

## **Lindor hits 30th HR, but Tribe remains in funk**

By Casey Harrison MLB.com

CLEVELAND -- A collective funk has recently made its way to the home team at Progressive Field.

One day after the Indians were tamed by the visiting Rays' infamous "opener" strategy, the Tribe bats were relatively quiet again Monday, dropping a 5-1 decision to the last-place Royals.

After Francisco Lindor's 30th home run of the season with one out in the ninth, Cleveland went on to load the bases. But the Royals turned a game-ending 4-6-3 double play on Yandy Diaz's sharply hit grounder.

"It's frustrating, but we'll be fine," said Lindor, who finished with two of the Tribe's four hits. "It's just that point of the season like, late August, early September, when guys are dragging their feet a little bit now. It's not that we're tired, it's just that point of the season, you know? But we've got to go back to playing the Tribe way, we've got to go back to not taking anything for granted."

With the defeat, the Indians have dropped three in a row and eight of 12. The Twins' 4-1 loss to the Astros means the Tribe's Magic Number to clinch the American League Central dropped to 12 games. The Royals, now 31 back, have won six in a row and eight of nine.

Royals starter Jakob Junis (8-12) strung together his second strong outing in a row, silencing the Tribe across seven scoreless innings, and gave up two harmless singles with six strikeouts and no walks.

"He doesn't really overwhelm you with his velocity, but he threw three quality pitches and he could throw them at any time in the count," Indians manager Terry Francona said. "He was efficient."

Right-hander Adam Plutko (4-5) allowed four runs on three homers, including two to left-hander Ryan O'Hearn, and finished with eight strikeouts -- a career best. Plutko scattered seven hits over six innings.

"I feel like I've said the last couple outings there's been a lot of good," Plutko said. "But the long ball has beaten me. I've got to keep the ball in the yard. That's the bottom line."

O'Hearn's two home runs completed a 3-for-4 showing and the first baseman's first multihomer game. The rookie is now 7-for-14 with three homers and three doubles against the Tribe in four games.

"He's really swung the bat well," Francona said. "He's hit the ball all directions with power and he's hurt us."

The Royals added another run in the eighth with a one-out solo homer by Hunter Dozier off right-hander Jon Edwards, one of the Tribe's two players called up when rosters expanded on Saturday.

### **MOMENTS THAT MATTERED**

Following Lindor's ninth-inning homer, the Tribe loaded the bases to create a last-ditch scoring effort for the second game in a row. The Indians plated three runs in the final frame of Sunday's loss.

After Lindor, Michael Brantley lined a single and Wily Peralta issued back-to-back walks. Royals manager Ned Yost opted to go to southpaw Tim Hill to attack Yonder Alonso, a left-handed batter. Francona opted for Diaz, who fired a grounder with a 108-mph exit velocity -- per Statcast™, straight at second baseman Whit Merrifield to end the threat.

### **SOUND SMART**

With Lindor's home run, he and Jose Ramirez (37 homers) became the first pair of switch-hitting teammates in Major League history to each have 30-plus homers in a single season.

"Josey became a power hitter, I just became a lucky hitter," Lindor said, grinning. "It's just consistency. ... I guess he got tired of doubles and started hitting home runs instead."

### **HE SAID IT**

"We're certainly not swinging it great the last three or four days. That's just the way the game goes. We'll be OK. It's not a lot of fun going through it, but we'll be OK." -- Francona

### **DONALDSON POWERFUL IN REHAB DEBUT**

Josh Donaldson, who was placed on the 10-day disabled list retroactive to Saturday with a left calf strain, hit a grand slam in his first rehab game for Triple-A Columbus. He finished 1-for-2 with a walk and played six innings at third base. More >

### **UP NEXT**

Right-hander Mike Clevinger (10-7, 3.17 ERA) will take the mound in the middle game at Progressive Field for a 7:10 p.m. ET first pitch on Tuesday. Clevinger earned the win after allowing two unearned runs and four hits over 6 2/3 innings against the Twins on Thursday. The Royals will counter with left-hander Danny Duffy (8-11, 4.72 ERA).

## **Donaldson hits grand slam in first rehab game**

By Casey Harrison MLB.com

CLEVELAND -- Josh Donaldson's first appearance with the Indians appears to be taking a step in the right direction.

The Indians placed the newly acquired third baseman on the 10-day disabled list, retroactive to Saturday, with a left calf strain. The move allowed Donaldson to begin a rehab assignment on Monday afternoon with Triple-A Columbus, where he hit a grand slam. He finished 1-for-2 with a walk and played six innings at third base.

Indians manager Terry Francona praised Donaldson's communication with team personnel when mapping out a rehab plan and said Donaldson will likely play six innings Monday before returning to the Tribe to work out Tuesday. Donaldson will then transfer to Double-A Akron to finish the stint, and he could switch between third and designated hitter.

"We had multiple conversations, multiple meetings with medical people and with Josh," Francona said. "Just felt like to put him in the best position to succeed ... we felt like him playing a handful of games would put him in the best position to be healthy, where he could come back and play maybe back-to-back and play multiple games."

The Blue Jays acquired the three-time All-Star on Friday, along with cash, ahead of the deadline to acquire players in time to be eligible to join a postseason roster. Donaldson had been on Toronto's DL for the second time this season from May 29 through Thursday, and he was activated to complete Friday's trade.

Donaldson will be eligible to come off the DL Sept. 11 in St. Petersburg in time for the Tribe's second of three games against the Rays. Francona said it's "definitely the hope" to get Donaldson with the Tribe by then, but he also said overall health is the priority.

"Don't let excitement get in the way of making the proper decision," Francona said. "In the end, we had a really good process. He was involved in it and he was tremendous. The other thing is to respect the other guys that it's affecting."

Donaldson, an eight-year veteran, has been limited to 36 games in 2018, hitting .234 with 11 doubles, five home runs and 16 RBIs in 137 at-bats. Shortly after Donaldson was acquired, Francona announced that Donaldson would become the team's everyday third baseman once healthy, moving American League MVP Award candidate Jose Ramirez to second base and shifting Jason Kipnis to center field.

"They'll be starting to take balls at other positions and when they're ready to move, we'll make that move when they're ready, even if it's before Donaldson's back with us," Francona said.

Donaldson was introduced to the media on Sunday and was at Progressive Field participating in speed, agility and baserunning exercises as well as batting practice.

"There was a lot to be excited about," Francona said. "[But] you try to not get overexcited about him being here and getting on the field."

#### WORTH NOTHING

Reliever Cody Anderson made a rehab appearance for Double-A on Monday. The right-hander gave up a leadoff walk and induced a pair of flyouts in one inning against Erie, finishing with 13 pitches (six strikes) with his fastball ranging from 89-92 mph, according to the radar gun. Anderson has been sidelined since 2016 because of Tommy John surgery. A return to the Tribe this season is still questionable.

"Right now, it's just kind of day to day, seeing how my arm bounces back," Anderson told MLB.com's Jason Beck. "I think I have two innings coming up at some point, so I'm looking forward to that and just taking another step forward."

