

Alert Ramirez sparks Indians' rare triple play

By Jordan Bastian MLB.com @MLBastian

GOODYEAR, Ariz. -- Jose Ramirez looked to be the only person inside Goodyear Ballpark who immediately realized what he had pulled off Sunday afternoon. The crowd was buzzing as they discussed the play that unfolded in front of them and it took a few moments before the umpires let Cleveland's fielders return to the dugout.

In the sixth inning of a 5-4 loss to the Brewers, Ramirez swiftly recorded a pair of outs to ignite a unique triple play with the bases loaded, providing the highlight of Cleveland's split-squad games against Milwaukee and Kansas City. The three outs were recorded so fast that manager Terry Francona quipped the Indians could have notched four on the play.

"There were outs everywhere," Francona said.

Brewers manager Craig Counsell agreed.

"They could have gotten four outs on that play, very easily could have gotten four outs," Counsell said. "It's a crazy thing. You come to the field and see something [like that]. I think everyone in our dugout said they'd never seen anything like that."

The play began with Jonathan Villar on first, Christian Yelich on second and Stephen Vogt on third base for the Brewers against Indians righty Matt Belisle. Travis Shaw then sent a soft looping liner up the third-base line, where Vogt was caught in between. If he bolted home and Ramirez snared the ball for an out, Vogt could have been doubled up at third. Instead of making the catch, Ramirez gloved the ball on a short hop, introducing a bit of chaos.

Ramirez quickly ran a few steps and tagged Vogt out before then stepping on third to force out Yelich. The Indians third baseman then fired the ball to Jason Kipnis at second to force Villar out. That triple play goes in the books as 5-5-4, which is extremely rare.

"I actually thought Josey did a good job," Francona said. "He tagged the right guy. I think he had a better awareness than the umpires did, but he did a good job on that play."

According to the triple-play database compiled by the Society for American Baseball Research, the last 5-5-4 version in the regular season occurred on Aug. 17, 1950. St. Louis Browns third baseman Owen Friend turned the trick against the Indians in that game with the help of second baseman Snuffy Stirnweiss.

"It was a play like I've never seen before," Vogt said. "Kudos to [Ramirez]. He made a really good play. I tried to avoid the tag. It was one of those perfect little spin shots right by the bag. No man's land. None of us knew what the heck to do. I kind of polled people in the dugout -- people that have been in this game for 50, 60 years. Nobody had ever seen anything like it before."

Shaw maintained his sense of humor after hitting into three outs with one swing.

"If that happens during the regular season," Shaw said, "I'd throw my bat out of the ballpark."

Injury updates

- Francona noted that left fielder Michael Brantley (right ankle surgery in October) was scheduled to go through a baserunning workout Sunday, along with taking fly balls off the bat in outfield drills. The timetable for Brantley's Cactus League debut remains unclear.
- Right-hander Julian Merryweather (No. 16 on the Indians' Top 30 Prospects list per MLB Pipeline) was back at the Tribe's complex Sunday. Merryweather underwent Tommy John surgery on his right elbow Friday. Dr. Keith Meister performed the operation in Dallas.

Camp battles

- In a split-squad 3-1 win over the Royals, left-hander Ryan Merritt got the start for Cleveland and turned in a solid effort. Merritt spun two shutout innings, in which he struck out two, allowed one hit and did not issue a walk. Merritt is out of Minor League options and trying to win a spot on the Tribe's pitching staff.
- Veteran reliever Matt Belisle, who is trying to capture a job in the Indians' bullpen, pitched two innings in Cleveland's other split-squad game against the Brewers. Belisle was charged with two runs on six hits. Belisle, Merritt, Carlos Torres and Evan Marshall are among the arms vying for a relief role for Cleveland.
- Utility candidate Giovanny Urshela kept his hot spring going with a 2-for-3 showing against the Royals. Urshela, whose main competition is Erik Gonzalez, is now batting .542 (13-for-24) in Cactus League play.

Worth noting

- Relief ace Andrew Miller took the mound in Sunday's game against the Brewers, marking the lefty's first Cactus League appearance since Monday. Miller logged one shutout inning with two strikeouts. Closer Cody Allen also worked one shutout inning with two walks and one strikeout.

- Right-hander Carlos Carrasco continued his march toward the regular season with three strong innings against the Brewers. Carrasco allowed no runs and one hit and ended with six strikeouts and no walks. The starter struck out five of the first six batters he faced. Carrasco has 12 strikeouts and one walk in six innings this spring.

Up next

Indians starter Trevor Bauer is scheduled to take the mound against the Rangers in a 4:05 p.m. ET Cactus League clash Monday at Goodyear Ballpark. Relievers Nick Goody, Stephen Fife, Jeff Beliveau, Neil Ramirez, Ben Taylor and Alexi Ogando are also penciled in to pitch for Cleveland. Righty Clayton Blackburn will start for Texas.

Salazar hoping patience with injury pays off

By Jordan Bastian MLB.com @MLBastian

GOODYEAR, Ariz. -- The hum of an occasional plane using Goodyear Airport, which sits just beyond the eastern edge of the Indians' complex, usually fills the air in the mornings at Cleveland's camp. On Sunday, there was another sound disrupting the calm before the team's daily workout.

On a half-diamond behind the row of bullpen mounds, Danny Salazar went through his delivery, firing a weighted ball into a large green pad, which in turn shook the chain-link fence from which it hung. The thump and subsequent rattle repeated over and over, while Salazar's teammates began to trickle out of the facility. By the time their work was starting, the pitcher's solitary throwing session was complete.

"It's frustrating," Salazar said. "It's the middle of Spring Training. I should be throwing four innings in a game right now. It's a little bit different, but I'm not the only guy that's been through this. I just have to take it day by day and get better."

