

## **Tribe in 0-2 hole after Miller's untimely stumble Lefty relieves solid Carrasco in 6th, allows deciding 2-run double**

By Jordan Bastian MLB.com @MLBastian

HOUSTON -- It was not that long ago that the image of Andrew Miller emerging from the bullpen in October was an intimidating one for opposing hitters. Two years ago, the Indians' relief ace hoisted his team's injury-riddled pitching staff on his back and led Cleveland to an American League pennant.

This year has been a different story. When Miller walked across the Minute Maid Park infield en route to the mound on Saturday, the tall lefty carried with him baggage from this trying season. And in a critical sixth inning, Miller's trials persisted at the worst possible time against the Astros, sending the Tribe to a 3-1 loss in Game 2 of the AL Division Series.

"That's my spot to come in," Miller said. "I came in, I wasn't good, I wasn't effective and I blew the game for us."

Now the AL Central champions are staring at an 0-2 hole in this best-of-five series, which continues with Game 3 on Monday at Progressive Field. In a way, the Indians can look to last year's early October exit for an ounce of inspiration. Cleveland had a 2-0 lead on the Yankees, who then took the next three games.

In the history of five-game series using the 2-2-1 format, teams that have won Games 1 and 2 at home have gone on to win the series 89 percent (24 of 27) of the time. Last October's Cleveland squad -- a team that won 102 games and set an AL record with a 22-game winning streak -- was one of the exceptions.

"We just need to find a way to win Monday," Indians manager Terry Francona said. "I'm guessing that Houston will enjoy their off-day more than we will. Other than that, show up on Monday and play for our baseball life."

Miller, who allowed a momentum-swinging two-run double to Marwin Gonzalez, was not the only complicating factor. Astros starter Gerrit Cole piled up a dozen strikeouts -- the most in a playoff game vs. Cleveland since Mike Mussina's 15 in Game 3 of the 1997 AL Championship Series -- across seven overpowering innings.

Cole's lone lapse came in the form of a stadium-hushing homer from Francisco Lindor. Given the way Cleveland's Carlos Carrasco was dealing, it felt as though that slim 1-0 advantage might have been enough.

"That's a lot to ask to make that hold up," Francona said.

Jose Altuve opened the sixth with a dribbler up the third-base line, where the roller stayed fair for an infield single against Carrasco. Altuve tripped out of the box and limped through the bag, but he stayed in, eliciting an approving roar from his audience. Carrasco then issued a walk to Alex Bregman before inducing a flyout to left off the bat of Yuli Gurriel.

At that juncture, Francona reverted to a familiar formula, summoning Miller from the bullpen in an effort to apply the tourniquet.

Carrasco did not question his manager's decision.

"He's the manager. He made the right decision," Carrasco said. "There's nothing I can do about that. Yeah, I just want to continue to pitch, but if that's the call from Tito, I respect that."

In 2016, Miller set single-postseason relief records for consecutive multi-inning outings (10), innings (19 1/3) and strikeouts (30), taking home the ALCS Most Valuable Player Award for his work against Toronto. He was strong again in last year's ALDS, too. This season, though, Miller endured three stints on the DL, posted a 4.24 ERA and logged his fewest innings (34) since 2013.

"Honestly, I feel like I was throwing the ball well coming into this," Miller said. "Today is what matters, and I didn't do a good job today."

Francona said he wanted Miller for a couple of reasons. First, Gonzalez had a single in each of his first two at-bats against Carrasco. The manager also liked Miller's history against Gonzalez, who was 1-for-8 with six strikeouts in his career against the lefty.

"We wanted Andrew," Francona said. "That's what we wanted right there."

Miller's second pitch to Gonzalez was an up-and-away heater, which the Astros outfielder slashed into the right-field corner. Altuve scored easily from second and Bregman raced around from first -- helped by the fact that right fielder Melky Cabrera bobbled the ball and had to retrieve it at the base of the wall. Minute Maid Park trembled as Houston grabbed a 2-1 lead.

Both runs were charged to Carrasco, who worked 5 1/3 innings and was hung with a hard-luck loss.

Miller followed with a walk to Carlos Correa and then, during the next battle with Tyler White, the left-hander pulled a slider errantly behind the batter for a wild pitch. Both runners moved up 90 feet, prompting the reliever to intentionally walk White to load the bases. After Houston sent Evan Gattis in as a pinch-hitter, Francona pulled the plug on Miller's outing.

Trevor Bauer took over and escaped the jam with a popout (Gattis) and a strikeout (Martin Maldonado), flexing and letting out a howl as he headed off the field. One inning later, though, Bauer surrendered a solo shot to Bregman to increase Cleveland's deficit, magnifying the damage done during the ill-fated sixth inning.

Now the Indians have to hope that the Astros get a taste of what Cleveland experienced in the ALDS a year ago.

"It might be a little unfortunate that we know it can be done," Miller said. "We have a day to regroup. That's how I'm looking at it. I have a day to regroup and then I'll be in and ready to succeed in the same spot. And I think these guys, we're not giving up just yet."

#### MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Donaldson's decision: It was unclear whether Altuve's roller up the third-base line in the sixth would have crossed the chalk line, but Josh Donaldson opted to pluck the ball from the ground. Cleveland's third baseman said he did so because he noticed Altuve's stumble out of the box. While the Astros second baseman may have been safe regardless, Donaldson's throw sailed wildly beyond first, helping set up the rally.

"He didn't get out of the box particularly well," Donaldson said. "Normal circumstances, if he got out of the box well, I let it go every time. But with the circumstances, I feel right now I'd still make the play. I would just make a better throw. I felt like if I made the throw, it's an easy out."

Lindor's shot: The lone breakthrough against Cole arrived in the third, when Lindor pounced on a 2-2 slider left over the heart of the plate. The shortstop sent the offering out to right field with a 103.2-mph exit velocity, marking his fourth career postseason home run. Immediately after making contact, Lindor looked back at Cleveland's dugout, trying to inject some life into the lineup in the process.

"I was hoping. It seemed like we had good at-bats," Lindor said. "I know we struck out a lot of times, but we had good at-bats. It's just the hits haven't fallen. Altuve started a rally with a ground ball to third base. We haven't had any of those. We'll be fine." More >

No way, Jose: With one out and runners on the corners in the third inning, Carrasco induced a sharp grounder to the left side off the bat of Altuve. Donaldson gloved the ball and fired it to Jose Ramirez, who recorded an out at second, but then tripped on the base. While falling over, Ramirez somehow pulled off an accurate throw to first baseman Yonder Alonso to complete a stunning inning-ending double play. More >  
HE SAID IT

"They locate. They execute. They've done a very, very good job. Our pitching staff today did a tremendous job. As the offense, we've got to do a little better job." -- Lindor, on Houston's pitching holding the Tribe to a 6-for-60 showing through two games

"He had that upshoot heater. As a hitter, it's a little bit deceiving because it looks like it's going to be in there for a strike and it just keeps going up." -- Donaldson, on Cole

#### SOUND SMART

The Indians were one of the hardest teams to strike out during the regular season, posting an 18.5 percent strikeout rate (second in the Majors) on offense. In fact, prior to Cole's performance Saturday, no pitcher recorded 11-plus strikeouts against the Tribe in 2018. The lone double-digit showing was a 10-strikeout game by Seattle's James Paxton on April 26.

#### UP NEXT

Following Sunday's off-day, the Indians will hand the ball to righty Mike Clevinger (13-8, 3.02 ERA) for Game 3 of the ALDS at 1:30 p.m. ET on Monday at Progressive Field. Clevinger and Corey Kluber joined Houston's Justin Verlander and Cole as the only sets of teammates to have at least 200 innings and 200 strikeouts in the Majors this season. The Astros will send lefty Dallas Keuchel (12-11, 3.74 ERA) to the hill in Cleveland.

#### Lindor goes deep for Indians' lone spark

By Anthony Castrovince MLB.com @castrovince

HOUSTON -- Very little went right for the Indians against Gerrit Cole in Game 2 of the American League Division Series -- or really, against any Houston pitcher through two games of the best-of-five set they trail, 0-2. But one sweet swing from Francisco Lindor in the third inning Saturday at Minute Maid Park did provide a glimmer of hope.

Lindor took Cole deep with a solo shot on a two-strike slider left over the heart of the plate to give the Indians their first lead of the series. Alas, it would not hold up as Cole and the Astros' bullpen did not let another Tribe hitter get past first base in Cleveland's 3-1 loss.

When Lindor connected on his 103.2-mph blast to the right-field seats (there was no exit velocity reading available when an Astros fan tossed the ball back on the field of play in protest), he looked back and roared at the Tribe's dugout, and it appeared the Indians had the offensive spark they have been searching for.

"I was hoping," Lindor said. "It seemed like we had good at-bats. I know we struck out a lot of times [14 total], but we had good at-bats. It's just the hits haven't fallen."

Lindor's homer was his first in the postseason since his momentous grand slam in Game 2 of the ALDS against the Yankees last year.

On the whole, though, Lindor has struggled in the Tribe's past two trips to October. He is a combined 4-for-26 with eight strikeouts going back to Game 1 of the Yankees' series last year, and those issues in the leadoff spot have set a tone for a Tribe team that has been held to eight runs over its past five postseason games.

Serving as the Indians' leadoff hitter in the regular season, Lindor became the first shortstop to have at least 35 homers, 40 doubles and 20 stolen bases.

#### Astros' aces carving up Tribe's approach

By Anthony Castrovince MLB.com @castrovince

HOUSTON -- An unstoppable force cannot meet an immovable object. Were there such a thing as an unstoppable force, there could not logically be such a thing as an immovable object. And were there such a thing as an immovable object, there could not logically be such a thing as an unstoppable force.

Which brings us to the Astros' pitching staff and the Indians' offense.

Houston's pitching staff entered this American League Division Series with the "unstoppable force" that is the highest strikeout rate in all of baseball, while Cleveland's lineup entered with the "immovable object" that is the highest contact rate/lowest strikeout rate in all of baseball. And the fallacy of this oft-proposed paradox has played out right before our eyes, because the high-spin, high-velocity Astros staff, led by Justin Verlander and Gerrit Cole, has made mincemeat of the Tribe's nine with a cavalcade of K's that has resulted in a 2-0 edge in the best-of-five set.

"They're pitching their tails off, man," said Indians catcher Yan Gomes, best articulating the cap-tipping Cleveland has been reduced to at the hands of this Houston staff.

As good as Verlander was in the opener, Cole was actually a bit better in a 3-1 victory in Game 2 at Minute Maid Park on Saturday, logging seven dominant innings and becoming just the second postseason pitcher (and first since Hall of Famer Tom Seaver in Game 1 of the 1973 National League Championship Series) to strike out at least a dozen batters with zero walks.

"Tom Seaver, high heat, nasty breaking ball, workhorse," Cole said. "Seaver and [Don] Sutton, both guys seem the same." You could say that of Cole and Verlander right now.

Cole's offseason arrival was the first hint that the 2018 Astros might actually be a more potent postseason force than last year's World Series champs, but the depth that has been added to a bullpen (albeit with some attached controversy) that required quite a bit of creativity to advance last October make this a more realistic back-to-back bid than we typically see this time of year.

First, of course, the Astros have to get past the AL Central champs, and nothing we've seen this weekend indicates they won't. That the Indians' bullpen is compromised by the obvious absences of the 2016 versions of Andrew Miller and Cody Allen is potentially enough of a DS difference-maker on its own. But a 6-for-60 showing with 24 strikeouts in 64 plate appearances is the real killer for a club trying to end baseball's longest championship drought.

So the Indians are, essentially, striking out twice as frequently against the Astros (37.5 percent of the time) as they did in the regular season (18.9).

It either screams of a need for an adjustment in approach or, perhaps, an adjustment of opponent, because Houston's pitchers are an impossible matchup at the moment.

"They want a shutout every day," Hinch said of his staff, "and they don't care who you match up against, teams that can dominate, teams that can't. They prepare as good as you would expect. They execute at an elite level. They get outs quickly if they need it. They punch out guys when they need it. Very few walks, excellent stuff across the board. How many compliments can I give our pitching staff?"

That Verlander and Cole, specifically, are good is understood. But the Indians got their absolute best on the biggest stage of the season.

Cleveland had a .522 slugging percentage against four-seam fastballs this season -- the highest such mark in all of baseball, per Statcast™. But that doesn't mean its offense is invincible (or immovable or unstoppable, as it were). Verlander and Cole sure proved that. An Indians team that saw, on average, 33 percent four-seamers over the course of the regular season saw 60.5 percent heaters (121 out of 200) from the Astros' dual aces.

"It seems like they can throw the ball wherever they want," Astros second baseman Jose Altuve said.

