th homer of the season, marking the seventh straight year in which he's hit at least 30 homers. It's the longest current streak by a player in the big leagues.

"As long as Edwin can stay on the field, and he has, he's going to hit 30 and drive in 100," said manager Terry Francona. "Hopefully, he gets a bunch more. It's important. You have to have a certain amount of runs and you know he's going to drive in 100."

Right-hander Tyler Glasnow (1-6, 4.48) allowed both homers, but still pitched well in his second start of the season against the Indians.

Turn your volume ALL THE WAY UP for this one! [?]

RT to scare a friend! [?] #RallyTogether pic.twitter.com/r9WrKOeoGr

-- Cleveland Indians (@Indians) September 12, 2018

The Indians are the first AL team this season to have three players with 30 or more homers. Encarnacion joined Francisco Lindor (34) and Jose Ramirez (37). It's the fifth time it has happened in franchise history and the first since 1999 when Richie Sexson, Manny Ramirez and Jim Thome did it.

Bieber (10-3, 4.32) pitched 6 2/3 scoreless innings. He allowed three hits and three walks. Bieber is the fifth Indians pitcher to win at least 10 games this season. The others are Corey Kluber (18-7), Carlos Carrasco (16-8), Trevor Bauer (12-6) and Mike Clevinger (11-8).

"I thought he executed the game plan really well," said Francona. "He tried to get in on the lefties enough to open up the plate. His fastball, through the zone, had a lot of life on it."

The Indians have 27 games this season where a pitcher has struck out 10 or more batters. It extended their club record and tied them with Houston for the MLB lead.

Josh Donaldson made his debut with the Indians. He hit two balls to the warning track and struck out in his first big-league game since May 28. Donaldson ended the fifth inning with a nice play at third base to retire C.J. Cron.

"To me he looks like Donaldson," said Francona. "By that I mean he took some ferocious swings and he's on so many pitches. He's got time. It gets exciting. All of a sudden Andrew (Miller) throws like he did Monday night. Now Donaldson is here."

The Indians activated Miller on Monday and Donaldson on Tuesday.

Jose Ramirez, who moved from third to second to make room for Donaldson, went 0-or-4 in his first game at second base. Jason Kipnis, in his first game in center, went 1-for-3 and had no chances before Greg Allen replaced him in the seventh inning.

Bieber allowed a leadoff double to Joey Wendle in the seventh. He retired the next two batters, but walked Jake Bauers to bring Brad Hand into the game. Hand walked Nick Ciuffo to load the bases, but retired Mallex Smith to end the inning after falling behind 3-0. Hand gave up a walk-off homer to Ji-Man Choi in the ninth inning on Monday night.

Cody Allen picked up his 27th save of the season, allowing one hit in the ninth. Bieber, Hand and Allen combined on a four-hitter for the Tribe's 15th shutout.

The pitches

Bieber threw 100 pitches, 63 (63 percent) for strikes. Glasnow threw 90 pitches, 66 (73 percent) for strikes.

He gone

Tampa Bay manager Kevin Cash was ejected in the eighth inning for protesting a balk by lefty Vidal Nuno. Plate umpire Mark Carlson ejected Cash.

Thanks for coming

The Indians and Rays drew 10,599 to Tropicana Field on Tuesday night. First pitch was at 7:09 p.m. with a temperature 72 degrees inside and 89 degrees outside.

Next

The Indians end their season series against the Rays on Wednesday as Carlos Carrasco (16-8, 4.31) faces Tampa Bay left-hander Blake Snell (18-5, 2.06) at 1:10 p.m. SportsTime Ohio and WTAM will carry the game.

Carrasco, who already has one loss against the Rays this year, is 4-4 in his career against them. Snell beat the Indians on Sept. 1 at Progressive Field. He allowed two runs and struck out nine in 6 2/3 innings.

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 09.12.2018

Magic number cut to 3 as Cleveland Indians edge Tampa Bay Rays

Joe Noga

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Yan Gomes and Edwin Encarnacion homered and Shane Bieber struck out 11 as the Cleveland Indians earned a 2-0 win against Tampa Bay on Tuesday at Tropicana Field.

The victory snaps Tampa Bay's 12-game home winning streak and shrinks the Tribe's magic number to clinch the American League Central Division title to 3.

Cleveland's lead over second-place Minnesota in the A.L. Central is at 16 games with 17 to play. The Twins were hosting New York and leading the Yankees midway through their game at Target Field.

Any combination of Indians wins or losses by the second-place Twins that is greater than or equal to 3 will clinch a third consecutive division title and postseason appearance for Cleveland.