Opening Day is less than three weeks away, but instead of closing in on a roster spot, Salazar is facing a trip to the disabled list when Spring Training ends. That has become all too familiar for Salazar, who thought he took the proper steps over the winter to avoid injuries, only to have his electric right arm defy him once again. The shoulder soreness Salazar experienced in January has delayed returning to the mound, though that step could be coming soon.

During Saturday morning's workout, Salazar worked through a long-toss session and built up to throwing at 120 feet. The pitcher will keep stretching things out over the next few days in an effort to build up the strength in his shoulder, which he does not feel is quite yet at 100 percent. Then Salazar can begin thinking about taking the mound for a bullpen session -- a step the rest of the starters completed several weeks ago now.

Given the uncertainty surrounding Salazar's timetable, the Indians are planning on heading into the year with Corey Kluber, Carlos Carrasco, Trevor Bauer, Mike Clevinger and Josh Tomlin in the rotation. Lefty Ryan Merritt, who started Sunday in a 3-1 split-squad victory over the Royals, is the next arm in line, if any issues arise in the coming weeks.

Salazar was last on a mound Oct. 9, when he logged 1 2/3 innings out of the bullpen for Cleveland in Game 4 of the American League Division Series against the Yankees. He had not yet reached the mound portion of his throwing program over the offseason when he felt discomfort in his shoulder and alerted the Indians' medical staff.

"They're so close," said Salazar, motioning to the row of mounds that were over his shoulder Sunday morning. "I'm getting there. I'm close." Injuries have been an unfortunate theme throughout Salazar's career.

When Salazar was in the Minor Leagues, he underwent Tommy John surgery on his right elbow in 2010. In 2016, Salazar was brilliant out of the chute for Cleveland and earned a spot on the AL All-Star team. Elbow, forearm and shoulder woes then plagued him in the second half, and Salazar was not available as a starter for the team's postseason run to the World Series. Last year, elbow and shoulder problems limited him to 103 innings in the big leagues.

Salazar has gained a reputation for being injury-prone and he knows Indians fans have surely reached a point where they question whether he is reliable.

"The fans, so far, they have been great," Salazar said. "They judge a little bit, but I would say the same thing. I want to be playing every day. I don't want to be on the DL. But it's hard when you have something and you try to play through it. Even if you know it's not right, you want to try to help the team, but you only do damage to the team and damage to you."

Over the winter, Salazar only spent four days in his native Dominican Republic in November. The pitcher was either training in the Cleveland area or in Florida, adhering to a more controlled throwing program provided by the Indians. In previous offseasons, Salazar did more improvising in his workouts on his own in the D.R. Even with those steps taken, soreness still crept into his arm.

Salazar said his rehab program might seem extremely conservative, but the pitcher said it was "the right pace" for him at the moment. In each of the past two years, health troubles have taken Salazar out of the equation for the rotation come playoff time. This time, the pitcher wants to take the appropriate steps now in order to be available for a potential run to the World Series in the fall.

"Learning these things now, just taking care of my shoulder more, I think it's going to help for the season," Salazar said. "I'd rather have maybe the first month off of the season than the last month. That's been the issue the last few years."

Morimando, Merritt among top performers

• Indians Nos. 22 and 30 prospects Ryan Merritt and Shawn Morimando combined to allow one hit over five scoreless innings as Cleveland defeated the Royals, 3-0. Morimando tossed three hitless frames in relief of Merritt, and each left-hander struck out a pair in the game.

“I was going to make a change and I was going to surprise people.”

by Jordan Bastian

On a recent morning, new Indians first baseman Yonder Alonso engaged in a wide-ranging Q&A with MLB.com. Alonso, who signed a two-year contract with Cleveland over the winter, talked about his first impression of the Tribe, why he doesn't like being a poster boy for the launch angle movement and the perspective life has given him.

Q: Now that you've been here for several weeks now—playing in games with these guys, going through workouts, being in the clubhouse—what is your impression of this team and organization?

YA: “I think it's a laid back atmosphere, but there's obviously a sense of awareness of getting the job done and making sure you're working right, making sure everything is clean, making sure that you're doing all the little things very precise in practice. I find that very intriguing, because of other teams that I've been on. How serious they take their defense. How serious they take their running the bases. How serious they take their pre-work. How serious they take their recovery and the weight room and the eating right. All these things that I think you don't see as much, or fans don't see it as much. But then, when you get to the playing field, it's like a golfer working consistently on his iron or his sand wedge. Next thing you know, this guy doesn't shoot a sand wedge a whole round, but he's so on point with it that he's aware, if it comes to that, or in a game if that happens to be the situation, you are prepared and you're ready to go. I find that very nice, knowing that's what it takes. That's what it takes to win.

“Such attention to detail like this is a testament to the years they've had and obviously gives a lot of credit to the staff. There's definitely not a lack of coaches here. There's no question. Heck, you can grab anybody and anybody's willing to help. Everybody understands that everybody's got to pull the same way. If you're pulling in different directions, then it's just going to be a battle all the time. So, it's nice. It's very pleasing to obviously come to work and see all these guys, even from the video guys, the chefs, the trainers, the assistant guys in the weight room. They're just all in the same boat. They're all aware of what's happening and it's a testament to the type of organization they have here.”

Q: Your swing changes have been well-documented. This past winter, when you're looking to continue on with that years-long process, what types of things did you focus on to maintain or adjust your swing?

YA: “I've made some adjustments—no question about it. I think you have to make adjustments in all areas of your game. Defense. Running the bases. Your body staying healthy. And then, when it comes to the hitting side, you have to make adjustments as well. I did a lot of homework, realizing what was good for me when things worked and what wasn't good for me when things didn't work, what was my mind process when things didn't work.

“Everybody hears talk about launch angle and exit velocity and all this stuff, right? For me, that's all crap. Sorry. But, for me, I am aware of that. I read into that. I know what's happening in that area, but do I take it into the game or do I take it into my cage work? Or, do I take it into my video work? No. I'm not doing that.”