"Every time you attack something and try to get better at that instead of focusing on the long term -- you don't look at the light at the end of the tunnel. You look at the next day and what you have to do to get prepared."

#### **Chang homers twice for Columbus**

By William Boor MLB.com @wboor

• Indians No. 6 prospect Yu Chang saved the best for last as his first two-homer game of the year came on the final day of the regular season. Chang went 2-for-4 with a pair of solo homers for Triple-A Columbus and finished the season with 13 homers in 127 games.

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

By Jim Callis MLB.com @JimCallisMLB

OF: Will Benson, Lake County Captains (low Class A)

(Indians No. 22 prospect)

.360/.467/.880, 6 G, 25 AB, 6 R, 9 H, 1 2B, 4 HR, 10 RBI, 5 BB, 7 SO, 1 SB

A 2016 first-rounder (14th overall) making his full-season debut, Benson tied for the Minor League lead with four homers last week, including two on Saturday, and moved atop the Midwest League leaderboard with 22 overall. His .360 average in six games more than doubled his season mark, as he's hitting .179/.323/.370 in 122 low Class A games.

#### **Stark: What we've learned on Labor Day**

By Jayson Stark Sep 3, 2018 40

Labor Day, to you, probably means one last walk on the beach, one last long weekend with the kids, one last barbecue in the sun before you start calculating wind-chill factors.

In baseball, on the other hand, Labor Day has a slightly different meaning – because finally, after all these months, you can see the finish line. Listen closely. You can almost hear a faint voice, off in the distance, bellowing: "And down the stretch they come."

So as we reach the top of that stretch, what have we learned so far? Glad you asked, because we can help you with that. Yes, here it comes, your essential list of 10 Things We've Learned on Labor Day.

#### THE NATIONAL LEAGUE IS ON FULL CHAOS ALERT

So what would happen if the season comes to an end and there's an eight-way tie for every single playoff spot in the National League? Hahahahaha. Nobody knows what would happen because baseball doesn't even have an eight-team tie-breaker, since obviously, that could never happen.

Oh, wait.

My friend Joel Sherman tweeted recently about how easy it would be for that exact scenario to go down in the National League this year. Here's an updated version of his rundown of just what it would take, heading into Labor Day, for all of these teams to finish at 88-74:

Phillies 16-10  
Diamondbacks 14-11  
Rockies 14-12  
Dodgers 13-12  
Cardinals 12-13  
Braves 12-14  
Brewers 11-13  
Cubs 7-19

We'll concede that the likelihood of the Cubs going 7-19 isn't real high. But if you look at the rest of that chart, you'll get the idea. A seven-way tie for four spots is a heart-thumping, fun-filled possibility. And even if that doesn't happen, much to the dismay of chaos lovers everywhere, it's a reminder of something else:

The National League is headed for a total free-for-all.

We woke up on the morning of Sept. 1 and found eight teams within two games of a playoff spot – and within seven games of each other. We've never seen that, as September dawned, in any season in the wild-card era, in either league. So that part of this is very cool.

But now ask yourself the next logical question: Who's the favorite in this league?

"My God," said an executive of one contender when I posed that question last week. "I can't even tell you who is going to make it, let alone who's the favorite."

The Cubs are probably most likely to win their division... The Dodgers might have the most talent, if they can remember to start getting the last three outs... The Cardinals haven't lost a series since July 25... The Braves feel like the 2015 Astros reincarnate... The Diamondbacks are about to start a streak of 20 straight games against teams in some sort of race... The Rockies play 19 of their last 26 at scenic Coors Field... The Brewers still have 15 games left against teams with losing records... The Phillies are trying to become the first NL team in history to make the postseason with a team batting average under .240 (currently .237).

What. A. Race.

"This last month," said a GM of one NL contender, "is going to be nuts."

#### THE AL IS A LEAGUE OF SUPER-POWERS

Meanwhile, over in the American League, they're gearing up this month for a different kind of fun. They call it October.

All you need to know is this: If the postseason started right now, the two teams in the AL Wild Card game would have more wins than any division winner in the National League.

Of course, some of that disparity, one NL exec argued, is a direct result of playing in a league in which four free-falling teams — the Orioles, Royals, Tigers and White Sox – have a shot to finish a combined 200 games under .500. But let's not get too fixated on that.

"The American League, compared to the National League," said one AL exec, "is almost like the varsity and the junior varsity at this point."

Over in the AL, there's almost no September drama – barring an epic collapse by somebody or a 22-game winning streak by the Mariners, the only non-playoff team within eight games of the Fab Five (Red Sox, Yankees, Astros, A's and Indians).

So September, in the AL, is a month for wondering:

Will Chris Sale get healthy enough in Boston to MadBum his way through October?

Will Aaron Judge's wrist heal fast enough in New York to turn him back into a potential postseason game-changer?

Can the Indians get Cody Allen and Andrew Miller straightened out, or have those 500-plus innings they've combined for since 2015 taken too great a toll?

Will the Astros' offense (12th in the AL in runs scored since the break) rediscover its 2017 mojo now that it's survived two months of not seeing George Springer, Carlos Correa and Jose Altuve on the same lineup card?

Do the A's have enough starting pitching to survive September – and if not, what's the downside to a Hudson/Mulder/Zito reunion tour?

"Every one of these teams basically knew they were in the playoffs a month ago," said an exec of one AL contender. "So we're all just lining up our teams for the postseason. Then we'll see what happens."

#### THE TRADES FORGOT TO STOP AT THE TRADE DEADLINE

It was just last Aug. 31 that the most season-altering trade of 2017 went down. Justin Verlander woke up in Detroit, wound up in Houston, and you know the rest.

So is there any chance that the most important trade of 2018 also took place in August? Uh, probably not. But we'll get back to you on that on Halloween.

Who knows what Andrew McCutchen (now a Yankee) and Josh Donaldson (now a Clevelander) have in store for us in September and October? But our friends at Stats LLC tell us they're already the first pair of former MVPs to be traded in the same year since 2008 (Ken Griffey Jr., Pudge Rodriguez). And McCutchen and Donaldson both got traded on the same day, Aug. 31 – a month after the supposed trade "deadline."

Daniel Murphy has already had one magical October (.328, with seven unforgettable homers, in 2015). And the Cubs are 10-1 in games he's appeared in since he arrived at Wrigley on Aug. 21.

Also on the move last month, in after-hours trading: A former home run champ (José Bautista, to the Phillies)... a former World Series MVP (David Freese, to the Dodgers)... and a former All-Star closer (Fernando Rodney, to the A's), All-Star starter (Gio González, to the Brewers) and All-Star outfielder (Curtis Granderson, also to the Brewers). Not to mention Ryan Madson, Keone Kela, Matt Adams, Mike Fiers, Tyson Ross, Lucas Duda, Corey Gearrin, Jake Diekman, Luis Avilán and Adeiny Hechavarria (twice!).