The Indians (82-63) conclude their series against the Rays on Wednesday at 1:10 as Carlos Carrasco faces Blake Snell. Minnesota concludes its series at home against the Yankees at 8:10 p.m.

You can calculate the first-place Tribe's magic number by starting with 162 (games in a season) and adding one, then subtracting the number of Indians wins and subtracting the number of losses by the second-place team.

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 09.12.2018

Rays' home winning streak ends quietly

Marc Topkin

ST. PETERSBURG — The sound of silence was stunning in the Rays clubhouse after Tuesday's 2-0 defeat without the E-40 rap that had become a sound track over the last month as they'd put together a streak of winning 12 straight home games.

"It is a little weird," manager Kevin Cash said. "But, you know what we can start another one here, we can get going. The guys have played really, really well."

Certainly, he's right. Not only had the Rays posted the dozen W's at home, but they'd won eight of their last nine and 17 of 20.

But also, the clock is ticking and the margin for losses dwindling. If the Rays are serious about their long-shot chances of catching Oakland in the race for the second American League wild-card — the merit of which is another conversation — they really can't afford to lose again. Not often anyway.

Tuesday's loss to the Indians, combined with the A's win in Baltimore, left the Rays 8½ games back with only 18 to play. If the A's go 9-8 in their remaining games, the Rays have to win out to tie. So with the A's coming to the Trop for a weekend series, the Rays obviously need to be as close as they can to make it matter.

Fortunately, they will have the right man on the mound for Wednesday's matinee, their ace and lead playoff pusher, Blake Snell.

"I really think this team can do it," he said Tuesday. "I think we can prove a lot of people wrong. Just got to keep playing the baseball we've been playing."

Tuesday's loss was a result of a break in that pattern, in that they had been swinging big bats, averaging 6.33 runs over the previous 18 games.

But they were shut down and shut out Tuesday by Shane Bieber, with help from two reliever, limited to four hits. Their best opportunity came in the seventh when they loaded the bases on a double and two walks, but Mallex Smith popped out, and they couldn't stir up any of the ninth-inning magic that saved them on Monday.

"You've got to give credit when you run into a little bit of a buzz saw on the other team's mound; that's what's going to happen," Cash said. "But couldn't be more impressed with the way that we continue to show up and compete."

The good news for the Rays (79-65) was the bounceback performance by starter Tyler Glasnow from his brutally bad last outing. Improving on allowing seven runs while lasting less than an inning wasn't going to be hard, and he did way better, working seven solid innings without a walk, and allowing six hits, throwing only 90 pitches, completing two innings with six each.

The problem was that two were solo home runs, a shot by Yan Gomes on a hanging curveball in the fifth and a 422-foot blast on a fastball Edwin Encarnacion destroyed in the sixth.

"I thought Tyler was outstanding," Cash said. "Really impressed with the way he bounced back."

Glasnow was relieved, if not pleased. But while he had better command of the curveball and slider that was lacking last week in Toronto, the velocity on his fastball was down a bit into the mid 90s.

"Just one of those days. I don't know," he said.

The Rays are going to need some help in catching Oakland, and it looked Tuesday like they might get it from old friend Alex Cobb, who started for the Orioles against the A's. But after posting two scoreless innings, Cobb was forced out due to recurrence of a blister issue (the same one that kept him from pitching Sunday against the Rays) and then the Baltimore bullpen promptly gave up the three runs that made the difference

in Oakland's 3-2 win. (Also of note, for any of you who were uber optimistic, Tuesday's loss also eliminated the Rays from the American League East race.)

Having lost at the Trop for the first time since Aug. 8, the Rays are buoyed by having Snell on the mound.

Snell has arguably the best base numbers of any pitcher in the majors at 18-5, 2.06 and is even better under the tilted Trop roof, 9-1, 1.23 in 12 starts, allowing more than one earned run only once, in his last outing (and on his final pitch).

The Rays, understandably, have a sense of confidence when he is on the bump.

"Pretty high," Cash said. "It's tough to dispute that. Blake, we talk about what he's done this year, we use that word "ace" or "elite." Anytime you have that type of feeling when a guy takes the mound it's a good feeling for the offense and the defense. ...

"There's a confidence, there's an air about him when he takes the mound, and we feel like we've got really good chances with him on the mound."

Really, really good.