Q: You've kind of been referred to as one of the poster boys for the launch angle movement...

YA: “Yeah, I've been clumped into that. I'm not that. I'll be honest with you. This game's been around for 200 years. A fly ball, you're out. A ground ball, you're out. For me, it's about driving the baseball, using my legs, doing things that I do. My pitch sequence. My pitch location. What pitches I can handle. What pitches I can't. And then after that, just going and compete.”

Yonder Alonso Is the New Poster Boy for the Fly Ball Revolution

Q: Two years ago, when Jason Kipnis had a big power spike, his launch angle improved, but he cited the improved aggressiveness on inside pitching as the main reason. In talking to the hitting coaches about Yandy Diaz, they've noted how deep he lets the ball travel in the zone. A better launch angle can be a byproduct of adjustments in those areas. Is that kind of what you mean?

YA: “I think that there's two ways of looking at this launch angle stuff. I think №1 is you have to know what type of player you are. I think people are so concerned about this whole launch angle thing, but if you're 5'4"... And then there's another guy who's 6'1" that is aware of that, and that's a different animal. So, I think guys get a little bit confused when they talk about launch angle. But, if you look at ESPN or Baseball Tonight or MLB Network, and you look at all these guys hitting homers, right? But, what people don't realize is, it's not the first pitch they're hitting out. It's like the fourth pitch in the at-bat, because they've been able to lay off two balls. Or, they fight off a tough pitch to get to 3–2 and they get the mistake. The pitch selection was much better and you hit a homer. So, I think people are just a little bit confused and I think sometimes when everybody talks about all these things going on right now, I think people that are saying these things may not know what a fastball at 100 mph looks like, right? They may not know what a slider that looks just like a fastball at 92. I saw a report about Syndergaard saying he was at 101 and his changeup was 92. OK. Explain to me how I'm going to be able to sit on one pitch or cover the whole plate when this guy's doing that. So, I think there needs to be way more process and kind of chew up the information and, when you're saying it, kind of simplify things for not only big league players, but young players, too. Guys in college who now are aware of this launch angle. Guys in high school who are aware of this stuff. So, I think it's a very tricky and very thin line. My swing wasn't built to hit fly balls or homers. People think that, but it's not. It's not what I was trying to do.”

Q: So, if I'm understanding you right, you're saying that if you build your swing specifically to generate a better launch angle...

YA: "You're going to open up holes. 100 percent. My main goal is to be a tough out. If I'm going to be out, it's going to be tough. I'm not going to have an easy out. So, that's my goal. That's what I strive for every single day. To be a tough out and be the best Yonder Alonso that I can be every single day."

Q: OK, so launch angle wasn't the primary focus of your swing changes. But, you have the bigger kick now and it seems like a lot of this was aimed at using your legs more. Was this a from-the-ground-up process?

YA: "Yeah, I use the ground as my friend. I use my legs as my friend. I understood that I was in a situation where I was a little stuck in previous years. I've always felt like I'm a strong guy. I can squat really well. I can do my cleans really well. I can be in the weight room really well and do all the things in the weight room well. Now, when it came to the baseball field, I wasn't using that when it came to the hitting. So, I had a problem with that. For years, I was like stuck in my own ways."

Q: Was it your own ways or was it the way you were instructed?

YA: "I think it's a little bit of both. But, more than not, I think it was my own ways, thinking that this stuff could work, the way I wanted to swing. I came to a realization that it wasn't going to work and I was just going to be that. I was coming into my free-agency year and I said to myself, 'Well, you know, if you don't make a change, you're going to be gone.' Clearly, a lot of first basemen are doing well and the position is about maximizing and they expect a lot out of you at that position. And I felt like I was doing so many things well, but I wasn't doing things I thought I would be doing well when I got here to the big leagues. So, when I changed, I just took the risk—obviously, a very well-educated risk—but I knew this was going to work and I was going to make a change and I was going to surprise people."

Q: When you've looked into your second half last year, what have you found to help explain the drop-off in production? One thing that jumps out is the production against fastballs.

YA: "I think it had nothing to do with baseball. I think people, and with all due respect, reporters and media, and then the people that don't know the game. I'm not saying you don't know the game, but I mean like fans who maybe watch one game in two weeks and they say, 'This guy sucks. This guy's slumping.' Well, they don't realize that when this was happening, it was the Trade Deadline. I've got a 1-year-old at my house that's not sleeping. I have my wife. I'm traveling thousands and thousands of miles, because I'm on the West coast. And I was mentally exhausted. It was a grind, which there's no excuse for that at all, by no means. But, I think people don't realize sometimes that we're human. I'm not a machine. I'm not a robot. As much as people want to treat us like that, we have our own rights, we have our own ways, we have thoughts and we have feelings. And, our bodies tell us what's happening."

"So, I think what was happening was a little bit of everything. I think all that into consideration, then playing a baseball game and then, after the baseball game having 30 questions to answer if I'm going to be here or not. And then I'm like, 'Am I going to be here or not?' You want to play on a winning team and you see six teammates get traded away and next thing you know, you're like, 'Am I going to leave? Am I next?' And I think, obviously, there were some mechanical things that were wrong as well in my hitting. I think it was that, too. I felt like there were some things that were wrong. I felt like there were some things physically, mechanically, that were wrong that I had kind of gotten away from earlier in the year. Some drills that I was doing that I got away from."

"Once I was in Seattle, and I knew I was going to be there and we were going to play winning baseball, that we were going to try to make a push, then I started feeling better. And that's still a big park, but I still felt like I was good. I still felt like I was doing my thing. I was hitting less foul balls. I was working on my swing. I was hitting more fastballs and breaking balls. My pitch selection got better. Then, the human element comes into place. I knew I was going to be there. I knew I wasn't going to get traded in September, right? So, we were playing baseball."