Verlander's 5 1/3 innings of mastery (two runs on two hits with two walks and seven strikeouts) against a Tribe team that gave him fits in his Detroit days was a testament to how his increased use of the four-seamer at the expense of the sinking two-seamer has made him, in some respects, a different pitcher. Verlander can challenge hitters in the zone because he has the highest average spin rate of any starting pitcher in baseball, giving the illusion of a "rising" effect on the pitch.

But the Indians were struck by how frequently Verlander worked left-handed hitters away in Game 1:

Justin Verlander ALDS G1 pitch chart

"Verlander pitched away more than you'd typically see," Indians hitting coach Ty Van Burkleo said. "He's more glove-side comfort, typically."

Cole doesn't generate as much spin (and, ergo, "upward" movement) on his fastball as Verlander does, but he's got more velocity -- a 96.5 mph average to Verlander's 95. On Saturday, with the pulse of the postseason evident, he was even nastier -- a 97.5 mph average, with a 99.2-mph max.

And Cole wasn't afraid to challenge Tribe hitters in the upper-third of the zone and above:

Gerrit Cole ALDS G2 pitch chart

This approach only made the sweeping and biting movements of Cole's breaking pitches all the more effective.

"The only thing that surprised me was his velocity," Gomes said. "He was up there, 98-100. I'm not very familiar with him other than seeing videos, but that's the kind of baseball you're going to get right now."

Between the starters and what has been a bullish bullpen (zero runs, one hit, two walks and five strikeouts in 5 2/3 innings), the Astros have given the Indians their best. Game 2 marked just the fifth time in postseason history that a team allowed no more than five baserunners with 14 or more strikeouts. Francisco Lindor's solo shot off Cole marked the only time all day Cleveland got a runner past first base.

"We knew coming in that we had our hands full with their pitching staff," Van Burkleo said.

You could call it an unstoppable force. Or an immovable object.

Or, simply, the backbone of a 2-0 series edge.

### **Astros-Indians G3: Lineups, matchups, FAQs**

HOUSTON -- Behind dominant pitching performances from Justin Verlander and Gerrit Cole and a shutdown bullpen, the Astros have held the Indians to six hits in two victories in Houston in the American League Division Series, and they can punch a ticket to the AL Championship Series with a win in Monday's Game 3 in Cleveland.

The Indians have managed only nine total bases and have struck out 24 times while drawing only four walks heading into a Game 3, in which they'll face former AL Cy Young Award winner Dallas Keuchel, a lefty. The Astros have taken advantage of the Tribe's aggressiveness at the plate, but Keuchel pitches more to contact and feasts on ground balls.

Meanwhile, the Indians have struck out the Astros only 10 times in two games, while allowing 39 total bases to Houston's offense. It will be up to right-hander Mike Clevinger to try to keep the defending champions from eliminating Cleveland.

What might the starting lineups look like?

Astros: Manager AJ Hinch has already said Brian McCann will start at catcher instead of Martin Maldonado, and Tony Kemp might get his first start in the outfield, as well, facing another right-hander. Carlos Correa (0-for-7) is likely to stay in the lineup because of his defense with hopes that his bat will come around.

1. George Springer, CF
2. Jose Altuve, 2B
3. Alex Bregman, 3B
4. Yuli Gurriel, 1B
5. Marwin Gonzalez, LF
6. Carlos Correa, SS
7. Tyler White, DH
8. Josh Reddick, RF
9. Brian McCann, C

Indians: With a lefty in Keuchel on the mound, there is a chance that the Indians could have one or both of Brandon Guyer (124 OPS+ vs. left-handers) and Yandy Diaz (103 OPS+ vs. lefties) in the lineup. Other than that possibility, expect the majority of the Tribe's nine to remain the same.

1. Francisco Lindor, SS
2. Michael Brantley, LF
3. Jose Ramirez, 2B
4. Edwin Encarnacion, DH
5. Josh Donaldson, 3B
6. Brandon Guyer, RF
7. Yan Gomes, C
8. Yandy Diaz, 1B
9. Jason Kipnis, CF

Who are the starting pitchers?

Astros: Keuchel (12-11, 3.74 ERA) put together a solid season following a slow start. He went 9-3 with a 3.23 ERA in his final 20 starts. This will be the 2015 AL Cy Young Award winner's eighth career playoff start. He's 4-2 with a 3.24 ERA in eight career playoff appearances, including one relief appearance against the Royals in 2015.

Keuchel is 4-1 with a 2.79 ERA in eight career games (seven starts) against the Indians, and he allowed 14 hits and six earned runs in 11 innings across two starts against them this year. He's 2-0 with a 2.57 ERA in four career starts at Progressive Field.

Indians: Clevinger (13-8, 3.02 ERA) will take the ball in Game 3, marking the first postseason start of his career. Clevinger finished the 2018 campaign with a career high in innings (200) and strikeouts (207), and he enjoyed a stellar second half. In 13 starts after the summer's intermission, the righty had a 2.31 ERA, which was the third-lowest mark in the AL in that span (minimum 60 innings).

Clevinger faced Houston twice this year, going 0-2 with a 6.17 ERA (eight earned runs in 11 2/3 innings) in back-to-back outings (May 18 and 24). In 17 starts this season at Progressive Field, the right-hander went 7-3 with a 3.14 ERA with 114 strikeouts vs. 29 walks in 106 innings.

How will the bullpens line up after the starter?

Astros: Ryan Pressly and Roberto Osuna pitched in the first two games of the series, and Lance McCullers Jr. went in Game 1. The Astros' other four relievers are well rested, and following Sunday's off-day, Pressly and Osuna should be ready to pitch again in Game 3.

Indians: Cleveland leaned on righty Trevor Bauer in each of the first two games, and he will likely continue to be a leverage option for Game 3. With the Tribe in must-win mode, Bauer will likely be leaned on for multiple innings if Clevinger runs into trouble. With the exception of starters Carlos Carrasco and Corey Kluber, it will be all hands on deck.

Are there any relievers who are unavailable?

Astros: None.

Indians: Between Sunday's off-day and the fact that the Indians have not overextended any relievers, expect everyone to be available for duty.

Any injuries of note?

Astros: Altuve appeared to tweak his sore right knee running to first base in the sixth inning of Game 2, but he said he'll be ready for Monday.

Who is hot and who is not?

Astros: Bregman is 3-for-6 with two walks and two homers in the first two games, and Gonzalez is 5-for-7. White is 3-for-5 with two intentional walks. Meanwhile, Correa and Gurriel (1-for-7) have gotten off to slow starts.

Indians: After posting a .171 average and a .550 OPS in the ALDS a year ago, Cleveland's lineup has gone cold once again (6-for-60) to start October. The middle of the Tribe's order (Ramirez, Encarnacion and Donaldson) has gone especially frigid, with a 1-for-22 showing through the first two games. Lindor tried to light an offensive fuse in Game 2 with a solo home run off Cole, but that was the extent of the lineup's output.

Anything else fans might want to know?

The Indians went 49-32 this season at home, averaging 5.47 runs per game on offense and posting a 3.82 ERA as a staff. Cleveland's 151 home victories over the 2016-18 seasons trail only the Red Sox and Yankees (152 apiece) in the AL. The Indians have won an AL-high 289 home games under manager Terry Francona from 2013-18.

The Astros went 57-24 on the road this season, marking the second-best road record in the Major Leagues since the schedule expanded to 162 games in 1961. They won 15 of their final 18 games on the road in the regular season and averaged 5.2 runs per game away from home this year (4.6 runs per game at home).

### **Gonzalez, Bregman lift Astros over Indians for 2-0 ALDS lead**

#### **The Associated Press**

HOUSTON (AP) -- Justin Verlander and Gerrit Cole have been even more brilliant in the playoffs, keeping Cleveland's powerful offense in check to give the Houston Astros a 2-0 lead in the AL Division Series.

Cole struck out 12 and walked none, combining with two relievers on Houston's second straight three-hitter in a 3-1 victory Saturday.

"There's no doubt we expect to be good, but this is a team effort," Cole said. "So, we expect to keep our team in the ballgame. I don't know about all the personal accolades or all the dominance or that kind of stuff, but we just want to put up a fight."

Marwin Gonzalez hit a go-ahead, two-run double and Alex Bregman homered for the second straight day.

Next up: 2015 AL Cy Young winner Dallas Keuchel will oppose Mike Clevinger in Game 3 of this best-of-five series on Monday in Cleveland.

Francisco Lindor hit a third-inning homer for the AL Central champion Indians, who have three runs in the two games. Cleveland is batting .100 (6 for 60) following a regular season in which the Indians ranked second in the majors with a .259 average. Jose Ramirez, Edwin Encarnacion and Josh Donaldson have combined to go 1 for 22.

"This is one of the best offenses in the league," manager AJ Hinch said. "They can do damage. They can put long at-bats together. (Cole) used all his pitches. He was creative. What else can I say? He was awesome."

Gonzalez put the Astros ahead in the sixth with the third of his four hits, an opposite-field double to right off usually reliable reliever Andrew Miller.

"With a one-run lead, and with Gonzalez coming up the way he had swung the bat against him prior and Andrew's history, I felt really good about it," manager Terry Francona said. "Didn't work out the way we obviously planned."

Bregman homered against Trevor Bauer in the seventh, and the World Series champions moved within a win of a second straight trip to the AL Championship Series.

Cole allowed one run and three hits in seven innings, joining Tom Seaver (1973) as the only pitchers to strike out at least 12 batters without a walk in a postseason game.

Ryan Pressly got two outs, and Roberto Osuna walked one in a four-out save.

Cleveland starter Carlos Carrasco allowed two runs and six hits in 5 1/3 innings.

Jose Altuve singled leading off the sixth but slipped as he left the batter's box and was limping after reaching first base. Hinch and a trainer came out to check on Altuve, who remained in the game.

Bregman walked and one out later, Cleveland brought in Miller, the dominating left-hander who was MVP of the 2016 AL Championship Series but has been slowed by injuries this year.

The switch-hitting Gonzalez turned around and hit right-handed. He fouled off a slider, then doubled on a fastball. Gonzalez, who hit a career-best .303 last season, has struggled this year hitting just .247.

"It was a tough season for me on the offensive side ... but I've been putting in a lot of work and it felt good today," Gonzalez said.

Miller had allowed just one previous inherited runner to score in the postseason, on a sacrifice fly by Boston's David Ortiz in Game 3 of the 2016 AL Division Series.

Miller walked Carlos Correa on four pitches and loaded the bases with an intentional walk.

"I wasn't good," Miller said. "I wasn't effective."

Bauer, a starter pitching in relief for the second straight day, retired Evan Gattis on a popout and struck out Martin Maldonado.

Cole retired 13 of 14 after Lindor's homer, striking out the side in the fourth. After fanning Ramirez on three pitches to end the sixth, Cole screamed and pumped both arms as he walked off the mound.

Houston leadoff hitter George Springer went 1 for 4 with a single, ending a streak of five straight postseason games with a home run - one shy of Daniel Murphy's record.

Now he and the Astros head to Cleveland hoping to set a different kind of mark by becoming the second team in franchise history to reach the championship series in consecutive seasons.

"We're going to try to finish it on Monday," Gonzalez said. "That's the mentality that everybody has in the clubhouse."

#### OSUNA'S STREAK

Osuna, acquired from Toronto in July, has pitched 11 1/3 scoreless innings in the postseason. The streak spans nine games, including six in a row against Cleveland. He's converted all three save chances in the playoffs and each of his three saves have been more than three outs.

#### THEY SAID IT

Francona on his team's mindset heading into Monday's elimination game: "Show up on Monday and play for our baseball life. Nobody wants to go home. So, try to keep this thing going."

#### UP NEXT

Keuchel (12-11, 3.74 ERA) is 4-2 with a 3.24 ERA in eight postseason games, including seven starts. Clevinger (13-8, 3.02) will be making his first career postseason start after making six relief appearances with a 6.43 ERA.

### **Covering the Bases: ALDS Game 2**

#### **by Jordan Bastian**

Notes and quotes from the Indians' 3-1 loss to the Astros in Game 2 of the American League Division Series on Saturday at Minute Maid Park.

**FIRST:** Josh Donaldson swung through an elevated fastball from Gerrit Cole and, as the Houston crowd roared, the Indians third baseman flipped his bat in disgust, sending it bouncing to a stop in the dirt in front of the plate.

Donaldson then tossed his helmet aside, wearing a look of disgust after his strikeout punctuated a series of three straight for the Astros' starter. Cole went to the upper reaches of the zone three times with his heater in the battle and Donaldson could not connect.

"He had that up-shoot heater," Donaldson said. "As a hitter, it's a little bit deceiving, because it looks like it's going to be in there for a strike and it just keeps going up."