There's a trade "deadline" in July. Then along comes August – and thanks to the miracle of waiver-wire artistry by front offices across our land, more than two dozen more trades arrive in a Transactions column near you.

We counted 10 contenders that made at least marginally significant deals to add depth and fill holes last month, almost all at discount prices compared with July. But we couldn't find anyone, in any front office, who thinks this whole deal-via-waiver-claim process makes sense.

"I don't know why we need to have the August system," said one AL exec. "I know if I worked in New York (i.e., the commissioner's office), I'd be asking: 'Why do we do this?' If it were up to me, I'd get rid of the waiver deadline and move the (July) deadline back to Aug. 15. I just know there are more GMs who can squint at the standings on July 31 and say, 'We're in it,' and then by the middle of August, they're saying, 'We're not in it.'"

#### THE CUBS ARE THE WHEELER-DEALERS OF THE YEAR

Six starts into his Cubs career, Cole Hamels has given up a total of four runs (for a ridiculous 0.69 ERA).

A week and a half into his Cubs career, Daniel Murphy is hitting .306/.333/.551 – and as we mentioned, they pretty much never lose when he plays.

And then there's Jesse Chavez. We don't recall anyone writing that he was the bullpen steal of the year when he got shipped from Texas to Chicago on July 19. But of course he has been to the mound 19 times since then and has a 1.07 ERA, because, well, of course he has.

That's three extremely impactful deals, for minimal prospect return, that have already added up to 3.7 wins worth of bWAR, in a very short period of time, by one of the most astute, most creative front offices in any sport. But these trades were actually even more significant than that, said one rival NL exec.

"Remember, they lost Brandon Morrow, they lost Yu Darvish, and they've been missing Kris Bryant," the exec said. "So they lost an MVP-caliber hitter in Bryant and replaced him with an MVP-caliber hitter in Murphy. They have Cole Hamels, who's performing at the level they would have expected Darvish to perform. And they lost an excellent closer, but they added Chavez, who is pitching like an elite late-inning guy. So basically, they've replaced every key guy they lost with guys who replaced the production they projected from those guys."

And that, in essence, is July/August deal-making at its finest.

#### WE'RE MISSING THE BIG STORY IN THE NL CY YOUNG RACE

It wasn't so long ago that a pitcher who won two games all season won a Cy Young award. OK, it was Eric Gagne in 2003. And he was a closer for a living. But just sayin'.

We bring this up because we have what should be the greatest Cy Young race in history going, in the National League, as we speak. And all we're going to wind up talking about is:

Do "wins" matter?

Here's why we shouldn't be obsessed with that: Because Max Scherzer, Jacob deGrom and Aaron Nola have been totally freaking stupendous. That's why.

Because all three of them have an adjusted ERA+ of 186 or better. That's why. And because they're all going to pile up north of 200 innings worth of brilliance. That's why.

So what's so cool about that, you ask? Oh, only the fact that we've never seen this before. Not in the same league. Not in the same year. That's all.

Earned runs became an official stat in 1913. In the 105 years since, there has never been a season in which one league produced three starting pitchers with 200-plus innings and an ERA-Plus of 180 or better, according to baseball-reference.com. Right. Never.

But we're not going to spend nearly enough time on that, are we? All because deGrom is going to wind up with a record of, like, 9-9, 1.67. And this entire debate will turn into a referendum on "The Win."

We can do better, people. We can debate the things that really matter. We won't, though, just to warn you. What have we learned about Cy Young voting? That we're not ready to stop debating the stuff that people debated 50 years ago. That's what. And don't you hate when that happens?

#### FEWEST WINS, CY YOUNG STARTER \*

13 – Felix Hernandez, 2010

15 – Tim Lincecum, 2009

(\* in non-strike-shortened seasons)

#### THE OTHER AWARDS ARE ALL IN PLAY

Have we ever reached Labor Day and had every single major award – MVPs, Cy Youngs, Rookies of the Year – so completely up for grabs? It's awesome when September writes these stories for us. And boy, is that happening.

NL MVP – What we have here is about an eight-man demolition derby. Check out the Offensive Wins Above Replacement leaderboard in the NL. Ten players within .8 of each other? That's never happened, over any full season, in the expansion era (1961-present). So September is turning into the land of MVP opportunity – for Javy Báez, Nolan Arenado, Matt Carpenter, Paul Goldschmidt, Christian Yelich, Freddie Freeman, Aaron Nola, Max Scherzer, Jacob deGrom, Lorenzo Cain and maybe some other heroic figure who is about to sneak up on us over the next few weeks. Awesome.

AL MVP – This race isn't quite as nuts or quite as jammed together into the same statistical space. But not one NL player ranks ahead of José Ramírez, Mookie Betts, Francisco Lindor, J.D. Martinez, Alex Bregman or that Mike Trout guy in Offensive Wins Above Replacement. I could make eloquent MVP cases for every one of them. But all we know now is that somebody is a huge September away from having to clear space on his shelf for this trophy.

AL CY YOUNG – Chris Sale is the greatest pitcher in this sport who has never won a Cy Young. And this felt like his year. But uh-oh – with every start he misses, the more he opens the door for Blake Snell, Trevor Bauer, Justin Verlander, Corey Kluber or Gerrit Cole. There's already a 50-inning gap between Sale and Kluber, for instance. And volume matters. In a season in which the top three in ERA (Sale, Snell, Bauer) have all been on the DL, this is shaping up as a really difficult vote.

NL ROOKIE – Once, this felt like Juan Soto's award to win. Then Ronald Acuña Jr. came along in August and fired off the first .336/.405/.698/11 HR month by a 20-year-old in almost 90 years. And maybe Cliff Corcoran's choice – Miami's Brian Anderson – will wind up stealing this thing. But our bet is that Acuña and Soto become the first players ever to finish 1-2 in any rookie-of-the-year race at age 20 or younger.

AL ROOKIE – With all due respect to Gleyber Torres, Miguel Andújar, Joey Wendle or anyone else, our feeling about this award deserves a section of this opus all to itself. So ...

#### WE'VE BEEN IGNORING THE GREATNESS OF SHOH-TIME

Due to technical ligament difficulties beyond our control, Shohei Ohtani never threw a pitch between June 6 and Sunday. So for some reason, we pretty much decided, as a baseball-watching nation, to forget he was still a unique force of nature.

Well, we're here with this quick reminder: Don't let that happen again!

Ohtani has had a way busier season than many of you apparently realized. He has made 270 plate appearances as a hitter. He has faced 211 hitters as a pitcher. And it's been 100 years since anyone in baseball faced that many hitters as a pitcher and made that many trips to the plate as a hitter. That anyone was Babe Ruth, of course. You were expecting maybe Brooks Kieschnick?

And guess what? Ohtani has been truly great at whatever the heck he's been up to. Take a look:

OPS-Plus as a hitter: 142

Better than: Freddie Freeman (140), Nolan Arenado (136), Khris Davis (135), José Altuve (134)

ERA-Plus as a pitcher: 129

Better than: Cole Hamels (127), Carlos Carrasco (125), Jon Lester (122), David Price (121)

It's not my place to tell anyone how to vote for anything. But we've still got a month before those AL rookie-of-the-year ballots have to be filled out. So there's still time to cure this case of Ohtani amnesia that's been sweeping our fair land!