"I think people, they can say, 'Man, he's soft.' Or, 'Man, you shouldn't think like that.' Well, hey, everybody thinks like that. You have thoughts. They might be different thoughts, but they're still thoughts. So, I think there's a lot of elements that go into people other than just hitting a fastball and curveball, to be honest with you. There's more than baseball in this game and in this world. Baseball's just something that you do. Outside baseball, there's a world. There's a life, right?"

Note: On June 22, Alonso had a 1.000 OPS with the A's. Over the next 36 games, leading up to his trade to Seattle by Oakland, he hit .216 with a .715 OPS. Through June 22, Alonso posted an .805 SLG against fastballs. He slugged .445 off fastballs for the remainder of the season.

Q: Was there a difference in how pitchers were attacking you, though?

YA: "I think they were. I know they were. I'm not going to tell you how they were attacking me, but I know they were. I made adjustments. I responded. That's what it is, man. It's a cat-and-mouse game."

Q: Did it help to head into the offseason with the strong finish to the season?

YA: "Yeah. I had a good September. I hit five homers or something like that. I ended the year well. I played the last four games—three homers. So, I felt great. I felt good. I felt like I could continue to play. So, for me, now it's just getting to better and continue to strive to be the best Yonder Alonso that I can be."

NOTE: Alonso hit .310 with a .943 OPS over his final 15 games of the season, belting three homers in his final five games. He hit .262 with an .822 OPS and four homers in the month of September.

Q: On a different note, seeing photos you post of you and your son, how much does your background with your dad provide you with perspective now? Thanks to the sacrifices made when you were young, you have been able to provide a much different life for your family.

YA: "It's a blessing. It's more of a blessing than anything else. My parents gave me a great childhood—a way better childhood than most kids had in my country. So, I have a lot to be thankful for. I had food on my table. Just being able to give back to my kid and my family, my wife and everybody around me, is great. It's nice. Obviously, I understand what they went through and I understand all the things they did for me—no question about it. I'm just thankful.

Q: How young were you when you came from Cuba?

YA: "I was 10. I wrote a story on the Players' Tribune. Everything is in there. I came when I was 10 with my dad and my mom and my sister. We left Cuba late at night and landed in Miami and started a life, basically. We started a life."

Letter to My Younger Self | By Yonder Alonso

Q: When you were in high school and college, you used to help your dad clean offices and warehouses at night. Sometimes after playing a baseball game. Did you feel a responsibility for your family?

YA: "It was just life. I didn't feel like I had to give anything. It was just family life. That's just how our family thinks at least. That's just what it was. I didn't really think about it any other way. It was just, 'All right. Go work.'"

Q: That seems like a lot on your shoulders when you were a college kid.

YA: "Yeah, maybe for some people they might think that at the moment. For me, it wasn't a lot. For me, it was, this is life. This is life. I have to help my family out, so they can buy groceries for the week, or maybe go to an Outback Steakhouse on Saturday. And, for me to then pay my phone bill. So, for me, it wasn't like, 'Oh my God, this is too much to handle.' No, there's so much worse out there than going to go clean. Obviously, it was a tough thing and it was a physically exhausting thing, but come on. It is what it is. You have to be mentally strong."

Q: And it's clearly given you a lot of perspective...

YA: "Yeah, it's made me mentally stronger. You can go 0-for-20 and that ain't nothing, man. I'll be honest with you. An 0-for-20 just means I can be 1-for-1 in my next at-bat."

No sleep till Cleveland: Indians stressing shut-eye strategies

By Zack Meisel 3h ago

GOODYEAR, Ariz. — The birthday boy woke up from a nap and decided to sneak up on his girlfriend. His cunning plan backfired.

Mike Clevinger startled his girlfriend, Monica, and caused her to unintentionally bump him in the face. His nose had been stuffed with gauze following surgery two days earlier, but blood still flowed from his nostrils like two running faucets.

"It was the worst pain I've felt in my life," Clevinger told The Athletic. "I remember almost passing out."

A few years ago, Clevinger had his first meeting with a sleep doctor. He revealed that he was always dragging, even after dozing off for 10 hours. As it turned out, he was suffering from sleep apnea, the result of a blockage in his sinus and nasal cavity. The doctor told Clevinger he wasn't achieving any REM cycles (rapid eye movement); his breathing struggles would force him awake before he reached a deep sleep.

"I was like, 'How am I alive?'" Clevinger said.

Clevinger also constantly battled sinus infections, and he found himself buzzing around with the most energy late at night, while the rest of the world recharged. So, the ensuing winter, he underwent a procedure to have his adenoids and tonsils removed. Doctors also drilled open the skeletal structure in his nose to better his breathing. Mike Napoli also underwent surgery to address his severe sleep apnea, which he deemed a life-changing event.

Not every sleep meeting proves so fruitful and transformative.

When Dan Otero met with Dr. Chris Winter earlier this spring, they spent more time discussing how to get his three young daughters to sleep instead of his own relaxation tactics.

The Indians scheduled each player in camp to meet with the doctor during a two-day period at the start of the month. It's part of an effort to explore every possible method of improving player performance.

"They try to take care of and look at everything," Otero said. "Sleep, nutrition, stretching, whatever the case may be. In our line of work, sleep is weird. For me, I have two different lifestyles. In the offseason, I'm in bed by 8:30 or 9. And during the season, I have to be ready to pitch by 8:30 or 9. So, it's nice talking to him, seeing what we can do to adjust that body clock for the season."

The content within the meetings can border on self-explanatory — more rest equates to feeling better, which equates to enhanced on-field production. Genius! But this isn't material to which players tend to devote much thought, especially early in their careers, when they're young and oozing energy and are able to close down the bar and still rise early enough to snag a banana nut muffin from the hotel's breakfast buffet.