From Cole's perspective, the sequence against Donaldson was a thing of beauty:

1. 89-mph slider in the dirt: Ball one
2. 98-mph fastball high inside zone: Swinging strike
3. 99-mph fastball away, above zone: Swinging strike
4. 101-mph fastball low, away, in dirt: Ball two
5. 84-mph curve low, away, in zone: Foul ball
6. 99-mph fastball up, above zone: Swinging strike three

From the Indians' perspective, it was a glimpse into an approach by Houston that has helped limit Cleveland to a 6-for-60 showing through the first two games of this American League Division Series. That paltry offensive showing has put the Tribe in an 0-2 hole as the series shifts to Cleveland.

Specifically, it was an approach by Justin Verlander in Game 1 and then Cole, who has a similar arsenal, in Game 2. Combined, the two hard-throwing righties pounded Cleveland's lineup with four-seamers, focusing on high-velocity heaters in the upper-third of the zone or elevated out of the zone.

What is interesting about this approach is it goes against what Cleveland has faced for the bulk of this season. When the Indians' lineup has struggled, it has typically been against pitchers who center their attack around offspeed and breaking pitches.

During the regular season, the Indians saw 57.8% fastballs, marking the second-lowest rate in the Majors. Why? Because Cleveland slugged .491 (second in MLB) against all varieties of fastballs. The Indians saw 33-percent four-seamers (fourth-lowest in MLB). Why? Because Cleveland slugged a Major League-leading .522 against four-seamers.

Verlander and Cole combined for 121 four-seamers within their 200 pitches, or 60.5% of their offerings over the past two nights. Yes, the starters have executed their secondary pitches to help make the heaters more effective. Even with that said, though, it has felt like a here-it-is, see-if-you-can-hit-it challenge on the part of Houston's arms.

As T.J. Zuppe of The Athletic noted, the Indians produced a .426 slugging percentage on four-seamers in the upper-third of the zone and above, compared to a .591 slugging on four-seamers in the lower two-thirds and below. That plays into the elevated-heater approach by Houston's starters.

"I had a pretty decent feel for the zone, but I think that came more from the fastball," Cole said. "If you can constantly just put pressure on all four quadrants, it gives you a little more leverage to be able to fill the zone up with breaking balls in fastball counts, or with breaking balls when guys are maybe sitting on the fastball that you've established.

"I had good command with it. I was able to throw strikes with all four pitches, but I really just kept trying to pound the zone and stay aggressive."

Cole struck out 12 over seven innings, with his lone setback being a solo homer by Francisco Lindor, who drove a 2–2 slider out in the third inning.

Verlander might very well take home the AL Cy Young Award for his work this season. Cole was a leading candidate for that accolade for much of the summer. The Houston rotation set single-season MLB records this year with 10.37 K/9 and 1,101 strikeouts overall, and finished 22nd all-time for single-season fWAR (22.5).

So, it's important to keep things in perspective when considering that Cleveland has scored one run via a wild pitch, one on a groundout and one on a homer—and nothing else—in the first two games of this season. The Astros' pitching staff is ridiculously good.

Does that make this 0–2 pill any easier for Cleveland's hitters—let alone this title-starved fan base—to swallow? No, not at all, especially given that the Indians hit .171 with a .550 OPS in their ALDS debacle against the Yankees last year.

The Nos. 3–6 hitters, in particular, have been handcuffed by the Astros. Jose Ramirez, Edwin Encarnacion, Donaldson and Yonder Alonso have combined to go 1-for-28 in the two losses at Minute Maid Park.

"They locate. They execute. They've done a very, very good job," Lindor said. "As the offense, we've got to do a little better job."

SECOND: Over the past two games, Indians manager Terry Francona's decision on when to pull his starting pitcher loomed large in the aftermath of each defeat.

In Game 1, ace Corey Kluber labored through a 35-pitch fourth inning, but was trusted to return to the mound in the fifth. He promptly allowed back-to-back home runs and Houston was on its way to a 7–2 romp.

In Game 2, Carlos Carrasco cruised for the first five innings, but then ran into trouble in the sixth. Jose Altuve reached on an infield single (more on that in a moment) and Alex Bregman walked. Following a flyout by Yuli Giurriel, Francona called Andrew Miller from the 'pen.

"He's the manager. He made the right decision," Carrasco said. "He took me out. There's nothing I can do about that. Yeah, I just want to continue to pitch, but if that's the call from Tito, I respect that."

We now sit here with the benefit of hindsight.

Miller entered and his command did not enter with him. He misfired on an 0–1 fastball—sending it up and away—and Marwin Gonzalez shot it into right field. Two runs scored on the play, giving the Astros a 2–1 lead. Miller then walked Carlos Correa and, while facing Tyler White, fired a wild pitch behind the batter that allowed two runners to move up a base.

After an intentional walk, Trevor Bauer took over and escaped the jam, but the damage had been done. After the loss, Miller got dressed, waited for Bauer's interview session to end, and then walked over to reporters and made no excuses.

"I blew the game for us," Miller said.

Francona's reasoning for going to Miller was two-fold. First, Gonzalez had two hits off Carrasco in two at-bats. Next, the Astros outfielder was 1-for-8 with six strikeouts in his career against Miller.

"We got to a point in the game where," Francona said, "oh boy, with a one-run lead, and with Gonzalez coming up—the way he had swung the bat against him prior—and Andrew's history, I felt really good about it. It didn't work out the way we obviously planned.

"We wanted Andrew. That's what we wanted right there."

THIRD: Altuve's infield hit to start the sixth-inning rally was a roller up the third-base line. Donaldson charged in and, for a moment, it looked like the ball had a chance at spinning into foul territory.

The catch was that Altuve stumbled out of the batter's box and Donaldson saw that. Normally, a third baseman might let that ball go, especially with a good runner like Altuve. If it rolls to a stop in fair ground, chalk it up to a tough-luck hit. If it rolls foul, well, then the pitcher gets a second chance.

Donaldson made a judgement call given Altuve's delayed departure. In the third baseman's view, the bigger issue was his wild throw. It wasn't ruled an error, but the errant toss ensured Altuve reached safely.

"He didn't get out of the box particularly well," Donaldson said. "Normal circumstances, if he got out of the box well, I let it go every time. But, with the circumstances, I feel right now I'd still make the play, I would just make a better throw. I felt like if I made the throw, it's an easy out."

HOME: The next stop is Progressive Field, where the Indians will hope to feed off their home crowd and make this a series, beginning with Game 3 on Monday. Consider Cleveland on the verge of three consecutive must-win Wild Card games.

In the history of five-game series with the 2–2–1 format, teams who win Games 1–2 at home have taken the series 89% of the time (24-for-27). The 2017 Indians are a part of the 11% exception.

Maybe it's not a comfortable thing to think about, but the Tribe's players can at least look back to only one year ago for a glimmer of hope. Cleveland was up 2–0 and then watched New York rattle off three straight wins.

"It might be a little unfortunate that we know it can be done," Miller said. "We have a day to regroup. That's how I'm looking at it."

Added Lindor: "They've got to win three games. So do we. We've just got to win three in a row. It's possible."

### **Tito's ALDS Game 2 minutiae by Jordan Bastian**

Q: After the loss, Jason Kipnis said the team needs to get back to just being loose and having fun. Is there something to that or is that just something you say after a tough matchup against Justin Verlander, who can make anybody look uptight?

TF: "Yeah, I think maybe that's just somebody answering. What're you going to say sometimes? It's not a lot of fun when a guy's throwing that well and you're not getting hits, you know? So, I don't think it's something about being tight. He just kind of had his way with us."

Q: Last year in the second half with Corey Kluber, he really leaned heavily on that curveball. This season, he never really flipped that switch. Do you know why that's been the case?

TF: "I know. You know what? You'd probably have to ask him. I think the reliance on the cutter has been something that he's been really comfortable with. Again, he would be better suited to answer that, because he's the one that's going out there and executing pitches."

Q: So, it wasn't a plan between Kluber and pitching coach Carl Willis?

TF: "No, no."

Q: How did you think Adam Cimber handled the situation in Game 1?

TF: "Really well. Really well. And I thought that was important to get him in there, especially as right-handed as they are. I thought he was fine. I didn't not think he would be, but it's his first time. I'm sure he had a heartbeat going."

Q: Have you noticed anything with Yonder Alonso?

TF: "Yeah, I mean, sometimes he gets in swing mode. If he can get them to elevate and try to hit mostly fastballs, he's going to be in good shape. When he starts to chase offspeed—down, especially—he can get himself in trouble."

Q: In Game 1, it felt like he was 0–2 every at-bat...

TF: "Yeah, he was kind of swinging at everything."

Q: Against Dallas Keuchel in Game 3, would you alter your lineup given that he's a lefty?

TF: "You know what? I haven't even got there yet. We've got a day off in-between, so we'll see."

Q: Kluber is usually much sharper than that. Was there a reason he struggled? What did you see?

TF: "I just thought he was flat and sometimes it's who you're playing, too, you know? They didn't miss. When he was flat in the zone, they hit it. Sometimes, facing another team, they might foul it and not hit it and then he executes a pitch. When you make a mistake to this team, sometimes you don't get it back."

Q: When you go down 0–1 in a best-of-five series, there's a stat that says the team that won Game 1 goes on to win the series 75 percent of the time. Is that on your mind at all?



TF: “No. What’s on my mind is winning today. I mean, that’s the only thing that really matters. It seems silly to waste time trying to do addition or multiplication or whatever it is that I probably can’t do. It doesn’t matter. The first team to win three gets to move on. It’s a little easier to do when if you don’t put yourself in a hole, but I’ve been on both sides of it. I’ve come back from down. Been up two and lost. You’ve got to get to three.”

Q: How different is this ballpark from others?

TF: “You’ve got to be aware of left field, in my opinion. That’s the biggest thing. It’s a little bit like Fenway where it comes into play in a hurry. Like yesterday, somebody hit a little flare and the guy was standing right there. It’s pretty shallow over there. You can make a pitch and still pay for it.”

Q: Melky Cabrera made some good contact...

TF: “He always does. He gets the barrel to the ball. Sometimes, it’s on the ground, but he finds a way of getting the barrel to it.”

Here is Francona’s Q&A with reporters from the main interview room:

Q: Is Trevor available tonight, and did his appearance influence—maybe I’m looking too far ahead—but your decision for Game 4?

TF: “No, he is available, and we actually wanted to pitch him regardless of what the score was for a couple of reasons: One, you’re always trying to win, but the more he pitches, the better off he’s going to be. We talked the last couple of weeks of the season. Some guys you’re trying to stay away from, maybe save bullets, but with Trevor, we feel like the more he pitches, the better feel, command he’ll have.”

Q: From your perspective, what makes the Astros’ bullpen so effective against a team like yours?

TF: “It’s not just against us. They’re effective against just about everybody. They’re really good. Shoot, some of the guys they left off their roster are really good. They’re deep. They have power. They have different looks. Tony Sipp’s having kind of a bounceback year that helps them. You can put a starter like [Lance] McCullers out there. A guy like [Collin] McHugh who had success starting, put him in the bullpen, and he’s got a minuscule ERA. They have a lot of good pitchers.”

Q: Knowing that, how can you adapt for a bullpen like that? Even against the starting pitcher...

TF: “How do we adapt? We’ve got to fight for everything we can get. Sometimes the starting pitcher that has stuff like Verlander, [Gerrit] Cole, make them work for everything, and when they make a mistake, be ready for it. That’s part of why they’re here, is because of those pitchers.”

Q: I know you guys haven’t seen Cole a lot, but just what do you think of him? Kind of compared to Verlander.

TF: “A little bit similar. A little different breaking ball. He might actually have a little more velocity. He’s one of the best. We saw him back in Pittsburgh, what, three years ago? But, he’s one of the better pitchers in the game, and we know that. It’s why it’s exciting to come to the ballpark, though, knowing that you’re going to face somebody that good, and we’ve got to figure out a way to just be one run better. Somehow, some way, that’s our challenge today.”

Q: The top of the lineup—obviously, it’s just one game—but is there something that they can do to just kind of generate some offense from your perspective?

TF: “It’s easy for me to sit here and say, ‘Yeah, we’ve got to get Frankie on base four times and Brant ...’ You know, Verlander did a number on us. Hopefully today won’t be like that. It’s not just on them, though. We kind of win as a team and lose as a team, and we always feel that way. They’re up there for a reason, because they’re really good. But then again, I know in a short series things get magnified after a game, and I understand that, but we’ve got to fight back today.”

Q: There’s familiarity on both sides between Verlander and you guys, but was his approach any different than maybe you guys expected yesterday? Or was it maybe as you thought it would be?

TF: “You know what, his stuff was so good—not that we didn’t expect that because we’ve seen it. There was maybe a couple times he threw a couple of 3–2 breaking balls that, after seeing 96 or 97, that’s difficult for anybody. And he kind of stayed with the power, not the two-seamer as much, just because it was so effective.”

Q: Cody Allen’s had ups and downs throughout the year. Do you think he’s at a spot right now where he’s kind of searching still? Or did you think his stuff looked better yesterday?