"When he pitches, it's not only the confidence he brings to us, it's the show we're going to see that day," outfielder Carlos Gomez said. "When you see the season he has put together this season, you see how talented he is. You see every time a guy going to the mound and striking out double digits almost every time that he pitches. Listen and you hear the other players saying, I can't wait until you change pitchers, I can't see the ball, that guy is unbelievable. That is impressive. ... We feel (confident) when he's on the mound — imagine how they feel."

Tampa Bay Times LOADED: 09.12.2018

Rays journal: Kevin Cash, Terry Francona have a solid bond

Marc Topkin

ST. PETERSBURG — Once you get past the kidding, jousting and the pranking, there is something more defining about the relationship between Indians manager Terry Francona and Rays counterpart Kevin Cash.

Admiration for how the other carries himself and does his job, appreciation for how they've helped each other, a commonality in personality and a true friendship rooted in all the right things.

"I've got a ton of respect for him," Cash said. "I kid around, and can play back and forth with the jabs. But I don't know if I could respect anybody more."

The bond started to form in 2007, when Francona was managing a Red Sox team headed to win a World Series that Cash joined in August to add catching depth.

Francona admired the way Cash, then a 29-year-old career backup, handled himself on a veteran team, how he ran the game, how "he cared so much."

Cash noted how Francona was "a special person," impressed with how he made just as much effort to connect with him as the Sox's veteran stars, and the day to day consistency of his personality as he managed.

Cash played for Francona again in 2008, then again in 2010, and by then the relationship was cast. They remained in touch as Cash retired and spent 2012 scouting while Francona, ousted in Boston after 2011, was doing TV work.

"When he was at ESPN and he saw somebody look like an idiot at the plate he'd text me and say that's what you looked like," Cash said.

Francona told Cash he'd like to bring him on if he managed again. When he was hired by the Indians in 2013, he made Cash his first hire, as bullpen coach and confidant. They roomed together in the spring, rode together to the airport, became best of friends during the 2013-14 seasons before Cash, now 40, got the Rays job.

"It was a really good fit," said Francona, 59. "We got so close when he came here. He's just a great guy. ... I think a lot of him."

To coaches who worked with them, such as Brad Mill and Matt Quatraro, they were an obvious pairing. "Very similar senses of humor, very self-deprecating, especially making fun of their own careers, and high baseball IQs," said Quatraro, who was in Cleveland and now Tampa Bay.

"For all the back and forth between them, you can tell they care about each other deeply."

It's just that sometimes they show it in odd ways.

Medical matters

3B Matt Duffy said his strained lower back was feeling better Tuesday, that an MRI showed no reason for concern. He proved that by pinch-hitting, and walking, in the seventh. He likely won't rejoin the lineup until Friday. ... CF Kevin Kiermaier was also out for a second straight day, but apparently feeling a little better as he was on deck to pinch-hit in the ninth and could play today. Cash described it only as "general illness," with symptoms including "a head cold, stomach doesn't feel too good, pretty ache-y." ... RHP Jose Mujica became the fourth advanced Rays pitching prospect to undergo Tommy John surgery this year, joining LHP Anthony Banda and RHPs Jose De Leon and Brent Honeywell. Mujica will be out until 2020.

Tragedy remembered

Rookie INF Anthony Velazquez was a 7-year-old second-grader at the St. Francis Xavier school in the Bronx during the tragic events of Sept. 11, 2001. "I didn't understand the magnitude at that age but I could tell something serious was happening by the way the adults were acting," he recalled. "They evacuated our school, and my grandmother came and picked me up. My dad was a cop, and he had to go downtown for the clean-up. He was one of the first responders. Everybody in New York knew somebody who was affected by it."

Not so minor matters

Triple-A Durham opened the best-of-five International League championship series against Scranton/Wilkes Barre (Yankees) with the game delayed by rain. Because of the threat of Hurricane Florence hitting North Carolina, all games will be played in Scranton. ... Class A Bowling Green opens play today in the best-of-five Midwest League championship series against Peoria (Cardinals) with RHP Tobias Myers on the mound.

Miscellany

- To boost crowds for the Saturday and Sunday games against the wild-card holding A's, the Rays are selling lower-level outfield corner seats for \$10.
- OF Tommy Pham extended his career-high hitting streak to 15 games.
- DH Ji-Man Choi's ninth-inning walkoff homer Monday was only his second hit against a lefty in 25 big-league plate appearances.
- Cash was ejected after coming out of the dugout to argue an eighth-inning balk called on LHP Vidal Nuno. Cash said he knew he wasn't supposed to challenge that type of call, but was "looking for clarification." It was his first ejection this season, the eighth in his four years on the job.

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