#### THE AL CENTRAL – WORST DIVISION IN HISTORY

Division play has been around for 50 seasons now. The wild-card era has been around for more than 20 years now. So when we tell you that the 2018 edition of the American League Central is the worst division ever, you're supposed to be appropriately impressed. After all, we're stacking this up against decades worth of ineptitude.

But five months into this season, it's pretty much a done deal. Thanks to our friends in the research department at MLB Network, we have the math to prove it.

#### Lowest Combined Winning Percentage vs. Other Divisions

YEAR	DIV	W-L	WIN PCT
2018	AL Central	148-240	.381
2002	AL Central	177-253	0.412
1994	AL West	144-201	0.417
2003	AL Central	180-250	0.419
2005	NL West	189-255	0.426

So that's not good. But you already knew that. Instead, we should be asking ourselves: How did this happen? And: What's the ripple effect of having an entire division that's this bad at baseball?

All right, first things first. How did this happen? Important note: This is not a tanking situation, because none of these teams knew they were tanking. The Royals, Tigers and Twins meant to be reasonably competitive, but stuff happened. The White Sox were rebuilding, but if they were tanking, they'd have dumped James Shields and traded José Abreu long ago, right?

"I really don't see this as part of the tanking problem," said one AL executive. "They just happened to catch everyone in the same cycle."

So the No. 1 ripple effect of all this losing has been this: The Indians clinched this division on April Fools' Day.

Oh, all right, not mathematically. But realistically, said the same exec, the Indians "looked up at the beginning of the year and everyone in their clubhouse knew that if they just finished over .500, they'd make the playoffs."

So the Indians have basically been gearing up for October since April. Or at least June. Which makes their season incredibly difficult to evaluate – but makes them no less dangerous in October.

There has been one other major ripple effect, though. And that's on the wild-card race – in the National League. If three teams in the NL Central wind up in the postseason – meaning the second-place and third-place teams show up in the Wild Card Game – remember this:

The Cubs, Cardinals and Brewers have gone 27-13 (.675 win pct.) in interleague play this year against the bottom four teams in the AL Central. But over in the NL East, the Braves, Phillies and Nationals have gone 19-25 (.432 win pct.) against the portion of the mighty AL East not known as "the Orioles." In a race as bunched up as the NL wild-card derby, the historic ineptitude of the AL Central could easily wind up determining who plays baseball in October and who goes fishing.

#### SHILDT HAPPENS

Mike Matheny managed over 1,000 games in St. Louis. Did you know that only once in those 1,000 games did his teams have as hot a stretch, over any span of 41 games, as Mike Shildt's Cardinals had in his first 41 games as a big-league manager (29-12)? That's a fact.

So how does a fellow go from almost total anonymity to interim manager to permanent manager – with a three-year contract – in less than two months? That'll do it. Restore order. Restore the culture. Restore the luster of the St. Louis Cardinals. And also win every darned night. Excellent formula.

It's a funny thing, though. Once the Cardinals awarded Shildt that contract and zapped the "interim" tag off his job description, a lot of people deduced that this was a tide-shifting development in this sport. Maybe, the theory went, teams would now start hiring guys like Shildt and Atlanta's Brian Snitker again – you know, men with actual minor-league experience at managing a baseball team.

Well, maybe. And I'd be all for it. But I'm not sensing that. I ran that theory past several big-league executives, and they saw the hiring – and success – of men like Shildt and Snitker as part of a different trend, one that was already in progress:

#### The Disappearance of the Rock-Star Big-Name Manager.

"I think what's actually happening," said one of the NL execs quoted earlier, "is that collaboration between managers and front offices is becoming more important."

So after decades of teams recycling the same old faces in these jobs – and years where the immense presence of men like Tony La Russa, Joe Torre and Lou Piniella allowed them to tower over their franchises – the full-time hiring of Mike Shildt is really a sign that clubs are trending away from that style of manager these days.

"The amount of communication that takes place now between managers, coaching staffs and front offices is so much greater," said an AL exec. "It's not two separate worlds anymore. There's not a wall between the manager's office and the front office the way there was for so many years."

"When a guy is sitting in that manager's office with the credibility of a Mike Scioscia or a Buck Showalter, I think GMs and front-office guys are much less inclined to go down there and say, 'This is how we'd like to run the game.' But that's where baseball is heading. So I think that's what has changed."

Is that good for the game? Bad for the game? We'll let you judge. But take a few moments to consider the difference in stature between Mike Shildt and Tony La Russa, even though they've both sat at the same desk in the same manager's office. Got it now? It's not just a new manager. It's a new world.

#### THE RAYS ARE THE MOST UNORTHODOX TEAM EVER

The Tampa Bay Rays are 10 games over .500. Could you even name, say, seven guys on their team? I bet you can't.

Go on. Try it. Kevin Kiermaier, Blake Snell, Sergio Romo, Carlos Gomez and who else? This seems like an excellent game to play on a bar stool some night with your friends. But who knew it would also be an excellent way to build an actual winning team.

There was a time this season, right after the trade deadline, when the Rays didn't have a real starting pitcher on their active roster. Never saw that before. There was also a time last week when the Rays had more rookies on their active roster (13) than non-rookies (12). Never saw that before, either.

Over the last calendar year, they've jettisoned Evan Longoria, Chris Archer, Jake Odorizzi, Alex Cobb, Alex Colomé, Wilson Ramos, Steven Souza Jr., Corey Dickerson, Logan Morrison and just about everyone else on their team whom you might have recognized if they sat down next to you on a flight to Tampa.

Hasn't mattered. According to baseball-reference, they're just the second team – in the 20 years their franchise has existed – to use eight rookie pitchers in at least a dozen games and at least eight rookie position players in at least a dozen games in the same season. The other was the 2013 Astros. That team lost 111 games. And this Rays team is 10 games over .500. Amazing.

It's way too simplistic, though, to say they've thought outside the box. They've actually built a whole new box. And maybe they're the only team that could have – because they have so few fans in the seats and such low expectations that they're free to try any innovation they want, with very little pressure.

"There's a lot less marquee value in 'Ryan Stanek versus Chris Sale' than there is in 'Chris Archer versus Chris Sale,' but they're not concerned at all with marquee value," said one rival exec. "So it's so much easier for them to exist outside that world than it is for the rest of us."

In their world, they could conceivably finish the season with a better record than maybe half of the NL playoff field – and still finish 20 games out of first place. Wrong division. Wrong year. But as one AL exec quipped, "I hope they enjoy their Wins Per Payroll title."

#### **My attempt to dethrone José Ramírez, the 'Mario Kart' king**

By Zack Meisel 8

On a quiet day, you can hear the faint piano notes softly playing from the center of the Indians' clubhouse. The gentle tones indicate that a race was recently completed.