TF: “You know what, that’s a fair question. I think what happens is, once a game starts, you stop searching, and you go into compete mode. I think Cody’s really good at that. Yeah, he gave up the home run to [Martin] Maldonado, but I think, when push comes to shove and it’s time to compete, that’s what he’ll do. Even by his own admission, he says, ‘I’ll take whatever I have and go out there and get him out.’ I’ve always felt like he’ll do that. There’s a ton of faith in Cody, the person, the competitor.”

Q: You’ve obviously had a lot of success bringing late-game relievers in earlier in games. I’m just curious why you liked bringing Cody in at that point and saving Trevor for later yesterday?

TF: "Well, we were losing. And I wanted Cody to pitch and I didn't want Trevor to pitch too much. So that was the reason we tried to balance it."

### **Andrew Miller gives up two-run double in sixth as Astros take 2-0 series lead with 3-1 win**

By Ryan Lewis

HOUSTON — The Indians are returning home with their backs firmly planted against the wall.

Carlos Carrasco turned in a strong postseason performance in a duel with Gerrit Cole, but the Indians unraveled in the sixth inning and lost 3-1 Saturday afternoon to the Houston Astros in Game 2 of the American League Division Series at Minute Maid Park.

The Astros now hold a 2-0 lead in the best-of-five series, leaving the Indians needing to win three consecutive games against the defending champions to avoid another early exit from the postseason. Game 3 is set for Monday at Progressive Field.

"Keep battling," Josh Donaldson said when asked about his message to teammates. "[The Astros have] played pretty much perfect baseball up to this point. We've had a couple of mistakes the first couple of games. Now it's our time to respond. We get to play at home now in front of our fans and get something going early and often."

Carrasco was efficient on the mound, holding the Astros scoreless through five innings. He exited in the sixth with a 1-0 lead, and the Astros immediately pounced and dashed the Indians' hopes of returning to Cleveland with the series tied.

Jose Altuve opened the sixth with a dribbler down the third-base line for an infield hit, and Carrasco then walked Alex Bregman. Yuli Gurriel lined a ball to left field, but it was right at Michael Brantley. The single, walk and hard-hit out ended Carrasco's day in favor of Andrew Miller.

The slim Indians lead evaporated in an instant. Marwin Gonzalez slashed a ball to right field that easily would have tied it regardless, but right fielder Melky Cabrera misplayed it and allowed the ball to roll all the way to the wall. By the time the relay throw reached the plate, Bregman slid safely into home, giving Gonzalez a two-run double and the Astros a 2-1 lead.

Miller then walked Carlos Correa and, after a wild pitch allowed both runners to advance, he intentionally walked Tyler White to load the bases with one out. Manager Terry Francona made the long walk out to the mound to bring in Trevor Bauer to replace Miller, who registered only the second outing of his career in which he faced at least three batters and didn't record an out.

"I blew the game," Miller said. "Carlos gave us a chance to win. That's my spot to come in. ... I came in, I wasn't good, I wasn't effective and I blew the game for us."

With the sold-out crowd on its feet and the Astros on the verge of breaking the game open, Bauer induced Evan Gattis to pop out to shallow right field and then struck out Martin Maldonado to end the inning.

In the seventh, though, Alex Bregman belted a solo home run to left-center field off Bauer, extending the Astros lead to 3-1. Bregman also homered off Indians ace Corey Kluber in Game 1.

The Indians held a 1-0 lead for much of the day but couldn't come away with anything more. In the third inning, Francisco Lindor launched a 2-2 slider off Cole for a solo home run to right field to give the Indians their first lead in the series. What followed was a flood of swings-and-misses as Cole went on to limit the Indians to one run on three hits with 12 strikeouts in seven innings.

It was the most strikeouts any pitcher has recorded in a game against the Indians this season. In the first two games of the series, the Indians mustered only three runs on six hits.

Cole joined Tom Seaver (1973) as the only two pitchers in postseason history to record at least 12 strikeouts with zero walks.

### **Indians notebook: Hitters searching for answers against powerful Astros pitching staff**

Ryan Lewis Beacon Journal/Ohio.com @ByRyanLewis

HOUSTON — The Indians' hitting through two games of the American League Division Series has been overpowered by the Houston Astros' elite pitching staff, led by two Cy Young-level starters.

If the Indians are to have any hope of rebounding quickly enough to rattle off three consecutive wins to advance, and eliminate the Astros the same way they were bounced from last year's postseason by the New York Yankees, the lineup must find a way to kick into gear.

In first two games, the Indians scored just three runs on six hits — and much of that came after the Astros already held a commanding lead in Game 1.

"They did a great job of executing pitches and they've taken advantage of some of our aggressiveness in some counts," Josh Donaldson said. "But good hitting offenses are aggressive. We just have to do — I know especially for myself — I have to do a better job of getting in the zone what I'm looking for."

Justin Verlander took a no-hitter into the sixth inning of Game 1 and in Game 2, Gerrit Cole struck out 12, the most by any pitcher in a game against the Indians this season. Both routinely throw in the high 90s. Both have devastating breaking balls. The Indians have been left without an answer against two of the game's best.

"They locate. They execute," said Francisco Lindor, who launched a solo home run for the Indian' lone run in Game 2. "They've done a very, very good job. ... As the offense, we've got to do a little better job. ... You make the adjustments, continue to grind and play the game."

This isn't Michael Brantley's first postseason, but it is the first full series in which he's been able to contribute as a healthy player. And, for him, that's a relief, even if he hasn't found much room to operate against the Astros' pitching staff.

Brantley went 1-for-4 in the 2013 wild card game, but that was a one-and-done game. He sat out the entire 2016 postseason and ran to the World Series with an ongoing shoulder issue. Last year, he was on the Indians' roster for the ALDS against the Yankees, but an ankle injury limited him to only 11 at-bats — and only one hit — and he clearly wasn't his normal self at the plate.

So this ALDS has given one of the Indians' mainstays his first legitimate postseason series. Being able to be on the field is something Brantley can appreciate after a lengthy, rocky road back to the everyday lineup.

"It's great. It's a lot of hard work that paid off," Brantley said before Game 2 when asked about being able to go through a healthy season. "A lot of hard work that doctors and trainers put in for me to get here. My teammates, first and foremost, were always pushing me, being positive, being my support system, and just being back with them, a great group of guys in the locker room to compete every day. It's fun. It's a great journey."

Two years ago, as the Indians went on their improbable run to extra innings of Game 7 in the World Series, all Brantley could do was watch, knowing he couldn't take the field. In effect, it relegated him to becoming an assistant coach. It's all he could do.

"I really looked to do whatever I could do to help the team," Brantley said. "I really looked to myself as a coach. I was talking to guys about at-bats. I was talking to them about their approach with certain pitchers. If anyone had a question of me, I made sure I was in the dugout cheering them on and made sure they knew I was there. I accepted the role, even though I didn't want to. I'd rather be out there playing with them. But I really tried to make sure I was there for my teammates, whatever they needed."

Now, he can actually step into the batter's box in October knowing he's fully healthy. For Brantley, it's been a long time coming.

Adam Cimber got his first postseason action in Game 1 and delivered a scoreless inning to settle down an already-partying Minute Maid Park crowd.

Cimber has been considered a key to this series against a right-handed-heavy Astros lineup.

"Really well. Really well," Indians manager Terry Francona said when asked how he thought Cimber handled the situation. "And I thought that was important to get him in there, especially as right-handed as they are. I thought he was fine. I didn't not think he would be, but it's his first time. I'm sure he had a heartbeat going."

### **Astros 3, Indians 1: 19 Walk-Off Thoughts on the Indians' backs being pressed against the wall, breaking down the two key, sixth-inning decisions by Josh Donaldson and Terry Francona and Andrew Miller taking the blame**

Ryan Lewis Beacon Journal/Ohio.com @ByRyanLewis

Here are 19 Walk-Off Thoughts after the Indians' 3-1 loss to the Houston Astros in Game 2 of the American League Division Series on Saturday.

1. Almost everything has gone according to plan for the Astros, and the Indians haven't been able to stop much of any of it through the first two games of this series. The Astros' starting rotation has been overpowering, the top three in their lineup has now slugged four home runs—more total runs than the Indians have scored—the bullpen has been electric and the bottom of the lineup, while lacking the same star power, came away with a marquee hit. The Astros remain the well-oiled machine that won the World Series last season, and the Indians must now try to figure out a way to derail that steam engine of a roster, and fast.
2. The Indians are in about as precarious of a position as possible after the first two games. They now are staring down the barrel of needing to win three consecutive games, thus knocking the Astros out in the same fashion that they themselves were bounced from last year's postseason by the New York Yankees. They also have to figure out a way to jump-start a struggling offense and hope that Corey Kluber, Andrew Miller and company can rebound.
3. "Keep battling," Josh Donaldson said when asked what his message would be. "They've played pretty much perfect baseball up to this point. We've had a couple of mistakes the first couple of games. Now it's our time to respond. We get to play at home now in front of our fans and get something going early and often."
4. Added Andrew Miller: "Yeah, I mean, it might be a little unfortunate that we know it can be done, but I think that certainly we have a day to regroup. That's how I'm looking at it. I have a day to regroup and then I'll be in and ready to succeed in the same spot. And I think these guys, we're not giving up just yet."
5. The Astros' due of Justin Verlander in Game 1 and Gerrit Cole in game 2 has been electric. Verlander took a no-hitter into the sixth inning in Game 1 and Cole in Game 2 struck out 12 hitters, more than any other pitcher in a single game against the Indians this season. Both have attacked the Indians with the high heat. The Indians entered the series leading baseball with a .522 slugging percentage against four-seam fastballs this season. The Astros have simply overpowered the lineup as a whole.
6. Josh Donaldson's second at-bat in Game 2 is the prime example. Cole began the at-bat with a slider that missed low. He then fired two high fastballs at 98 and 99, respectively, both of which Donaldson swung through. After a low fastball missed and a fouled-off knuckle-curve, Cole went back up top again, powering a 99-mph fastball back Donaldson for the third swing-and-miss on that pitch in the at-bat.
7. "He had that up-shoot heater," Donaldson said. "As a hitter, it's a little bit deceiving because it looks like it's going to be in there for a strike and it just keeps going up. The breaking stuff, the first at-bat, it was a wipeout slider to me in my first at-bat. If I could have any of the at-bats back again, I'd really just try to focus in on trying to get him further down in the zone. He really wasn't throwing off-speed for strikes, but he did a good job of getting ahead and taking advantage of some of our aggressiveness."
8. The Indians took a slim, 1-0 lead into the bottom of the sixth inning before their hopes of tying the series began to crumble. Two key decisions played major roles in the Astros' two-run, go-ahead sixth inning. The first was up to Donaldson. Jose Altuve, leading off the inning, tapped a ball down the third-base line. He tripped trying to get out of the batter's box, and the ball rolled right along the line, leaving its destination unknown. Altuve can fly down the line, but the trip had stalled his takeoff. Donaldson decided to charge the grounder and fire to first. The throw was off-line, but Altuve couldn't advance after he came up hobbling a bit. That play forced Carlos Carrasco to throw out of the stretch, and he then walked Alex Bregman to put the go-ahead run on base, something that came back to bite the Indians.

9. For Donaldson, it was an in-between play. Normally, a player as fast as Altuve forces a third baseman to see where the ball ends up, leaving the play up to fate. Since Altuve tripped, Donaldson went for the out, which would have been a massive one considering the game situation, instead of allowing Altuve to step into the box as one of the toughest outs in baseball.

10. "You know, I saw he didn't do a good job of getting out of the box, thinking he might have slipped. So I knew I had a chance, the throw was just—I would do the same thing over again, I'd just make a better throw. ... Normal circumstances, he got out of the box well, I let it go every time. But with the circumstances, I feel right now I'd still make the play, I would just make a better throw. I felt like if I made the throw, it's an easy out."

11. The next decision was manager Terry Francona's. With one out and two runners on, Francona went to the bullpen, taking Carrasco out of the game and choosing to go with Miller. In that moment, Francona had three options.

12. The first was to leave Carrasco in the game. To that point, Carrasco had blanked the Astros over 5 1/3 innings and was putting together another strong postseason outing, which he also did in Game 3 of last year's ALDS at Yankee Stadium. The counterpoint to leaving Carrasco is two-fold. Marwin Gonzalez, who was coming up to bat, was 2-for-2 against Carrasco on Saturday and more importantly, Carrasco did have a positive start but had also just allowed a single, then he walked a hitter, then he gave up some hard contact to Yuli Gurriel, who rifled a ball to left field, where Michael Brantley just happened to be waiting. The combination of single-walk-hard contact, while holding a one-run lead, and Gonzalez coming up on a day in which he had found some success was enough to pull the trigger for the bullpen.