"You don't even think about it," said Otero, 33. "It's not even going to cross your mind. I thought about it more once I had kids. Sleep is precious, so you try to cherish those moments."

The constant variation in schedule and the limited number of off-days make it challenging for players to carry out consistent sleep routines. A player might pull into his driveway at midnight after a 7 p.m. game and arrive at the ballpark eight hours later to prepare for a weekday matinee. Traveling regimens force teams to land in new cities a few hours before dawn. Frequent changes in time zone complicate matters as well.

The lifestyle isn't exactly conducive to healthy sleep practices.

"Sometimes you go 20 games without having a day off," Josh Tomlin said, "so it's important to get in bed and have a good temperature to get you on a certain path of sleep, all to benefit the body, help you recover better and faster and be ahead of the curve."

Tomlin had his meeting with Dr. Winter at 6:40 a.m. There's something ironic about waking up early to attend a meeting about maximizing sleep potential. But Tomlin is more of a morning person now that he has two young daughters.

"Not everybody is going to take everything he says," Terry Francona said, "but even if you take one thing, if it helps a little bit, good. He has some interesting ideas. It's not like he's throwing stuff against the wall."

"If you can find a way to rest better, you're probably going to feel better. That's just stating the obvious."

Teams didn't focus on this sort of thing when Francona played in the majors 30 years ago.

"We took it for granted," he said. "Now, with research and stuff, maybe you can get a little edge. Even if it's in increments, it's better than not." Certain suggestions don't jibe with the regular-season routine. It's not ideal to eat late at night, but after a 7 p.m. game, guys have little choice but to gorge on whatever team chefs Mark and Miguel have whipped up in the kitchen.

Players also must adhere to the team's travel plans. The Indians fly to their next destination immediately after the final game of a series. So, instead of lying in bed at 1 a.m., players are sitting on a plane. Short naps are encouraged, but finding time for them can be difficult, since players typically head to the ballpark four or five hours before first pitch.

There are, however, strategies to keep in mind, and that's all these meetings are designed to do: reinforce the value of rest as it pertains to recovery and preparation during a rigorous season. Dr. Winter provides recommendations for devices that aid the waking-up process and sleep masks to use on the road, as well as tracking mechanisms. He emphasizes how extra focus on sleep can translate to sharper focus on the diamond.

Tomlin sleeps in another, quieter room the night before his home starts.

"It's just doing due diligence to understand what your body can do," he said. "Some people can go four or five hours and still feel good. I think, over a long period of time, if you keep giving your body a short amount of sleep and turning it off and resetting, you can fall into that trap of putting yourself at a bigger risk of getting hurt, not letting your tissues recover enough."

When Jason Kipnis first met with a sleep doctor a few years ago, he was a night owl, often awake until 1 or 2 a.m. during the offseason. His habits have since changed a bit. This spring, his alarm buzzes at 6 a.m. and he arrives at the Indians' complex by 7:30 at the latest. In fact, he had one of the earliest meeting times with Dr. Winter.

"I'm waking up with all of the fathers, all the guys with kids who are up early," Kipnis said. "I'm tired by 10 o'clock or 9:30 now. But I'm not mad about it. I'm turning over a new leaf."

Of course, he'll flip that schedule on its head once the season begins and most games end around his spring training bedtime. Still, Kipnis has grown to understand the perks of extended rest, which has become critical now that he's on the verge of turning 31 and has seven big-league seasons under his belt. Kipnis used to be able to brush aside all of the advice handed out in the meeting. Now, he enjoys learning about new sleep strategies.

"A lot of guys laugh about going to sleep meetings," Clevinger said.

Clevinger, of all people, can relay firsthand how helpful they can be. Clevinger serves as the model customer. Once he was able to return to his training regimen after the surgery, he would periodically become lightheaded because so much oxygen was flowing to his brain that had previously been blocked.

"I was like, 'Wow, this is actually doing something,' " Clevinger said. "I sleep better. I feel rested now."

Francisco Lindor could use some packing lessons and other things we've learned about the Cleveland Indians

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

CLEVELAND, Ohio - The Indians are past the halfway point in spring training. This weekend they head to Las Vegas for games against the Cubs on Saturday and Sunday, while playing split-squad games in Arizona against the Cubs and Mariners.

They'll play the Giants in Scottsdale on March 19 and have an off day on March 20. Then comes the stretch drive to the regular season. Along with that the roster will be reduced to 25 players before the season opener on March 29.

So here's what we've learned about the Indians to date. Francisco Lindor isn't a good packer nor is he superstitious. He forgot his No. 12 jersey for Saturday's trip to Peoria, Ariz., to play the Padres. He opened the game wearing No. 69 and hit a leadoff single. By the sixth inning, he was wearing No. 12 again and doubled and scored on a two-run homer by Jose Ramirez.

We also learned that Tony Amato, equipment manager, is mobile and agile. He transported Lindor's jersey from Goodyear to Peoria, about a 35-minute drive, with the game still in progress. Hopefully, no one got a speeding ticket. If so, Lindor better pay the fine. What does manager Terry Francona think about the "launch angle" revolution that took hold of baseball last year? Well, for one thing he doesn't think it's anything new. Guys have always had uppercut swings.

"It bothers me," said Francona. "Just because you're able to measure it now, doesn't mean the game has changed. We just have a new tool (Statcast) you can measure things with. Swings don't change. Launch angle is byproduct, in my opinion, of a guy understanding hitting and understanding pitches and what he can do with pitches."

Francona is always cautious about a hitter making a fundamental change in his swing.

"It's dangerous when you start working on things and there has to be an adjustment," he said. "That's the biggest word - adjustment as a hitter. If (Corey) Kluber is throwing you down and away and you're trying to get it up in the air, then the next thing you should start thinking about is exit velocity and that's how fast you're going to leave the batter's box and go back to the dugout."