A quick glance at the monitor typically reveals the same headline:

First place: Bowser

That's José Ramírez's character. He plays nearly every afternoon on the team's arcade-style setup. He chooses Bowser because the imposing creature's spiky shell matches José's pointy, bleached hair. And he often wipes the floor with his competition, whether it's Josh Tomlin, Shane Bieber, Roberto Pérez, Adam Plutko or anyone else brave enough to step into his lair.

In fact, José recently asked Bieber to play him, but the pitcher had to head out to the field for a bullpen session. The scene was reminiscent of a big brother reluctantly rejecting his little brother.

"I want to beat him," Bieber said. "Obviously, work comes first and all that."

Cody Allen dueled José for the first time a few days ago. He hadn't played "Mario Kart" in years, so he asked José for instructions, such as how to use turtle shells. Predictably, José won without issue.

"He was hustling me," Allen said. "He wanted to play for money after that. I said no."

José always chooses the Mushroom Cup, the first group of tracks that includes Luigi Raceway, Moo Moo Farm, Koopa Troopa Beach and Kalamari Desert. He typically plays on the medium difficulty (100cc), though he has no reservations about ramping up the challenge.

He asked Greg Allen to oppose him Monday afternoon, but the rookie outfielder said he had to go lift weights. José raised the right sleeve of his gray T-shirt, flexed his biceps and joked: "Oh, so you can get like this?"

He then turned his sights toward me. I had been studying his racing prowess for months. I had spoken with his teammates, soliciting their scouting reports on how to slay the "Mario Kart" dragon.

"There's one race he's gonna win: Koopa Troopa Beach," Plutko said. "So, you have to win the other three races if you're gonna beat him. There's this shortcut where you can jump through the tunnel and cut off, like, half the course. He hits it every time. I don't know how he does it. It's really insane. He's never lost — 100 percent, every time."

He has to have a weakness, though. No competitor is entirely invincible.

"He hates Moo Moo Farm," Plutko said. "He's very beatable on Moo Moo Farm. That's my race. It's pretty short, but he always tries to cut through the gophers and he always gets hit by them."

I logged hours of practice in my free time, battling my wife, my sister-in-law (an expert on the matter) and my sister-in-law's best friend (an unrivaled master at the game). I experimented with various characters to find the one that offered the perfect blend of acceleration and handling. I even searched Cleveland's bar-cade scene, hoping to test out the joystick and buttons instead of a traditional controller. Unfortunately, I came up empty.

So what was I in for? José is an AL MVP candidate, a prolific power hitter, baserunner and fielder. But this is his forte. He's comfortable in the batter's box, staring down a hurler who throws 100 mph. But he's in his element when he's standing before the "Mario Kart" arcade machine.

"He talks a lot of shit," Tomlin said. "He's very confident."

Earlier this season, José battled one of the Indians' clubhouse attendants. After the clubbie finished second, José quipped, with a hint of condescension: "Second place? That's good." José, of course, had captured first place.

"He'll let you know that he's better than you," Plutko said. "He'll say he's coming for you and then he'll pass you and he'll say, 'What happened?' He'll let you know that he's winning."

When Bieber outpaced José in the second of four races last Friday, Plutko shouted: "We've got a winner! You never see that!"

José, sporting a red batting practice shirt, raised his arms in the air, mystified by his second-place result. Bieber started to retreat to his locker.

"Mira!" José yelled, clearly frustrated with his showing.

Bieber turned around and looked at the screen.

"Oh, we have two more races," Bieber said.

Tomlin says he owns a respectable record against the guy who has his own "José Kart" shirt. José claims Tomlin only wins when José lets him win.

"It can bring out the evil in people and the good in people," Tomlin said.

Here goes nothing.

Luigi Raceway

The first lap was rough. Playing with Yoshi — some slim green dinosaur thing with a plump round nose — I slipped on a conveniently placed banana peel. Then, Wario — a tubby troll of a character — knocked me into oblivion with a turtle shell. That sent me spiraling into seventh place (out of eight), as José cruised along.

Then, I acquired a star.

"Star. Take it," José said, seemingly still unsure whether I knew what I was doing.

The brief stretch of invincibility the star provides vaulted me into third, right behind that bully Bowser. I eventually skipped ahead into first and hung on for dear life. José obtained a lightning bolt — which, when activated, shrinks the other players, thereby making them much slower. But he acquired it too late in the race, and wasn't able to use it until I had crossed the finish line.

I thought about initiating some trash talk. "Second place? That's good." But I didn't want to get ahead of myself. There were three more races, he reminded me.

Surprise, José: Your competition might actually be halfway decent at this.

Zack: 1st

José: 2nd

Scoreboard

Zack: 9

José: 6

Maybe this will be easier than I had anticipated ...

Moo Moo Farm

... or perhaps I awoke a sleeping giant.

Plutko's advice echoed in my head. This track is José's weakness. He's a sucker for trying to cut through the gopher patches, but those furry nuisances can disrupt even the most confident racer.



I sat in first place as we commenced the second of three quick laps. Then, I fell victim to those damn rodents. I lost my grip on the lead and José forged ahead, protected by three red turtle shells. He carefully plodded along the dirt path before crossing the finish line and staring me down.

This is going to be a dogfight.

Back to the drawing board.

Zack: 5th

José: 1st

Scoreboard

José: 15

Zack: 9

Koopa Troopa Beach

This is José's playground. There are two options:

1. Turn up the aggressiveness and attempt the shortcut, knowing José will head that way in each of the three laps.
2. Play it safe, take the normal path, focus on avoiding the palm trees and the pesky crabs and hope José misfires on the shortcut and it costs him.

José took the shortcut on the first lap, giving him a commanding lead. He had a 12-second advantage on me, which is an eternity in Nintendoland. He missed the jump on Lap 2, and we both tumbled toward the back of the pack. Then, José started to make moves. He climbed back into contention. All he needed was to convert the shortcut and he'd likely finish first, a crucial victory that could spoil my chances of swiping his crown.

But I acquired a lightning bolt.

"Save it for the shortcut!" one of José's teammates shouted.

As José sped toward the incline that leads to the secret tunnel, I delivered the lightning strike. His character spun out and shrunk and he fell to seventh place.

"Sorry," I said. He didn't respond.

The fourth race would decide everything.

Well, well. We have a battle on our hands, after all.

Zack: 3rd

José: 7th

Scoreboard

José: 15

Zack: 12

Kalamari Desert

After the third race, José pointed at the screen and did some calculations. He held a three-point advantage. So long as he topped me in the final battle, he'd win out. But if I could finish first, he would need to finish second to salvage a tie.

I completed the first lap in third place. José was in eighth, thanks to a collision with a passing train. (No, in "Mario Kart," you don't stop when the railroad gate lowers. You merely swerve around the oncoming locomotive.) Was he feeling the pressure? For years, he has waxed his competition, with only the occasional slip-up. Now, he was in a heated duel with a media member before an audience.