13. Another option was to go with Trevor Bauer prior to Miller. Bauer has been the Indians' best pitcher all season and had appeared to be mostly sharp in his recent outings. The Indians have been wanting to get him some work regardless. But, it wasn't the matchup the Indians liked the most, statistically.

14. That was Miller against Gonzalez, the third option. Batter-versus-pitcher matchup stats can be finicky, and sometimes an aspect like that should be taken with a grain of salt. In this case, Gonzalez entered Saturday with seven career at-bats against him. He had one hit, and Miller had struck him out in five of the seven. It's not a huge sample size, but it's also a pretty severe case.

15. "With a one-run lead, and with Gonzalez coming up the way he had swung the bat against him prior and Andrew's history, I felt really good about it. Didn't work out the way we obviously planned," Francona said. "No, we wanted Andrew. That's what we wanted right there."

16. Miller got ahead of Gonzalez with a slider but then mislocated a fastball. It ended up farther out over the plate than its intended destination, allowing Gonzalez to get extended, and he took it the other way. To double-down on the mistake, Melky Cabrera in right field misplayed it, allowing the ball to roll to the wall and Alex Bregman to score all the way from first. Quickly, a routine ball to right field became a back-breaking, go-ahead, two-run double. Miller then walked Carlos Correa and after a wild pitch allowed both runners to advance, he intuitively walked Tyler White to load the bases. It was only the second time in his career that he faced at least three batters without recording an out.

17. After the game, Miller got dressed at his locker and was ready to leave, but the reporters in the room were in the middle of an interview with Trevor Bauer. Instead of slipping out, Miller sat down at his locker and waited for Bauer to finish up before walking into the scrum himself. He then put the loss on his shoulders.

18. "I blew the game," Miller said. "Carlos gave us a chance to win. That's my spot to come in. I know when I'm going to face them, probably where I'm going to start most of my outings, or a good bit of them. I came in, I wasn't good, I wasn't effective and I blew the game for us."

19. The Indians now return home for Game 3. Mike Clevinger will take the mound opposite Dallas Keuchel. See you Monday.

### **Indians notebook: Hitters searching for answers against powerful Astros pitching staff**

Ryan Lewis Beacon Journal/Ohio.com @ByRyanLewis

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"They did a great job of executing pitches and they've taken advantage of some of our aggressiveness in some counts," Josh Donaldson said. "But good hitting offenses are aggressive. We just have to do — I know especially for myself — I have to do a better job of getting in the zone what I'm looking for."

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So this ALDS has given one of the Indians' mainstays his first legitimate postseason series. Being able to be on the field is something Brantley can appreciate after a lengthy, rocky road back to the everyday lineup.

"It's great. It's a lot of hard work that paid off," Brantley said before Game 2 when asked about being able to go through a healthy season. "A lot of hard work that doctors and trainers put in for me to get here. My teammates, first and foremost, were always pushing me, being positive,

being my support system, and just being back with them, a great group of guys in the locker room to compete every day. It's fun. It's a great journey."

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"I really looked to do whatever I could do to help the team," Brantley said. "I really looked to myself as a coach. I was talking to guys about at-bats. I was talking to them about their approach with certain pitchers. If anyone had a question of me, I made sure I was in the dugout cheering them on and made sure they knew I was there. I accepted the role, even though I didn't want to. I'd rather be out there playing with them. But I really tried to make sure I was there for my teammates, whatever they needed."

Now, he can actually step into the batter's box in October knowing he's fully healthy. For Brantley, it's been a long time coming.

Adam Cimber got his first postseason action in Game 1 and delivered a scoreless inning to settle down an already-partying Minute Maid Park crowd.

Cimber has been considered a key to this series against a right-handed-heavy Astros lineup.

"Really well. Really well," Indians manager Terry Francona said when asked how he thought Cimber handled the situation. "And I thought that was important to get him in there, especially as right-handed as they are. I thought he was fine. I didn't not think he would be, but it's his first time. I'm sure he had a heartbeat going."

### **Cleveland Indians on the verge of the wrong kind of sweep for first time since 1954**

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

HOUSTON - The Indians have not been swept in a postseason series since Willie Mays and the New York Giants won four straight in the 1954 World Series. It's taken 64 years, but they are at that place again.

The stakes aren't as high. The Indians, following Saturday's 3-1 loss in Game 2 of the ALDS, need to beat Houston in three straight games to advance to the ALCS. Then they'd have to win that best-of-seven series to reach the World Series.

When Mays broke Cleveland's heart with his over-the-shoulder catch against Vic Wertz in World Series opener on Sept. 29, 1954, there was no ALDS or ALCS. The Indians won a franchise record 111 games in the regular season and went straight to the Fall Classic only to be derailed in a sweep that still echoes in Cleveland.

The 2018 Indians won 91 games in a lackluster AL Central Division and have been thoroughly out-pitched and out-hit in the first two games of the ALDS by the defending World Series champion. They lost the first two games by a combined score of 10-3, but it seems like 30-3.

Justin Verlander muted their bats in Game 1 on Friday. Gerrit Cole was even better in Game 2 on Saturday. The Indians' offense has gone 6-for-60 (.100) in the first two games. Their only run Saturday came on Francisco Lindor's home run.

In Friday's 7-2 loss, the Indians couldn't even muster a RBI hit. Yan Gomes scored on a wild pitch and Lindor scored on a ground out by Jose Ramirez.

Asked if his team has been done in by small mistakes, manager Terry Francona said, "I don't know that there's anything small in games like this. Part of why they're good is that they always push. The continue to push. And they put heat on you all the time."

All the Astros seem to do is hit big home runs. They hit four in Game 1 - three against ace Corey Kluber - and one in Game 2. Alex Bregman, who is playing like Ramirez played in the first 4 1/2 months of the season, hit his second homer of the series on Saturday to complete a 3-1 win. Ramirez, by the way, is 0-for-7 in the ALDS. That makes him 2-for-27 over the last two years in this best-of-five series.

Indians' Francisco Lindor: "We have to win three games in a row"

The Indians have struck out 24 times in two games and now they're going home for Game 3. Mike Clevinger will face Houston left-hander Dallas Keuchel in what could be the last game where promise was always better than what was delivered.

Francona has been on both sides of the equation as a manager. In 2004, his Red Sox were down 3-0 in the ALCS to the Yankees and won four straight. Last year, his Indians were up 2-0 against the Yankees in the ALDS and lost three straight.

"We just need to find a way to win on Monday," he said. "I'm guessing that Houston will enjoy its off-day more than we will."

Said Lindor, "They've got to win three games and so do we. We've got to win three in a row. It's possible to win three in a row. We'll just focus on the one game on Monday."

The problem is this is the first time the Indians have been put in a corner all year. This is the first time they've actually had to play for something. And to think they can win three straight against the Astros is a stretch.

They are not a good late-inning team, especially with their bullpen in a state of flux. They had seven walk-off wins during the regular season, but they lost 13 games in walk-off fashion. The Twins were the only team with more such losses.

The arms they road to Game 7 of the World Series in 2016 and to 102 wins in 2017, look tired. Carlos Carrasco pitched well in Saturday's start, but when Andrew Miller relieved him in the sixth, he turned a 1-0 lead into a 2-1 loss on his second pitch.

"I blew the game for us," said Miller.

Indians Andrew Miller: "I blew the game for us"

And the Astros pitching has made it look worse than it is.

"They locate. They locate. They execute," said Lindor, of Houston's pitching staff. "They've done a very, very good job."

Lindor pointed to the Astros' two-run rally in the sixth that erased the Tribe's 1-0 lead. It started when Jose Altuve sent a roller to third, slipped coming out of the box and beat Josh Donaldson's offline throw to first. Donaldson said he normally would have let the ball go foul, but thought

he had a good chance to get Altuve for the first out of the inning. Altuve and Bregman ended up scoring on the two-run double Miller gave up to Marwin Gonzalez.

"Altuve started a rally with a ground ball to third base," said Lindor. "We haven't had any of those. We'll be fine."

Fine? Maybe Lindor was talking about next year. Right now, winter is calling, and the wrong kind of sweep is near.

### **Cleveland Indians: Hard to watch this team in the playoffs -- Terry Pluto**

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

HOUSTON - In many ways, it's been sad to watch the Indians as they lost their first two games to the Houston Astros.

It's more than the Tribe being down 0-2 in the best-of-5 American League Division Series.

The defending World Champion Astros stifled the Tribe, 3-1, Saturday.

A big part of the story is Houston starting pitchers Gerrit Cole and Justin Verlander. They combined to hold the Tribe to a pair of runs in 12-1/3 innings while striking out 19 hitters.

Cleveland hitters have been nearly helpless. They also were facing two of the best starters in all of baseball.

But there was a sense of doom about them.

I thought of that in the eighth inning. The Tribe had a runner on first base. Jason Kipnis had worked the count to 3-0 against Ryan Pressly.

Three pitches later, Kipnis struck out.

Three at bats and Kipnis didn't even hit a fair ball on this Saturday afternoon.

In the World Series season of 2016, he was a force at the bat and respectable at second base. Now, he looks lost at the plate.

Being realistic, Houston is the far superior team to the Tribe. The Astros had a 103-59 record. They played the first two games at home backed by lights-out, shut-'em-down starters in Cole and Verlander.

The Indians managed just three hits in each game, striking out 24 times.

This is the same Tribe team that had the fewest strikeouts in the American League this season.

This wasn't just a problem for Kipnis.

It's the entire team. Jose Ramirez, Yonder Alonso and Josh Donaldson are hitless in the series.

While Manager Terry Francona and the players insist "last year has nothing to do with this year," the Indians now have lost five consecutive postseason games.

They are dealing with the plague of doubt.

You could see it in Game 1 when Tribe starter Corey Kluber gave up four runs in 4-1/3 innings. He was great in the 2016 post-season. Since then, he has a 12.79 ERA in his last three playoff starts dating back to 2017.

Meanwhile, their opponent oozes confidence.

The Indians have one game left to stop this tidal wave seemingly ready to wipe out their season. That's Monday in Cleveland.

"We just have to find a way to win," said Francona. "We are playing for our baseball life. No one wants to go home."

But lots of things must change or that will happen.

### **MILLER TIME?**

Once upon a time, that thought brought Tribe fans to their feet.

Miller Time helped the Indians reach the 2016 World Series. Miller Time made him the Most Valuable Player of the American League Championship Series.

But that was two years ago.

Now Andrew Miller has been battling a cranky knee, shoulder and hamstring at various points in the last two seasons.

The lefty entered the game with one out and runners on first and second base in the sixth inning.

The Indians had a 1-0 lead.

Miller immediately gave up a 2-run line shot double down the right field line to Marwin Gonzalez. It was a high, 95 mph fastball.

After that, he had little control and even less confidence. His sensational slider now looked like an untamed snake, slithering anywhere but over home plate.

He uncorked a wild pitch. He walked two.

That was it. A double. Two walks. Goodbye.

Nine pitches, only three strikes.

I wondered why Francona went to Miller.

Starter Carlos Carrasco had given up two hits to Gonzalez in his first two at bats.

"We wanted the matchup with Miller," said Francona.

Gonzalez was 1-for-7 vs. Miller with five strikeouts.

But this is not the same Andrew Miller.

Miller had a 4.24 ERA in only 34 games this season. In his last regular season appearance, he gave up five runs.

And you have to wonder if the Indians can use him in any meaningful situations in Game 3.

It also explains why Trevor Bauer is in the bullpen.

The decline of Cody Allen and Miller - the two relievers who gave up only three runs in 33 postseason innings in 2016 - is a big reason why the Tribe is in big trouble in these playoffs.

Allen has given up 12 homers this season, counting the home run he allowed in Game 1.

The Indians took the field with the odds already against them.

The team that won the opening game of a 5-game series went on to win the series 75 percent of the time.

Carrasco was excellent, allowing two runs in 5-1/3 innings. Those came on the Gonzalez double against Miller.

There's not a lot of second-guessing to be done when a team is batting .100 (6-for-60 with 24 strikeouts).

Francisco Lindor has the team's only homer. He has two hits. The rest of the team is 4-for-52.

One game, one huge pitching performance can change a series. But how can the Indians make that happen?

### **Cleveland Indians lose to Houston Astros, 3-1, facing a three-game sweep in ALDS**

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

HOUSTON - The dry husk of the bullpen that carried the Indians to Game 7 of the World Series in 2016 has been on display in the first two games of the ALDS. It has not made for good viewing.

The Indians' aces, meanwhile, have been out-pitched by Houston's aces, which is another reason why they are on the verge of being swept in the ALDS following a 3-1 loss on Saturday at Minute Maid Park. The series moves to Progressive Field for Game 3 on Monday at 1:37 p.m.

Let us not forget the offense. In two games against the Astros, the Indians have gone 6-for-60 (.100). They've put two runners in scoring position so far in the series.