A reporter in Goodyear, Ariz., said that may have been the line of the spring. It's hard to argue with. For the record, Jason Kipnis told mlb.com that launch angle has nothing to do with the six homers he's hit this spring. "If you ever hear me say the words launch angle or anything like that, I'm lying right to your face," said Kipnis. "That's not anything I've ever worked on or cared about. I work on hitting the ball hard where it's pitched and staying balanced."

The Tribe's spring-training record for homers is held by Albert Belle. He hit 11 in 1991 when the Indians trained in Tucson. The reason Belle hit 11 homers that spring was that he was trying to make the team, not adhere to a new term for an old principle. Belle went on to hit .282 (130-for-461) with 28 homers, 95 RBI and a .863 OPS in his first full season in the big leagues. The Indians lost a franchise record 105 games that year.

Third baseman Mike Moustakas returned to the Royals last week on a one-year deal worth \$6.5 million after turning down a \$17.4 million qualifying offer in November. Why didn't the Indians bid on the Moose? Perhaps they would have if they'd been able to clear payroll during the winter, but their attempts to trade Kipnis were unsuccessful.

Lance Lynn, another casualty of free agency, signed a one-year \$12 million deal with the Twins. While Lynn undoubtedly thought he'd do better on the open market, Minnesota continued to add to a rotation that will challenge the Tribe in the AL Central. While ace Ervin Santana is expected to open the season on the disabled list with a finger injury, Jake Odorizzi, Jose Berrios, Lynn and Kyle Gibson isn't a bad front four to take into opening day. The Twins added veteran relievers Fernando Rodney, Addison Reed and Zach Duke along with first baseman/DH Logan Morrison. They signed mountainous Michael Pineda, recovering from Tommy John surgery, for 2019 and beyond.

It's been a rough spring for Brandon Barnes, who is in camp on a minor league deal trying to win a job in the Tribe's outfield. He's hitting .080 (1-for-25) with 14 strikeouts. Barnes did homer against Kansas City on Sunday for his second hit of the spring. On the other hand infielder Drew Maggi, another spring training invitee, has had a great camp. He's hitting .421 (8-for-19) and his uniform is always dirty from playing defense. It's hard to see where he fits on the Tribe's final 25-man roster, but he shouldn't have trouble finding work.

Giovanni Urshela has a big edge over Erik Gonzalez offensively in the race for the utility infielder's job. Urshela is hitting .524 (13-for-24) with three doubles, two homers and five RBI. Gonzalez is hitting .238 (5-for-21) with two RBI.

Urshela hit .308 (12-for-39) with five homers and 12 RBI in the spring of 2016, but it wasn't enough to win the third base job because the Indians signed free agent Juan Uribe. He went back to Class AAA Columbus that season, but this spring he's out of options. So is Gonzalez. Francona says he welcomes tough calls at the end of camp and he's going to have one here.

It appears Greg Allen and Francisco Mejia will start the season at Columbus. They bypassed Columbus last year to make their big league debuts from Class AA Akron. "Triple-A isn't the end all and be all, but it will be a great step for them," said Francona. "There will still be some growing for them to do at Triple-A and it will be good for them." Allen is hitting .375 (9-for-24) with five RBI. Mejia is hitting .421 (8-for-19) with two homers and seven RBI.

Roberto Perez homers, Ryan Merritt pitches two scoreless innings as Cleveland Indians top Kansas City, 3-1

By Joe Noga, cleveland.comjnoga@cleveland.com

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Roberto Perez homered, while Ryan Merritt, Shawn Morimando and Tyler Olson combined for six shutout innings Sunday as the Cleveland Indians defeated the Kansas City Royals, 3-1 in a split-squad Cactus League game at Surprise Stadium.

Perez put the Indians on the board in the third inning with his second spring training home run. He took Royals starter Nathan Karns deep to center field with Bradley Zimmer aboard to give Cleveland a 2-0 lead.

Brandon Barnes added a solo homer, his first, in the fifth inning against K.C.'s Eric Skoglund.

Yandy Diaz and Giovanny Urshela chipped in with two hits each for the Tribe.

Merritt, competing for a spot in the Indians starting rotation, threw two scoreless innings, allowing one hit and striking out two. Morimando followed with three hitless innings, including a pair of strikeouts.

Tyler Olson added a scoreless frame with one strikeout in the sixth for the Tribe.

Next: Trevor Bauer takes the mound at Goodyear Ballpark to face the Texas Rangers (split squad) at 4:05 p.m. (EST). The game will be available on webcast only.

Cleveland Indians sign Francisco Lindor and 21 other players to one-year deals

By Paul Hoynes, cleveland.comphoynes@cleveland.com

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- The Indians announced that they have signed the 22 players who were not eligible for arbitration to one year deals.

Players signing contracts include: Greg Allen, Cody Anderson, Willi Castro, Yu Chang, Mike Clevinger, Yandy Diaz, Erik Gonzalez, Nick Goody, Eric Haase, Francisco Lindor, Francisco Mejia, Ryan Merritt, Julian Merryweather, Shawn Morimando, Tyler Naquin, Tyler Olson, Adam Plutko, Rob Refsnyder, Eric Stamets, Ben Taylor, Giovanny Urshela and Bradley Zimmer.

The Indians reached agreement with the 22 players without renewing anyone's contract.

The major league minimum for 2018 is \$545,000.

Carlos Carrasco dominant, Cleveland Indians defense flashy, but Milwaukee Brewers rally late to win, 5-4

By Joe Noga,

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Carlos Carrasco pitched three scoreless innings, and the Cleveland Indians played brilliant defense, but the visiting Milwaukee Brewers rallied for three runs in the ninth inning to win, 5-4, in a Sunday split-squad game at Goodyear Ballpark.

Carrasco, making his third appearance of the spring, pitched three shutout innings, allowing one hit and striking out six Milwaukee batters on 62 pitches.