Then, he made his move. He shocked the group with a lightning bolt. Then, he smacked me with a turtle shell. He zipped past, overtaking me for first place. As the finish line approached, I picked up three red turtle shells. They're some of the most valuable items a player can attain. If used properly, they'll take out the competitor in front of you. You don't even have to aim. They have their own sense of direction.

All I had to do was strike him with one of the shells and I could speed past him. The players, reporters and staff members who had their eyes glued to the monitor would erupt in disbelief. The upset would be complete. Even Plutko was sitting at his locker, jotting down observations on a pad of paper (OK, so maybe he was working on that afternoon's scouting report, since he started for the Indians).

I immediately deployed all three shells. They turned the corner and headed for Bowser's spiky backside. I took the final turn and fixated on the bright "Mario Kart" banner that stands tall above the finish line.

I was too late, though. The shells didn't reach Bowser until the moment after he crossed the finish line. José had fended me off, beating me by two seconds on the final course.

Zack: 2nd

José: 1st

Scoreboard

José: 24

Zack: 18

He pointed to the final standings, pounded his chest twice and headed toward his locker, still the "Mario Kart" king.

## **Francisco Lindor: AL Central-leading Indians need to get back to 'the Tribe Way'**

Associated Press

CLEVELAND -- Francisco Lindor believes the Cleveland Indians need a spark.

Lindor homered in the ninth inning of Cleveland's 5-1 loss Monday to the Kansas City Royals, who extended their winning streak to a season-high six games.

The Indians have lost three straight but still lead the American League Central by 14 games. Their magic number to clinch the division was trimmed to 12 after Minnesota's loss to Houston.

"Our energy is down," Lindor said. "I don't [know] why. Personally, my energy is down. We're at that point in the season where guys are dragging their feet a little. We have to go back to playing the Tribe Way and not taking any pitch for granted. We'll be fine." Josh Donaldson hit a grand slam in Triple-A on Monday, soon after the Cleveland Indians put the new arrival on the disabled list to give him more time to rehab a calf injury in the minor leagues.

Jakob Junis allowed two hits in seven shutout innings and Ryan O'Hearn homered twice for Kansas City, which also has won eight of nine.

"It's no fluke," O'Hearn said. "Guys are going out, trying to win every day. Everyone is playing really well."

Junis (8-12) gave up a two-out single to Lindor in the third and a leadoff single to Yonder Alonso in the fifth. The right-hander hit a batter, walked none, struck out six and retired his last nine hitters.

Junis was 0-2 with a 9.82 ERA in his first two starts against the Indians this season.

"Being in the division, these teams see my slider a lot," he said. "Using my heater more was definitely the difference."

Brian Flynn pitched a scoreless eighth and Wily Peralta began the ninth with a 5-0 lead. Lindor homered with one out, Michael Brantley singled, and Peralta walked Jose Ramirez and Edwin Encarnacion on eight pitches.

Left-hander Tim Hill relieved, and pinch hitter Yandy Diaz hit a hard grounder that second baseman Whit Merrifield turned into a game-ending double play. Hill recorded his second save.

"That was a great play by Whit, a great play," manager Ned Yost said. "That's why you bring Timmy in, to get a ground ball."

Lindor has 30 homers this season. He joins Ramirez, who has 37 home runs, as the first pair of switch-hitting teammates in major league history to each have 30 or more homers in a season.

O'Hearn had the first multihomer game of his career. He led off the fourth with a home run and hit a two-run drive in the sixth. Jorge Bonifacio and Hunter Dozier hit solo homers.

Adam Plutko (4-5) gave up three homers and allowed four runs in six innings. The right-hander had a career-high eight strikeouts.

Kansas City took two of three from Cleveland at Kaufmann Stadium last month, and Junis made certain that trend continued. He retired the first eight batters before hitting Greg Allen with a pitch in the third. Lindor sent Allen to third with a single, but the inning ended with an out on the bases.

Lindor broke for second and was caught in a rundown when catcher Cam Gallagher threw to shortstop Adalberto Mondesi. The rundown continued until Allen finally broke for home, and Merrifield threw to Gallagher, who applied the tag.

### **NICE DEBUT**

Josh Donaldson hit a grand slam in Triple-A on Monday after the Indians placed him on the disabled list to give him more time to rehab a calf injury in the minor leagues. Donaldson, playing for Columbus, also walked and lined out against Toledo. Donaldson, acquired from Toronto on Friday, will work out with the Indians on Tuesday and continue his rehab assignment for Double-A Akron in the Eastern League playoffs this week.

"That was good," Indians manager Terry Francona said. "It sounded like everything else went well, too, and he made all the plays."

### **HEAR THE BUZZ**

The Cleveland National Air Show, held at a nearby airport, ended Monday. Players and fans turned their attention to jets that flew around the ballpark in the early innings.

### **FEEL THE HEAT**

Temperatures for the three-game series will be near 90 degrees each day, a stark contrast from the first time the Royals were in town. The game-time temperature of 32 degrees on April 8 set a Progressive Field record.

### **TRAINER'S ROOM**

Royals: C Salvador Perez (sprained left thumb) sat out his fifth straight game, but Yost said he is improving and remains day-to-day. The six-time All-Star last played on Aug. 28 against Detroit.

## UP NEXT

Royals LHP Danny Duffy (8-11, 4.72 ERA) takes on Indians RHP Mike Clevinger (10-7, 3.17 ERA) in the second game of the series. Clevinger has made three starts against Kansas City this season, going 1-0 with a 2.57 ERA.

### **Josh Donaldson hits grand slam with Clippers on first day of rehab assignment**

By Jeff Schudel, The News-Herald & The Morning Journal

Josh Donaldson's debut with the Indians was put on hold on Labor Day when the Tribe put him on the 10-day disabled list while he continues rehabbing a calf injury.

A player on a Major League team's active roster cannot go on a minor-league rehab assignment. The Indians announced Donaldson would join the Triple-A Columbus on Sept. 3, play third base and bat second in the Clippers' afternoon game against the Toledo Mudhens in the final game of the regular season.

Donaldson walked, lined out to center field and hit a grand slam in three plate appearances.

Donaldson, 32, will be able to continue his rehab with the Akron RubberDucks, who have clinched a playoff spot in the Eastern League. The DL designation is retroactive to Sept. 1. The soonest Donaldson could start playing for the Indians is Sept. 11 at Tampa Bay.

The Indians acquired Donaldson from the Toronto Blue Jays on Aug. 31 for a player to be named later with the hope he will be healthy enough to help the Indians in the playoffs. He has not played a game in the major leagues since May 28 when he injured his calf playing for the Blue Jays.

"I'm excited because my body's come to the point now where I feel very much comfortable in going out there and playing — and not just playing at an ordinary level — but at a very high level as well," Donaldson said on Sept. 2 before the Indians lost 6-4 to the Tampa Bay Rays.

Donaldson, the 2015 American League MVP, hit 41 home runs and drove in 123 with the Blue Jays when he was named American League MVP. He hit 37 home runs and drove in 99 in 2016 and hit 33 homers and drove in 78 runs last season.