In Game 1, Houston right-hander Justin Verlander dominated the Indians with a 95 to 98 mph fastball at the top of the strike zone. In Game 2, Gerrit Cole topped Verlander in velocity, hitting 100.9 mph, while striking out 12 in seven innings. The Indians, the toughest team in the AL to strikeout during the regular season, have struck out 24 times in the first two games.

As for the state of the Tribe, manager Terry Francona said, "We've got to show up on Monday and play for our baseball lives. Nobody wants to go home."

Added Trevor Bauer, "We need to win three straight and it starts with winning Game 3 on Monday."

Carlos Carrasco, thanks to a Francisco Lindor homer, carried a 1-0 lead into the sixth, but Andrew Miller couldn't hold it. Miller, one of the heroes from the Tribe's 2016 October run, relieved Carrasco to face Marwin Gonzalez and gave up a two-run double on his second pitch. Miller faced three batters, allowing a double and two walks before being replaced by Trevor Bauer, who quickly restored order.

In Friday's 7-2 loss to Houston, Cody Allen, who closed for Miller so well in the 2016 postseason, gave up a critical home run.

Lindor gave the Indians a 1-0 lead with a two-out homer off Cole in the third inning. He hit a 2-2 slider into the right field seats.

Indians' Francisco Lindor: "We have to win three games in a row"

Carrasco held the lead until the sixth when Jose Altuve reached on an infield single down the third-base line that Josh Donaldson, perhaps, could have let roll foul. But he picked up the ball and made a wide throw. Altuve pulled up lame on the play, but stayed in the game.

When Donaldson saw Altuve stumble out of the box, he made the decision to try and throw him out.

"I saw he didn't get out of the box particularly well," said Donaldson. "If he gets out well, I let the the ball go, I let it go everytime. I felt like if I made a (good) throw, he's out."

Alex Bregman followed with a walk, but Yuli Gurriel flied out to left field. With the switch-hitting Gonzalez due to bat, Miller relieved to make Gonzalez hit from the right side. Gonzalez, who had two hits in his first two at-bats against Carrasco, was 1-for-8 with six strikeouts against Miller. Gonzalez, however, foiled the strategy by lining a double to wall in right to give the Astros a 2-1 lead.

Miller further complicated matters by walking Carlos Correa, throwing a wild pitch and intentionally walking Tyler White to load the bases. Bauer, pitching in his second game in as many days, retired pinch-hitter Evan Gattis and struck out Martin Maldonado to end the inning.

"I thought Carlos was terrific," said Francona. "With a one-run lead and Gonzalez coming up with the way he'd swung the bat against Carlos, along with Andrew's history against Gonzalez, I felt really good about it. Obviously, it didn't work out the way we planned."

Indians Andrew Miller: "I blew the game for us"

Asked if thought about bringing in Bauer instead of Miller, Francona said, "No, we wanted Andrew. That's what we wanted right there."

After escaping the bases-loaded jam in the sixth, Bauer allowed a homer to Bregman in the seventh to give Houston a 3-1 lead.

While Verlander and Cole are a combined 2-0 with a 2.19 ERA through the first two games of the ALDS, Corey Kluber and Carrasco are 0-2 with a 5.23 ERA.

"Our pitching staff did a great job today," said Lindor. "Offensively, we have to do a better job."

Carrasco allowed two runs on six hits in 5 2/3 innings. He struck out three and walked on.

If the Indians are looking for inspiration on how to escape an 0-2 deficit in the ALDS, all they have to do is look to last year around this time. They had the Yankees down 0-2, but lost three straight to New York.

Carrasco threw 77 pitches, 55 (68 percent) for strikes. Cole threw 98 pitches, 70 (71 percent) for strikes.

The Indians and Astros drew a sellout crowd of 43,520 to Minute Maid Park on Saturday. First pitch was at 4:38 p.m. with the temperature 73 degrees inside the ballpark and 90 degrees outside.

### **The Indians' offense, where just getting to run to first base would count as a win**

**By Zack Meisel Oct 6, 2018 12**

HOUSTON — Edwin Encarnacion kissed his mom and his wife and then climbed onto a cart to head toward the team bus. José Ramírez, donning a black velvet suit jacket, sat in the back with Encarnacion's family.

The four passengers in the vehicle own a combined one hit in the ALDS, Encarnacion's sharp single off Yuli Gurriel's glove on Saturday was the only damage. They aren't in the minority, either. As Jason Kipnis headed toward the shower after a chat with The Athletic after the Indians' Game 2 defeat, he muttered, "Maybe I'll get to run to first base one of these times."

That would almost count as a victory for an offense that has produced five harmless singles and a solo homer in 60 at-bats in the series.

As a team, the Indians have produced a .100/.156/.150 slash line.

This season, the sport's pitchers produced a .115/.144/.148 slash line.

The Indians collected three hits in Game 1. The Indians collected three hits in Game 2. The Indians' season could end after Game 3.

"It's disappointing," Kipnis said, "because we haven't shown who we are or been able to put together ..."

He paused.

"I don't want to finish that sentence without giving them their due. They both pitched fantastic the first two games."

A hat tip to Justin Verlander and Gerrit Cole (and Ryan Pressly and Roberto Osuna) is required. Cole became the second pitcher in postseason history to register 12 strikeouts in an outing without issuing a walk. And he accomplished that feat against an Indians team that boasted the lowest strikeout rate in the majors this season.

Team strikeout rate, regular season

1. Indians (18.9 percent)
2. Astros (19.5 percent)
3. Red Sox (19.9 percent)

"You wouldn't be able to tell that if you watched these first two games," Kipnis said. "I don't know what to tell you. I'm as big a culprit as any."<br/>Indeed, Kipnis is 0 for 6 with five strikeouts. Cole baffled him, luring him into offering at a knuckle curve that plunged into the dirt miles in front of home plate. A 2-0 count became a five-pitch strikeout in a hurry.

Kipnis has company in the 0-fer department.

José Ramírez: 0 for 7, three strikeouts

Josh Donaldson: 0 for 8, three strikeouts

Yonder Alonso: 0 for 6, four strikeouts

Francisco Lindor is the only Tribe hitter with more than one hit. Melky Cabrera is the only Tribe hitter without a strikeout.

Cole tallied 23 swinging strikes Saturday (Carlos Carrasco induced eight).

Swinging strikes this season, AL starters

1. Verlander, 459
2. Cole, 437
3. Carrasco, 407
4. Chris Sale, 375

Swinging strike percentage this season, AL starters

1. Sale, 14.9 percent
2. Carrasco, 13.7 percent
3. Cole, 13.4 percent
4. Verlander, 13.4 percent



"They're two of the better power pitchers in the game," Kipnis said. "That being said, there's not a pitcher in this league this lineup can't hit and put up runs against."

Any hitter must maintain that sort of confidence. But, clearly, the jury's out — the offense went dormant at Minute Maid Park. Aside from Lindor's solo homer Saturday, there was nothing to hush the Houston faithful, who entered a frenzy every time the ballpark video board displayed Bobby Dynamite, the overalls-wearing, train-conducting semi-celebrity who jumps around from his perch atop left field.

"Our pitching staff did a great job and our defense did good," Lindor said. "It's the offense that has to come through. I think we'll be fine."

This same offense — save for a couple of minor tweaks in personnel — recorded a .171/.263/.287 slash line in the ALDS last year against the Yankees. In that series, Ramírez totaled two hits in 20 at-bats. Lindor totaled two hits in 18 at-bats.

Terry Francona wouldn't tip his hand Saturday afternoon when asked whether he'd adjust his lineup for Game 3, with the Astros sending lefty Dallas Keuchel to the mound. It would come as no surprise if Yandy Díaz replaced Alonso, who owns a 25 wRC+ against lefties (75 percent worse than league average) since July 31. Perhaps Brandon Guyer or Rajai Davis or Greg Allen will find their way into the order as well.

Time is running out on the Indians. They spent all season gearing up for October, but without a 180 from the lifeless lineup, October will last merely a few days before it fades into winter's oblivion.

"It's new territory," Yan Gomes told The Athletic. "But it's not over until the last out of the clinching game."

The Indians won Game 1 in each of their four playoff series the previous two years. In three of those series, they held a 2-0 advantage. This time, the Indians' stoic, stymied sluggers sitting in a slow-moving cart were the ones left clinging to hopes of a miraculous comeback.

"If there's any team that knows about coming back from 2-0 or 3-1, it's the guys in here," Kipnis said. "We've gotten out to series leads and it hasn't worked out. Maybe we'll take the other route."

### **Final Thoughts: Trevor Bauer might be the Indians' best reliever, but he hasn't been used in the best situations**

**By Jason Lloyd Oct 6, 2018 6**

HOUSTON — Thirty thoughts for 30 at-bats in Saturday's 3-1 loss to the Houston Astros, leaving the Indians in an 0-2 hole in the ALDS ...

1. Before there was this deficit, before the hitters were overmatched and their important arms failed them, Terry Francona was smiling inside Progressive Field earlier this week and reciting one of his favorite mottos about "a really fine line between being dumb and smart."
2. Francona was referencing the way he used Andrew Miller two years ago and how often he pushed Miller beyond perhaps his comfort zone. If Miller allowed a home run on his 49th pitch in a playoff game, Francona joked, the manager wouldn't look very bright for leaving him in so long. But Miller never let Francona down. He was sensational until Game 7 of the World Series.
3. No one is calling Francona dumb these days. He's still one of the very best managers in baseball. But he certainly hasn't enjoyed the same success manipulating relievers as he has in the past.
4. Trevor Bauer is the best weapon Francona has out of the bullpen. That alone is a depressing reality about the state of Indians relievers. Nevertheless, Bauer is the one Francona can count on most right now in high leverage situations.
5. Yet through two games in this series, Bauer has appeared only when the Indians were behind. Pitching with the lead wasn't really an option in Game 1 after Corey Kluber surrendered three home runs, but Francona could've gone to Bauer with the lead in Game 2 and he passed.
6. When Carlos Carrasco fell into trouble in the sixth, Francona went and got him despite throwing a shutout on only 77 pitches. While Carrasco appeared to be in full control, the Astros had runners at first and second with one out.
7. Although a case could be made to leave Carrasco in the game, A.J. Hinch yanked Justin Verlander with the bases loaded and one out in the sixth on Friday after Verlander entered the inning with a no-hitter. The Astros had a 4-0 cushion instead of 1-0, and Ryan Pressly eventually worked out of it after a rocky start. No one said a word about it.
8. Francona, however, played the numbers rather than going with who is currently his best option. Gonzalez was just 1 for 7 lifetime against Miller with five strikeouts.
9. "We wanted Andrew," Francona said. "That's what we wanted right there."
10. Looking at those numbers, it's easy to see why. But this isn't the same Miller. He hasn't been that Miller for a while now.
11. Bauer was just beginning to loosen in the bullpen when Marwin Gonzalez ripped a fastball up in the zone down the right-field line. Melky Cabrera failed to cut the ball off in the corner and the Indians were back where they've been most of this series: trailing.
12. "I blew the game," Miller said. "Carlos gave us a chance to win. I came in, I wasn't good, I wasn't effective and I blew the game for us."
13. Hey, give him credit for honesty and sincerity.

14. Miller was gone after nine pitches. He threw only three strikes. Yan Gomes told me Miller lost the feel of his once-devastating slider, which the numbers bear out: He threw six sliders, only one for a strike.
15. "It's my job to get through that inning. I didn't do it. That's really what it boils down to," Miller said. "I got ahead and then I didn't get a fastball where I wanted to and everything kind of spiraled from there. Just not a good job. Poor execution."
16. By the time Francona went to Bauer, Miller had loaded the bases and the Astros had the lead. Bauer was terrific to work out of it without allowing more damage, further proof he might have been the better choice to face Gonzalez with the Indians still leading.
17. "I like big situations like that," Bauer said. "The higher stakes, the better. Happened to be able to get out of it and give us a chance."
18. For Bauer to be the weapon the Indians envisioned him to be, it only works when he enters the game with the lead. Francona acknowledged he knew going into Game 1 he was going to use Bauer, but he elected to use Cody Allen first.
19. "I wanted Cody to pitch and I didn't want Trevor to pitch too much," Francona said. "That was the reason we tried to balance it."
20. Again, it backfired. Like with Miller, Allen hasn't been the consistent force this season he was in the past. Francona has enjoyed a lot of success bringing his late-game relievers in earlier in playoff games, but Allen allowed a home run to the first batter he faced and the deficit was 5-2 before Bauer got on the mound Friday. Bauer isn't going to be much of a weapon if the game is out of hand before he gets in the game.
21. The larger point in all of this is also how the Indians have been let down by the three pitchers they've counted on the most in their run of success: Kluber, Allen and Miller. Those three have a 10.80 ERA in this series with two walks and four strikeouts.
22. "That's a good team out there, man," Gomes said. "It's not even that (Indians pitchers) are making mistakes. They're putting good at-bats together, making us work."
23. The reality of the situation that no one wants to confess is that the Astros are just the better team. That doesn't mean the Indians can't win. The Indians were the better team last year and still lost to the Yankees. But Houston is the defending World Series champion who revamped its bullpen and added an All-Star and former No. 1 overall pick in Gerrit Cole, who dominated the Indians the same way Justin Verlander did the day before.
24. Cole became the second pitcher in history to strike out at least 12 batters in a postseason game without allowing a walk. Tom Seaver was the only other pitcher to do it in 1973.
25. In this era of the whiff, no team in baseball struck out less this year than the Indians. Yet the Astros have struck out 24 batters in two games. That's not all just the Indians forgetting how to hit. Verlander and Cole ranked first and second during the season in strikeouts and top five in ERA. Credit where it's due. These are terrific pitchers making terrific pitches.
26. "They locate. They execute," said Francisco Lindor, whose homer was the Indians' only run. "They've done a very, very good job."
27. The Indians, of course, have been on the other side of 2-0 leads before. They fumbled away a 2-0 lead to the Yankees last year, so nothing is impossible. Then again, they've now lost eight of their last 10 playoff games dating back to the 2016 World Series.
28. "I'm guessing that Houston will enjoy their off day more than we will," Francona said. "Other than that, show up on Monday and play for our baseball life. Nobody wants to go home. So try to keep this thing going."
29. Maybe Mike Clevinger can enjoy more run support than either Carrasco or Kluber have received. Then again, the Astros are that rare team that has been even more potent on the road this season than at home. They hit .248 and averaged 4.6 runs at home this year. They hit .262 and scored 5.2 runs on the road. So ... yeah.
30. Game 3 is Monday at Progressive Field. Clevinger vs. Dallas Keuchel with the season on the line. Talk to you then.