Center fielder Tyler Naquin kept Carrasco's ledger clear with a leaping catch against the wall in the first inning on a ball hit by Brewers leadoff batter Christian Yelich.

Francisco Lindor hit a leadoff home run for the Indians against Milwaukee starter Wade Miley. It was Lindor's third spring training home run and second in his last three games. Yonder Alonso added an RBI single in the fourth inning and Jose Ramirez plated a run with a sacrifice fly in the sixth.

Jason Kipnis, with two hits in three at-bats, upped his spring batting average to .520 with a 1.898 on-base-plus-slugging percentage.

Cleveland's defense turned a rare triple play with the bases loaded in the top of the sixth inning.

Brewers third baseman Travis Shaw sent a looping liner to third base that Jose Ramirez fielded on a short hop. Ramirez tagged Stephen Vogt running back to third, then stepped on the bag to retire Yelich and threw to Kipnis at second for the force on Jonathan Villar.

Milwaukee got on the board in the seventh inning when Brett Phillips tripled home Keon Broxton and came around to score on a throwing error by Indians second baseman Tyler Kreiger.

Cleveland added a run in the eighth inning when Bobby Bradley doubled home Mitch Longo, who had reached base on an error. But Milwaukee pulled ahead with three runs in the ninth inning on RBI singles by Shane Opatz, Kyle Wren and Keston Hiura.

Cleveland's spring training record is now 10-7-2, while the Brewers are 10-6-2.

Gammons: Baseball's leadership culture has changed dramatically, and for the better

By Peter Gammons 2h ago 1

PHOENIX— Baseball evolves. There was a time when spring training in Arizona meant late nights at The Pink Pony and Don and Charlie's in Scottsdale. Today, The Pony — a watering hole so loved by former Giants owner Horace Stoneham that he convinced the A's to move from Scottsdale to Phoenix so he could be closer to it — is closed, and Don and Charlie's is about to shut down.

Now the hot spring meeting place is True Food, a Phoenix restaurant where one night there might be two National League MVPs (Joey Votto, Ryan Braun) and another dozen baseball people, from Billy Beane to Chris Antonetti to Bruce Bochy. Chivas? Gone. Kale Aid? In.

Where once managers asked players to bake in the Florida and Arizona sun for hours, many now prefer their players to hit in the cage, not take batting practice on the field. Pitchers do not shag fly balls, depriving us of chances like the one we once had to time Mike Torrez as he stood in place in right field for 42 minutes during BP.

Where starting pitchers tried to build up innings, they now throw more in bullpens and back fields, believing that 180 innings is the new 220. Where hitting coaches encouraged hitters to take pitches to try to get to the soft underbelly of bullpens by the fifth inning, now the practice is to hunt fastballs and avoid what Dodgers manager Dave Roberts calls "the five-inning parade of guys who throw 95 to 100 miles an hour."

This spring we have a chance to examine the cultural change between front offices—and their billionaire owners—and the millennial players. No longer are players blindly doing whatever the manager tells them "because he's the manager." Theo Epstein, who despite his modest denials many credit with being the first general manager who could walk into his clubhouse and talk the players' talk, says, "what's happened is that we've begun the process of breaking down the barrier between front offices and players. Players today want to know Why? Which they should ask. It's the way it should be. Everyone needs to listen to one another, respect one another, be on the same page."

Asked to describe the Cub culture, Ben Zobrist called it "Collaborative. The relationship between the front office, the manager and coaches, the players and everyone in the organization is a collaborative effort. Theo and Jed [Hoyer] can walk the clubhouse, talk to the players and everyone understands where everyone is coming from. There's no feeling that upstairs they're constantly critiquing us. We clearly understand that we all have the same goal—to win—and can discuss how we can better reach our goal. Trust is really important in this game, and the ability to talk things through with people on every level of management from coaches to the top floor of the offices is a part of everyone working together."

What Zobrist says sounds like the message of *Radical Inclusion*, the new book on leadership by Gen. Martin Dempsey and Ori Brafman. They argue that future leadership "depends on developing an instinct for inclusion." Many baseball organizations are already on this path.

Eric Hinske, who moved from the Cubs to the Angels this season, remembers the seismic cultural change when the Rays replaced Lou Piniella with Joe Maddon. "It was like going from one place in time to another world," says Hinske. Danny Haren, now the Diamondbacks analytic and pitching advisor, remembers "when I was with the Cardinals, I don't think I ever talked to anyone in the front office. It had nothing to do with them, or us. It was just the way it was back then. Here in Arizona, the dialogue between the players, [manager] Torey Lovullo, the entire front office [Mike Hazen, Jared Porter, Amiel Sawdaye] and all the coaches and those who work with the coaches and players [like Haren and his hitting equivalent, Robert Van Scoyoc] is ongoing."

The Diamondbacks' culture begins with Lovullo, whose open relationships with his players and communication skills make him one of the brightest young managers in the sport. "Building relationships is a big part of managing today," says Lovullo. "There has to be some humor. You have to listen. Players need to know why decisions are made. It's not complicated. I really believe that when Terry Francona went to Boston [in 2004] and won in that first year, it changed managing moving forward. His ability to relate to players and be humble in the process—it's never about him—changed the way front offices saw managers. Then came Joe [Maddon]. Now it's prevalent."

We have seen the Yankees and Red Sox hire first-time managers in Aaron Boone and Alex Cora in perhaps the most intense media and fan markets in baseball. "Knowing them both, I think they're going to be very successful," says one NL general manager. "They each relate to players. They understand. They're both extremely authentic. Players know who's authentic and who isn't, who's managing with the players to win and who's managing to save his job or have people saying 'This is the manager's team.'"