"He plays with an edge," Indians manager Terry Francona said. "He plays hard. There's no crystal ball. We know that. There's a risk there, but, man, (the trade) has a chance to make us better."

Donald has five home runs and 16 RBI this season.

### **Lake County Captains attendance hits low mark**

By David Glasier, The News-Herald

The 16th season of Lake County Captains baseball is in the books.

It ended on Sept. 3 at Classic Park as the Captains beat the Lansing (Mich.) Lignuts, 3-2.

On the field, the Captains finished 31-38 in the second half of the Midwest League season and 60-79 overall.

Paid attendance was 202,125 in 66 home dates, for a per-game average of 3,062. Those figures were the lowest since the Indians' full-season Single-A affiliate re-located to Eastlake in 2003 from Columbus, Ga.

The 2017 attendance total was 221,652. This is the fifth straight year attendance has declined.

Captains General Manager Neil Stein traced this season's attendance downturn to unusually cold weather in April. The Captains had 12 home dates that month, including the home opener on April 5 with a first pitch temperature of 37 degrees. On April 6, the game against the Fort Wayne (Ind.) TinCaps was halted after four innings by snow and frigid temperatures.

Attendance improved in the second half with 13 crowds of 4,000 or more. The largest crowd was 7,098 on May 25 as the Captains beat the Great Lakes (Mich.) Loons, 4-3.

Classic Park is owned by the city of Eastlake and leased by the Captains.

Eastlake Mayor Dennis Morley said the downturn in attendance is put in context by an overall 4 percent dip in minor-league attendance this season.

"The Captains have a lot of dedicated fans," Morley said. "We just have to figure out a way to get more fans in the seats during the week."

Morley and Stein both characterized the relationship between the ballpark's owner-landlord and primary tenant as "good." That wasn't always the case in years past, especially when the city was coming to grips with being on the hook for \$35 million in stadium construction bond debt after the original financing plan devised by then-Mayor Dan DiLiberto fell apart.

"We have a good working relationship with the Captains," Morley said. "Building the Miracle Field made it better."

Morley was referring to the construction and July 28 grand opening of Lake Health Miracle Park, a baseball diamond geared to children and adults with developmental disabilities. Next to the baseball field is a playground and plaza to which Lubrizol bought naming rights.

The Miracle Field, playground and plaza are on a parcel adjacent to Classic Park. The project was enabled by a \$1.1 million fundraising campaign.

Stein said the while the ballpark is "holding up pretty well" after 16 years, the team constantly updates a list of needed repairs and infrastructure updates.

Those repairs typically are paid for by monies taken from the Capital Replacement and Improvement Fund, or CRIF. Morley said there currently is "about \$100,000" in the CRIF.

Morley said the city will spend "about \$70,000" on ballpark repairs in 2018.. As per terms of the lease, the Captains pay \$40,000 into the CRIF every year.

Eastlake this season will collect about \$69,000 in fees from the city-owned parking lot across Route 91 from the ballpark. That revenue is about the same as in 2017.

The Indians recently announced a two-year extension of the Player Development Contract with the Lake County franchise through the 2020 season.

"Our relationship with the Indians is so important," Stein said. "It wouldn't be the same if we were affiliated with another major- league team, not even close. Our fans follow these players from Lake County up through the minor leagues to the Indians."

For fans who like to plan ahead, the Captains are scheduled to play their 2019 home and season opener on April 4 against Great Lakes.

### **Captains end season on a roll, send 14 to next level**

By David Glasier, The News-Herald

Judged solely on the win-loss ledger, the 2018 season goes down as a disappointment for the Captains.

With a final record of 60-79, they finished well out of contention in the Midwest League's Eastern Division in both halves of the season.

On the plus side, they finished strong.

With a 3-2 victory over the Lansing (Mich.) Lugnuts on Sept. 3, the Captains ran their winning streak to five games. That matched their previous five-game win streak achieved July 7-12.

The final three wins of the season-ending streak came against the playoff-bound Lugnuts, who finished 80-60.

But as Captains manager Luke Carlin noted before the matinee on a steamy Labor Day in Northeast Ohio, wins and losses are not the most important measurement of a season at the Single-A level.

"In the major leagues, it is all about wins and losses," Carlin said. "Here, our job is to work with players, put them in positions to be all they can be and, hopefully, help them realize the dream of getting to the big leagues.

"As a staff, we focused on that process," Carlin added. "You want to win, of course, but I did not lose sleep over the losses."

By season's end, 14 Lake County players had earned one-way promotions to the advanced Single-A Lynchburg (Va.) Hillcats.

Left-handed starting pitcher Eli Morgan was the first to move up, on May 16. He was 2-0 with a 1.83 ERA in eight starts with Lake County. He is 7-7 with 3.91 ERA in 19 starts for the Hillcats, who will face the Potomac (Md.) Nationals on Sept. 5 in Game 1 of a Carolina League playoff series.

The last to get the good news of promotions to Lynchburg before the season finale against Lansing on Sept. 3 were outfielder Todd Isaacs (.232, four home runs, 31 RBI, 30 stolen bases) and relief pitcher Robert Broom (2-1, 1.17 ERA, 30 strikeouts in 23 innings).

Two of those 14 promoted Captains, shortstop Ernie Clement and relief pitcher Nick Sandlin, have moved beyond Lynchburg to the Double-A Akron RubberDucks.

Clement bated .267 in 54 games at Lake County and .346 in 53 games at Lynchburg. With the RubberDucks, he's batting .246 in 15 games and will be in the starting lineup on Sept. 5 when Akron opens the Eastern League playoffs at home against the Altoona (Pa.) Curve.

Sandlin, the Indians' second-round pick in the 2018 draft out of Southern Mississippi, was 0-1 with a 1.74 ERA in 10 appearances with the Captains. At Lynchburg, he was 1-0 with a 1.42 ERA in seven appearances. The transition to Akron has been rocky for the sidearm specialist. He's 1-0 with a 10.56 ERA in five appearances.

Of the other position players who moved up to Lynchburg, third baseman Nolan Jones is the one most worth monitoring.

In 90 games with the Captains, the 6-foot-5, 220-pound third baseman batted .279 with 16 home runs and 49 RBI. In 30 games at Lynchburg, the Indians' second-round pick in the 2016 draft out of high school is batting .298 with three home runs and 17 RBI.

Outfielder Oscar Gonzalez almost certainly would have earned a late-season promotion to Lynchburg if he hadn't broken a finger on Aug. 20 in a baserunning mishap. The 20-year-old native of the Dominican Republic was batting .292 with 13 home runs and 52 RBI in 114 games when his season came to an abrupt end.

The most notable position player not to earn a promotion to Lynchburg was outfielder Will Benson.

Selected by the Indians with the 14th overall pick in the first round of the 2016 draft, the 20-year-old Georgia native batted .180 in 123 games. His 22 home runs were tops in the Midwest League, but the batting average and 155 strikeouts in 416 at-bats must be causes for concern in the Indians' organization.