#### **Astros' Gerrit Cole in company of Tom Seaver with 12 K's, no walks**

Stefano Fusaro ESPN

HOUSTON -- Astros right-hander Gerrit Cole became the second player in MLB history to record at least 12 strikeouts without a walk in a postseason game Saturday in leading Houston to a 2-0 lead in its American League Division Series against the Cleveland Indians.

A day after Justin Verlander shut down Cleveland in Game 1, Cole was just as dominant, pitching seven innings while limiting the Indians to three hits and one run in the Astros' 3-1 victory.

The last pitcher to post at least 12 strikeouts without a walk in the playoffs was Hall of Famer Tom Seaver, who fanned 13 with the New York Mets in Game 1 of the 1973 National League Championship Series.

Marwin Gonzalez hit a go-ahead, two-run double, Alex Bregman homered for the second straight day and the Houston Astros beat the Cleveland Indians 3-1 Saturday to take a 2-0 AL Division Series lead.

The 12 strikeouts marked a career postseason high for Cole, and tied him with Nolan Ryan for third-most strikeouts in a single playoff game in Astros franchise history. They also also marked the most strikeouts against Cleveland (including postseason) since Cole's now-teammate Verlander struck out 12 Indians batters in 2016 as a member of the Detroit Tigers.

Cole became the fifth Astros pitcher with at least 10 strikeouts game in a postseason game, a list which also includes Verlander, Dallas Keuchel, Nolan Ryan and Mike Scott, with Scott holding the franchise record with 14 in the 1986 NLCS.

Cole seemed appreciative but muted in his reaction when addressing the media.

"It's pretty cool," Cole said. "Maybe I'll have a glass of wine to celebrate after this is all done." His teammates, meanwhile, were effusive in their praise for their star flamethrower.

"He's an All-Star; elite, elite, elite pitcher." third baseman Alex Bregman said. "He was dominant. Fastball was great. Breaking balls were great. But just his demeanor on the mound, his competitiveness -- that's why he is Gerrit Cole."

The Astros took their first lead of the game in a long bottom of the sixth inning, with Marwin Gonzalez smacking a two-run double to right field off Cleveland reliever Andrew Miller. Even with Cole nearing 90 pitches and a lengthy delay between innings, Houston manager AJ Hinch never questioned whether he would send him back out for the seventh.

"I didn't have any doubt I was going to send him out for the seventh," Hinch said with the grin of a proud papa. "He was so good today. It's hard to take the ball out of his hand when he's so dominant. He was focused. He was emotional. I loved the emotion off the mound when he's getting big strikeout after big strikeout. He used all his pitches. He was creative. I mean, what else can I say? He was awesome."

Houston will look to close out the series Monday when Keuchel is slated to start opposite Mike Clevinger in Cleveland.

Verlander struck out seven over 5½ innings in Friday's series opener for the defending World Series champions.

The Astros' aces have been so good that even franchise luminaries are taking notice.

"Verlander and Cole? That's as good a one-two punch as there is in baseball right now," said former Astros pitcher Roy Oswalt, who was on hand Saturday to throw out the ceremonial first pitch.

## **Nick Cafardo / SUNDAY BASEBALL NOTES - In baseball, the message is clear: Win now or else**

By Nick Cafardo

Are baseball franchises so valuable now that patience is wearing thin with the people who run them?

We get that some of this past week's firings of managers and general managers seemed unfair, but when have they not been? It just appears that five-year plans are a thing of the past. Either turn things around soon or you're gone. Or get us deep into the playoffs or you're out of here. You could see this coming when the Red Sox fired manager John Farrell after two division titles were followed by early exits in the playoffs. You could see it when manager Joe Girardi took a young Yankees team to Game 7 of the ALCS last season and he was fired, or when Dusty Baker, like Farrell, won division titles in Washington but couldn't get the Nationals deep into the postseason.

In Minnesota, we ask, "How can anyone fire Paul Molitor?" He was the American League Manager of the Year in 2017, leading the Twins to the playoffs as the front office was trading away veterans. Molitor still won under those circumstances. In 2018, the Twins were one of the worst teams in baseball, so Molitor, a Twin Cities native, was jettisoned in what had to be a tremendously difficult decision for chief of baseball Derek Falvey, who hails from Lynn.

Falvey comes from an Indians background, while general manager Thad Levine comes from the Rangers. It'll be interesting to see who emerges as "their guy." You can bet it will be someone who embraces analytics because these days that's all anyone in front offices and ownership cares about.

You would think Indians bench coach Brad Mills would be in Falvey's sights. He's been Terry Francona's top lieutenant and once managed the Astros.

And then you have the Orioles. My goodness. We outlined back in May that the Orioles have the most dysfunctional ownership situation in baseball. Why isn't Major League Baseball encouraging the Angelos family to sell this franchise? We're sorry that Peter Angelos is in failing health, and his sons, Lou and John, are running the team . . . into the ground.

They fired GM Dan Duquette after they mandated him to sell off more than \$60 million of assets, including Manny Machado, Jonathan Schoop, Kevin Gausman, and Zach Britton. After building a 69-win team into a 93-win team in one season, Duquette had an opportunity to be president of the Blue Jays, a job that ultimately went to Mark Shapiro after Duquette was denied the chance to leave by the Angelos family.

So given the results, why was the Angelos family discussing an extension with Duquette while intending to fire him? Baltimore had the smallest analytics staff (one full-timer, one part-timer); the smallest scouting staff (the Orioles barely had enough scouts to evaluate the players they were acquiring in deals); no money allotted for international scouting until this season; and generally the smallest administrative and baseball operations departments in baseball.

"We certainly did our best to put a competitive team out on the field and I thought we did a good job with that," said Duquette, who will seek other opportunities in baseball and hopes to be considered for openings with the Mets and Giants. "The only way I can look at it is that one door has closed and hopefully another opens."

Even one of the most stable franchises in recent memory had some disruption when Giants GM Bobby Evans was dismissed. Evans had been with the organization for 25 years in various roles. He was a big part of Brian Sabean's front office for the three World Series championship teams. When Sabean stepped aside to concentrate more on scouting after the Giants won the Series in 2014, Evans took over the job at the start of the 2015 season. Three years in, team president Larry Baer decided to remove Evans. It took Evans, a Framingham native, by surprise.

"All I can say is, the Giants were fantastic to me for 25 years," Evans said. "I think you're always surprised when something like this happens because we've all worked so closely together for so long and we had three World Series championships together. I don't think the Giants are that far away from the next three championships."

It seemed as if Evans never got to implement his full remake of the Giants. As he pointed out when asked about regrets, "You always have some regrets if the player or players you acquire don't work out or become injured." The Giants have a rabid fan base and completely rebuilding is not something that is in anyone's DNA in San Francisco.

Evans has 15 months remaining on his contract and said he'll await what the new GM will ask him to do. If it means a specific project, he'll do it. If it means he should leave completely, so be it. Evans also would like to be considered for the available GM jobs. Baer has publicly stated that he wants a more analytics-based organization to keep up with the top teams in terms of analytics — including the Red Sox, Astros, Yankees, Dodgers, and Cardinals — even though the Giants have done their winning the old-fashioned way, with great scouting.

Evans, however, said the Giants were already transitioning to more analytics, while trying to strike a healthy balance between the numbers and the scouts. Evans has one of the biggest scouting staffs in baseball, which has led to the perception that the Giants are still a scouting-based organization.

"Larry and Brian know exactly where we are with analytics," Evans said. "I think it differs greatly from the public perception of our organization."

You hear names such as Royals assistant GM Scott Sharp and Brewers assistant GM Matt Arnold associated with the Giants' GM job. Another name that could be interesting is Athletics assistant GM David Forst, who has been Billy Beane's top man for many years.

Another change was John Gibbons being removed from his second managerial stint in Toronto by Shapiro, who will likely replace him with someone with an Indians background. The Jays employ former Indians and Mariners manager Eric Wedge, who may get the call to return to managing. Shapiro also has two very good in-house candidates in major league coaches Luis Rivera and DeMarlo Hale.

In Cincinnati, there's growing energy toward Farrell replacing Jim Riggleman as manager. Farrell worked for the Reds this season as a pitching adviser and it appears he has won over the brass. Farrell's pedigree of a World Series championship and three division titles is obviously impressive and would be an easy sell to the fan base.

The Rangers fired manager Jeff Banister. The Angels are moving on from iconic manager Mike Scioscia.

It's really a crazy time. Whoever shouts "analytics!" the loudest will get the job.

It truly is a copycat league. Teams have the same information. They might be utilizing it differently, but good old-fashioned baseball seems to be gone for good. Scouts are getting fired constantly, their services no longer needed, replaced by Ivy League brains. Managers rely more on the numbers than the instincts they used so well for so long.

The pressure is on. Win or else.

Apropos of nothing

1. The Orioles' newfound international money will likely make them the front-runners for Cuban outfielder Victor Victor Mesa (yes, two first names), who tried out for teams Friday at Marlins Park in Miami. Once Dan Duquette got the word from ownership he could get back into the international market, he started squirreling international monies in the deals he was making for veterans, sometimes accepting a diminished package of prospects so he could save up to bid for Mesa. The Orioles have \$2 million more than the Marlins and Rays, and normally Cuban players go to the highest bidder.

2. The Cubs have to improve their offense, so you wonder if Manny Machado will be in the picture in free agency with Addison Russell suspended for 40 games because of his domestic abuse violation.

3. Steven Wright said he's preparing this offseason to be a starting pitcher again. Wright has no idea what the Red Sox have in mind for him next season, but he figures he'll prepare as a starter and then make adjustments to the bullpen if he has to. The Red Sox will lose Drew Pomeranz and possibly Nathan Eovaldi in free agency. Wright hopes to have a normal offseason where he doesn't have to worry about his surgically repaired knee. He said the day when he no longer thinks about the knee will be huge.

4. The qualifying offer is now set at \$17.9 million. Nice change on a one-year deal.

5. The people I'd love to see get managerial jobs because of the time and work they've put into the game over the years: DeMarlo Hale, Ron Wotus, Brian Butterfield, Luis Rivera, Tim Wallach, Sandy Alomar Jr., Perry Hill, Glenn Hoffman, and Gene Glynn.

6. Remember the name Stubby Clapp. He's the Cardinals' Triple A manager who's been getting rave reviews and is starting to appear on the radar of teams looking for a big league manager.

Updates on nine

1. Buster Posey, C, Giants — While there's some concern that Posey's hip surgery will curtail his catching career, the Giants believe Posey should be able to make it back at his familiar position next season. Posey is 31 and has caught a lot of games, but the expectation is he'll catch many more.

2. Eric Chavez, special assistant, Angels — Chavez remains the top candidate for the Angels' managerial job. His longtime relationship with GM Billy Eppler seems to be driving it. Chavez was summoned in August to manage their Triple A team to get some managerial experience. The Angels also could consider special assistant Brad Ausmus.

3. Tim Naehring, assistant GM, Yankees — Naehring gave a lot of credit to the Yankees' scouting staff, but also to analytics guru Mike Fishman, for coming up with slugger Luke Voit, who was acquired from the Cardinals on July 29. Voit is yet another power threat in the

Yankees' lineup, and he has opposite-field power. Naehring said that Scranton hitting coach Phil Plantier, like Naehring a former Red Sox player, recommended Voit highly for a major league promotion.