This isn't to say there haven't always been managers who understood players as people. Bobby Cox was a master, always taking a mistake and spinning it into a learning process. Jim Leyland, too. He could chew out Barry Bonds in front of the team in spring training, and years later still receive gifts from Bonds sent as a reminder of his respect. Leyland tried to wander the field talking to each player during batting practice and reading their moods (something few managers can do today because they have to do pregame media conferences). After he had to send a young Rick Porcello back to the minors, Leyland called him at least once a week to see how he was doing. Once, when a Pirates reliever complained to the media that he should be the closer, Leyland called him into his office at 3:30 before a night game and said, "you don't think I want you to be the closer? Of course I do. But your velocity drops when you pitch two days in a row. If we can get that fixed, we'll have what we need. For now, your role has to be what it is if we're going to win." They won the division for a third straight year.

Joe Torre was a master communicator with players. "If he knew he was going to criticize me for something after a game, he'd tell me," Jason Giambi once said. "There was seldom a surprise with Joe." Bud Black fits that mold today; from the day he became the Padres manager, he had an ongoing dialogue with all his players. The same is true with Bruce Bochy. But this change in leadership strategies isn't just about

managers. "There has to be a connected line from the top of the front office to all the coaches and the preparatory staff to the manager to the players today," says Lovullo.

Leyland's time in Pittsburgh came during a simpler era. Teams had the manager and five coaches, with little byplay between the front office and clubhouse. "I think Theo changed a lot in the game because he was one of the first general managers who could walk through the clubhouse, talk to players, listen to them and, with Tito [Francona], they created a culture," says Porter, the Diamondbacks assistant GM who in 2004 was working in the Boston organization. "They won in 2004 with a colorful collection of veteran players, and they won again in 2007 working in some very talented young players. It wasn't easy in that market, where people care so much and everything is magnified, but they created a culture where most everyone worked together. I saw it with the Cubs. Theo could talk to Jon Lester and John Lackey, Willson Contreras or Javier Báez, everyone. He and Joe Maddon work so well together."

Maddon doesn't want to waste players' energy; he discourages taking batting practice on the field, suggesting the cages instead. He rests players, taking advantage of the team's roster flexibility. The Cubs have an astounding playroom at Wrigley Field, with several guitars donated by Eddie Vedder, ping pong tables and PlayStations.

One day this week, a discussion arose in Glendale about Matt Kemp's rejuvenated demeanor this spring. Oh, his defense doesn't show off his old high school basketball skills the way it once did, but he's lost weight and is hitting and seemingly joyous. "I believe that some players are impacted by team culture," said one Dodger executive. "The culture here is really good."

There are few better people persons on the planet than Dave Roberts. His coaching staff is energetic, highly intelligent and socially skilled. But the culture begins with Andrew Friedman. Because he is somewhat shy, extremely bright, analytics-minded and now working with Farhan Zaidi, one of the most creative minds in sports, he often gets referred to as a nerd. In fact, Friedman was a first baseman at Tulane, and is one of the most legitimate baseball junkies I know. Last week, when I arrived in Glendale, he excitedly told me there was a B game on a lower field, a good place to watch Tony Cingrani and Walker Buehler and some of the talented young White Sox players with some of the Dodger evaluators. And watching Friedman's close interactions with players was illuminating.

Yes, the Dodgers may have nearly as many analytics experts as the M.I.T. faculty. "I think having all those people working with us actually makes it easier for a manager and his staff to spend time with the players," says Roberts. "They do so much preparation, we can spend more time with the players than we could if we had to do all the game planning. There's a lot more individualized coaching in the game today, and the guys upstairs allow the coaches the time to do the specific work they need to do. The important thing is to make the information understandable for players."

In Arizona, Haren works with pitching coach Mike Butcher and the staff on the pitching gameplan; Van Scoyoc will work with the analytics staff and hitting coach Dave Magadan on the hitting game plan; Dave McKay prepares his baserunners with help from above, and there is a team to go through the defensive positioning. It's the same with the Cubs, and in Cleveland.

In the 1980s, Whitey Herzog used charts and his own preparation methods, but he did it in his office, drawing out those charts from his game notes. Now, almost every team has analytics staffs that prepare from their own systems, Pitch/FX, Statcast and other programs. Haren and Boston's Brian Bannister, for instance, are former major league pitchers who study pitch selection as well as mechanical suggestions and effective arm slots. The success of pitchers moving from the world of sinker/slider dominance to four-seam high fastball/curveball/changeup dominance has been a product of these studies, as illustrated by the world champion Astros.

The Indians, Dodgers, Cubs and Diamondbacks were built on complicated multi-layered research, preparation and human coordination all bent to the same purpose, upstairs and downstairs. When A.J. Hinch got to Houston, he pulled together the human element to go with their analytical mass. The Yankees are an emerging giant on all these levels. So are the Twins. While Dave Dombrowski is from the more traditional school, he has allowed Bannister and other statistically inclined thinkers to prosper, allowed Zack Scott's analytics staff to grow, and hired a manager in Cora who believes in blending people skills, heavy analytical preparation and eyes trained by his lifetime in the game. Dombrowski also brought in Tim Hyers from the Dodgers as hitting coach.

Not incidentally, all those teams played in October in 2017.

"In the end, many players learn how to use all the information that is available to us in this era," says Rich Hill, who credits Bannister with helping him learn to frame his curveball. "But a Dave Roberts is important because he is such a great people person. He has never forgotten that baseball is played by humans and depends on the human condition." Or, as Kris Bryant says, "managers and front offices have to understand that most players are insecure, by the mere nature of the game and the business. How players and managers and front offices interact to address those insecurities is really important."

On the streets of Scottsdale, they still tell stories of Horace Stoneham and Billy Martin and The Pink Pony, and I'm not sorry to say my picture once hung in Don and Charlie's. But times change. May I suggest the kale salad with salmon?

As Paul Molitor—one of the most instinctive players of the last 50 years—puts it, "as a manager, the more information I have, the better my instincts become."