4. Mark DeRosa, analyst, MLB Network — It's no surprise that DeRosa is considered a top candidate to manage the Rangers. DeRosa has been rumored to be a managerial candidate in a few places over the last few years. With managerial experience no longer needed, DeRosa, who played for many teams and understands the baseball culture and its new realities, checks off all the boxes, including the ability to comprehend complex analytics, the communication skills needed to get players to buy into them, and all the things players need nowadays to make them feel wanted and happy. Rangers GM Jon Daniels makes the call and has always admired DeRosa, who would also have some credibility in Toronto. But here's the rub: First-year managers are generally paid less than \$1 million, so a team would have to go significantly over the unofficial pay scale to lure him from a nice job at the MLB Network.

5. John McDonald, minor league defensive coordinator, Indians — Don't be surprised if McDonald, who lives in Scituate, emerges as a candidate for the Toronto managing job. McDonald is highly regarded and has an Indians pedigree, which appeals to Jays president Mark Shapiro. Whether McDonald feels he's ready for it is another question, but we're told he'll be highly considered.

6. Ben Cherington, vice president of baseball operations, Blue Jays — Cherington wants to be very selective in getting back into the GM carousel. He certainly wants a supportive ownership situation as a starting point, which the Mets don't necessarily provide. And as we've pointed out, the Orioles are also a volatile situation. But the one thing the Orioles have going for them in Cherington's eyes is that he can build a team from the ground up. It's the same dynamic that led Theo Epstein to the Cubs. Cherington would be ideal for the Giants in terms of a supportive ownership and resources, but the Giants don't rebuild. He'd have to add to them.

7. Joe Maddon, manager, Cubs — Was Maddon ever really in jeopardy of not returning to the Cubs? A major league source close to Maddon said no. But the telling part is that there's no contract extension in the works or was ever discussed. What some in the industry are wondering is would the Cubs let him seek another job, say that of the Angels (you could you see owner Arte Moreno having interest in a big name)? Maddon spent many years with the Angels on Mike Scioscia's staff.

8. Josh Bard, bench coach, Yankees — Bard is being talked about among the next wave of young bench coaches, heavy into analytics of course, who could be considered for future managing jobs. Being Aaron Boone's top adviser and helping to mold a 100-win team certainly doesn't hurt.

9. Josh Donaldson, 3B, Indians — The Indians have been happy with the acquisition of Donaldson, whose intensity has seen a rebirth in Cleveland. The only question is, will the Indians try to bring Donaldson back as a free agent? Because of Donaldson's extensive injuries, which kept him out the majority of the season in Toronto, he picked a poor time to be a free agent and won't get nearly what he expected. The Indians are into bargains and Donaldson might be one they might try to take advantage of for 2019 on a one-year deal.

### **The Astros Are Loaded With Stars, But Their Supporting Cast Has Delivered In the ALDS**

Astros manager A.J. Hinch offered a sheepish grin on Saturday morning when reminded of his bit of soothsaying from the previous day before then repeating himself verbatim when declaring that the postseason lends itself to timely production from complementary players.

Hinch had specifically mentioned catcher Martin Maldonado, a light-hitting defensive maven who delivered a leadoff home run in the seventh inning in Game 1 at Minute Maid Park. But Hinch was ostensibly conjuring productive at-bats from Josh Reddick and Tyler White, Yuli Gurriel and Marwin Gonzalez, whose four-hit effort in Game 2 lifted the Astros to a 3-1 victory and a commanding 2-0 lead in their American League Division Series with the Cleveland Indians.

Exploiting lineup depth is old hat for the Astros. Laden with star power, from 2017 AL Most Valuable Player Jose Altuve and third baseman Alex Bregman, a legitimate MVP candidate this season, to 2017 World Series MVP George Springer and shortstop Carlos Correa, the Astros have benefitted from the tangible contributions of their most recognizable performers.

But their superstars identify the value of the supporting cast, whose clutch-time production won't be forgotten as Houston ratchets up its pursuit of a second consecutive championship.

"He's been very clutch for us for a long time," Bregman said of Gonzalez on Saturday. "I think everybody remembers World Series Game 2, probably the biggest swing I've ever seen."

Bregman, who bookended the scoring in Games 1 and 2 with solo homers off Indians right-handers Corey Kluber and Trevor Bauer, was referring to the game-tying homer Gonzalez blasted off Los Angeles Dodgers closer Kenley Jansen at Dodger Stadium on Oct. 25, 2017. Altuve, Correa, and Springer delivered arguably more celebrated dingers that evening but it was Gonzalez who lifted the Astros off the mat and set the table for their 7-6 comeback victory.

When duty called in the sixth inning of Game 2 against the Indians, Gonzalez responded with a two-run, opposite-field double off Cleveland left-hander Andrew Miller that erased a 1-0 deficit and put the Astros ahead to stay. Gonzalez had been 1-for-8 with six strikeouts in his career against Miller, whom the Indians were waiting to deploy in that very moment, especially after the switch-hitting Gonzalez produced a pair of singles off Indians right-hander Carlos Carrasco.

"Well, it's weird because I was all these days, I've been practicing from my left side because I know that all the starters are righties," Gonzalez said. "I've just been swinging from the right side just a little bit, especially because Correa (a right-handed hitter) is behind me and (righty-hitting) Yuli's in front of me. So, I didn't think that they were going to bring a lefty to face me."

"Well, I was lucky that I got the pitch and got the runs to win the game."

Gonzalez labored through a torturous first half, posting a .230/.305/.355 slash line against the roiling chorus that his breakout 2017 campaign which featured career highs in home runs (23), RBIs (90), and OPS (.907) was aberrant. He recovered in the second half with a .275/.352/.492 line and 10 home runs, but his season-long adjusted OPS still reflected a 43-point decline.

But there were positive signs in his splits. Gonzalez had long been considered a superior hitter batting left-handed, with his OPS against right-handers (.946) during last season far surpassing that against southpaws (.795). In 2018, Gonzalez struck a necessary balance, with just 31 points difference between his OPS against left-handers (.753) and righties (.722). When the moment called for the Indians to utilize a southpaw in a high-leverage situation, Gonzalez was ready.

"He was very pull-oriented early," Hinch said of Gonzalez. "When I first met him and got to know him early in '15, he was very pull-oriented, which this ballpark can do to a right-handed hitter, being how short it is.

"But it's a little bit more well-rounded now. He's got the ability to move the ball around the field. He's gotten to be a smarter right-handed hitter, where he's not just trying to ambush all fastballs. He's into the counts. I think his bat path is cleaner. I think his pitch selection has gotten better, and his production has come with it."

It was Gonzalez in Game 2 and Reddick in the series opener. Reddick hit into a rally-killing double play in his first at-bat against Kluber on Friday but followed with a pair of run-scoring singles to round out the Houston attack. It was easy to overlook his production given the home runs slugged by Bregman, Springer, and Altuve, but those in the know laud his efforts.

Reddick reflected upon succumbing into the lure of desiring the postseason limelight and admitted that some self-inflicted pressure was behind his postseason struggles of 2017. Now, understanding exactly where he fits on this loaded roster, Reddick is prepared to contribute when his spot in the order rolls around, just like everyone else.

"Last postseason, I think I got caught up in trying to be in the spotlight with these guys and hit the long ball," Reddick said. "In reality, I'm not there to drive the long ball, I'm down (in the order) to get on for those guys around the top of the lineup."

### **Astros Balls & Strikes: Keep the foot on the gas**

Chandler Rome , Oct. 6, 2018

Up again: Two brilliantly pitched games have the Astros in a familiar situation.

They boarded an airplane to Cleveland on Saturday night owners of a 2-0 lead in the American League Division Series. The Indians scored thrice against them in two games.

Indians ace Corey Kluber unraveled in Game 1, and the team's go-to bullpen arms — Trevor Bauer, Cody Allen and Andrew Miller — have all surrendered extra-base hits late in close games. Bauer and Allen gave up home runs.

Miller ceded the go-ahead double to Marwin Gonzalez on Saturday.

"I got ahead with a slider, then I wanted to get a fastball in a little more," said the lefthanded Miller, who has gone from unhittable to unreliable because of shoulder and knee injuries the past year. "Everything kind of spiraled from there."

Instead the fastball leaked over the plate and Gonzalez laced it. Miller's control unraveled further. He walked Carlos Correa. Then he yanked a slider behind Tyler White, which encouraged manager Terry Francona to signal for an intentional walk.

"I blew the game," he said.

The Indians could use the versatility version of Miller that undid jams routinely in their 2016 playoff run, which ended when they lost to the Cubs in Game 7 of the World Series. Confidence in Miller is wobbly at the moment.

"We're going to try to finish it on Monday," Gonzalez said. "That's the mentality that everybody has in the clubhouse, and like everything will be the same way.

Houston jumped out to the same lead in last year's ALDS against the Red Sox. Same for the American League Championship Series against the Yankees, too. Neither series ended in a sweep. To accomplish it this time, the Astros must solve Mike Clevinger on Monday at Progressive Field.

"This is not our first playoff series," Astros manager A.J. Hinch said. "We know it's not over. We have a day off tomorrow. We'll have an optional workout. We're not going to take anything for granted. Our mindset will be get after Game 3 and try to do everything you can to win it and end the series."

Resting on laurels, or coasting into Cleveland, does not seem to be on the agenda.

"It's important that we keep our foot on the gas, show up and compete from pitch one and try to win the next pitch," Alex Bregman said. "You can't look forward. You can't try and do anything different but go up there and play baseball."

As for the Indians, mired in the longest World Series drought of any major league team, they must find a way to regroup following two dismal days. They struck out 24 times in 18 innings and produced eight hits. Francisco Lindor's solo home run on Saturday was their only extra-base hit.

### **Roberto Osuna earns tough 4-out save in Astros' Game 2 win**

David Barron , Houston Chronicle Oct. 6, 2018 Updated: Oct. 6, 2018 8:58 p.m.

Osuna missed with a four-seam fastball on his first pitch, induced foul balls off another four-seamer and a cutter and then retired Lindor on a changeup to end the inning.

"It was a tough situation," Osuna said. "I tried to attack him early. I know he is a great hitter. He has a lot of power, and I was just trying to stay away from him. It worked out pretty well."

Osuna said he stuck with the pitch calls by catcher Martin Maldonado, who said he wanted to stick with the righthander's strengths.

"It wasn't a sequence," Maldonado said. "Every pitch we threw was with the intent to get him out, and we were able to get ahead of him."

Once in the dugout, Maldonado said, "I told him that was big out there, but remember to stay focused. You've got three more outs to go. Keep making pitches, and at the end of the day you're going to be where you want to be."

"He stayed focused. He's a smart guy."

Osuna, whose last four-out save came April 6 against the Rangers while pitching with the Blue Jays, said he went into the tunnel behind the Astros' dugout between innings to stay loose. That, and Maldonado's calls, carried him through, he said.

"The confidence he brought me in the ninth and the eighth, when he asks for a pitch and I'm not sure and he says that is what he wants, that gives me a lot of confidence," he said. "It worked out pretty well today."

Houston Chronicle LOADED: 10.07.2018

### **Astros' Jose Altuve says he was scared he injured his knee during Game 2**

Matt Young Oct. 6, 2018 Updated: Oct. 6, 2018 8:58 p.m.

The Astros' second baseman had just stumbled out of the batter's box, scurried to his feet and beat out an errant throw for an infield single. He also had a noticeable limp when he made his way back to first base.

"Absolutely (I was scared)," Altuve said after the Astros' 3-1 American League Division Series Game 2 win over the Indians on Saturday. "You don't want to be hurt in the playoffs. That's why I was like, 'Hey, what's going on?' But, after a couple minutes it just went away."

Astros manager A.J. Hinch and trainer Jeremiah Randall hurried out of the dugout to check on their second baseman, but Altuve said the pain he felt already was subsiding.

"It's not easy to hit the ball, go down, stand up and run in a close play, so I was a little sore after that play," Altuve said. "... But it went away."

Not only did Altuve stay in the game, but he was running on a 3-2 count to Alex Bregman that resulted in a walk, and then he scored on a Marwin Gonzalez double.

Earlier this season, Altuve spent almost a month on the disabled list with what the team called right knee discomfort, which led to some of Altuve's apprehension when he felt pain in the same knee.

"He's been battling this for most of the second half," Hinch said. "He went on the DL with it. There was a little bit of a scare, a little bit of uncertainty ... I mean, it's October, man. He probably doesn't feel great, but I think he'll be fine."

Altuve stood at his locker answering questions after Saturday's win and repeatedly insisted any discomfort in his knee went away a couple minutes after the play.

"It's nothing to worry or anything that will get me out of a game," Altuve said.

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