### **RubberDucks report: Curve a familiar postseason opponent for Ducks; series starts Wednesday at Canal Park** by ABJ/Ohio.com correspondent

The more things change in the Eastern League Western Division, the more they ... well, actually they don't.

Since the Altoona Curve came into existence in 1999, the Curve and RubberDucks have combined for 19 playoff appearances (Akron 10, Altoona 9) and have won seven titles (Akron 5, Altoona 2).

Altoona and Akron have met in the Western Division finals in 2003, 2005, 2006, 2016 and 2018.

The latest addition begins Wednesday when the Curve come to Akron for back-to-back 6:35 p.m. starts. After that, the teams could play three more times beginning Friday and running through Sunday in the best-of-five series.

"It's two good organizations," Ducks manager Tony Mansolino said. "Those guys from the Pirates, their leadership came from this organization. They're smart. Both organizations have smart front offices that know how to do player development. Through that you get a lot of good teams."

That's hard to ignore given the fact Akron owns six division titles since Altoona came into existence, and the Curve has claimed four.

In the five years the RubberDucks have been around, they've been to the playoffs twice. Both times they faced the Curve.

"This year for sure they've had a strong team," Ducks starter Triston McKenzie said. "They haven't had very many moves. They've had the same team pretty much all year. There are guys on the other team that have a lot of talent. They bring a lot to the team. There's a lot to that and helping the team win."

Promotions to Triple-A Columbus have hit the RubberDucks hard, but they stayed in first place until near the end before the Curve took over as the Western Division champion. The Curve have won the division in back-to-back seasons.

The Ducks feature regulars McKenzie (7-4, 2.68, 78 strikeouts), outfielders Andrew Calica (.276, 6 home runs, 48 RBI) and Tyler Krieger (.276, 5, 55) and second baseman Mark Mathias (.232, 8, 43) on a team hungry for its second championship after producing a Western Division best 613 RBI to go along with 658 runs.

First baseman Nellie Rodriguez (.277, 4, 22) has come back from Columbus as a member of the 2016 championship team.

Postseason all-stars Will Craig (.248, 20 home runs, 101 RBI) and third baseman Ke'Bryan Hayes (.290, 7, 44) as well as standout Cole Tucker (.257, 5, 43) highlight the Curve, which has made the playoffs for the fourth consecutive season.

"Obviously, whatever they do is working for them," Rodriguez said. "It's working here in our organization as well. The key is going to be pitching and defense. That's what matters in the playoffs most as well as timely hitting and situational hitting."

The regular-season series ended with Curve going 12-10 against the RubberDucks. That means every pitch could be vital.

In a five-game series, Game 1 becomes incredibly important. Win there and, as strange as it might sound, the series could be decided.

Under the current format, the second-place team hosts two games before heading to the first-place team's home for the final three if necessary.

That means if the RubberDucks take care of business at home, they'll head to People's Natural Gas Field and only need one win.

"The pressure will be on them to be honest with you," Mansolino said. "If we can squeak a game early with the team they've had the whole year, with the high first-round picks they have on that team, the expectation is on them to win in my eyes. If we go out and play clean baseball, get good pitching and get a couple balls to bounce our way, we'll give ourselves a chance to win."

### **Recent addition Li-Jen Chu steadying influence during RubberDucks' stretch run**

by ABJ/Ohio.com correspondent

Li-Jen Chu has never made the game of baseball harder than it is.

As a result, the RubberDucks have benefited as they enter the final game of the regular season in Erie on Monday before playing the Altoona Curve in the Eastern League Western Division Finals.

"My approach is to look for a fastball and stay aggressive," Chu said. "I see the ball and hit the ball. I don't think too much about what the pitcher is pitching to me. If I like it, I swing. I just make it happen."

Signed as a free agent on Nov. 29, 2012, the 24-year-old has provided the pop the Ducks need.

When Joe Sever, Bobby Bradley and Connor Marabell were promoted to Triple-A Columbus and Willi Castro was traded to the Detroit Tigers, the RubberDucks lost a collective 417 hits, 51 home runs, 237 RBI and 228 runs.

Although Nellie Rodriguez (.272, 4 home runs, 18 RBI) has helped fill the void, Chu has been just what the RubberDucks are looking for as they try close out the season with their second league title in three seasons.

Chu came into the weekend batting .260 with a pair of home runs, six RBI and 13 hits in 15 games with the team.

His slugging average (.400) ranks fifth on the team among those playing 15 games or more with the Ducks this season.

"He's a good hitter and pretty good catcher, too," RubberDucks manager Tony Mansolino said. "It's hard for a guy to come in and learn a new system, but he's been very important for us in that five-hole behind Nellie. When he gets a couple pitches to hit, he's made himself an important part of this team."

That says a ton about a catcher who is averaging .276 in the minors with a .439 slugging percentage and .783 OPS.

"It's my first time playing with him, but what I've seen so far is that he's a good power hitter," Rodriguez said of Chu. "He's a right-handed hitter. If they walk me, they have to get through him. It's trouble either way."

Chu's value is more than just his bat as he's been strong behind the plate. A catcher known for stealing strikes, he's as valuable to pitchers as he is dangerous to baserunners.

"He's big and strong, so he'll get you the low pitches if you need them," Brady said. "He knows what you like to do. He comes up to you in between innings and talks to the pitchers to see what they want to do the next inning."

"I was always told that he was a really good player. You always hope when people come up here that they don't miss a beat and they continue where they left off."

Chu's transition to the Double-A level hasn't shown signs of taking a step back either.

With a solid knowledge of the pitching staff and what the coaches are looking for, he has stepped right in and hasn't missed a beat.

"I've known everybody from before with this being my fifth year," Chu said. "It's a lot different in the clubhouse and the field. The umpire strike zone is also smaller."

"Other than that, for me, I feel it's the same. It's just baseball. The pitcher is more in command with the breaking balls and fastball. You have to pay attention more and ask coaches questions. They'll answer every question you have."

The post Recent addition Li-Jen Chu steadying influence during RubberDucks' stretch run appeared first on Ohio.com.

## **Royals 5, Indians 1: Indians bats go silent on Labor Day**

**By Ryan Lewis**

CLEVELAND: For the second consecutive day, the Indians were silent for nearly the entire day before a rally in the ninth fell just short in a 5-1 loss to the Kansas City Royals.

The Indians (77-60) were blanked by Royals starting pitcher Jakob Junis, who allowed only two hits in seven scoreless innings and were on their way to a quiet five-run loss.

But as they did in Sunday's 6-4 loss to the Tampa Bay Rays, the Indians put together a rally to bring the tying run to the plate in the ninth.

Francisco Lindor hit a solo home run off right-hander Wily Peralta to cut the Royals' lead to 5-1. With that home run, Lindor joined Jose Ramirez as the first pair of switch-hitting teammates in major-league history to belt at least 30 home runs in the same season.

Michael Brantley followed with a single and, with one out, Jose Ramirez and Edwin Encarnacion each drew walks to load the bases.

That brought in left-handed reliever Tim Hill and pinch-hitter Yandy Diaz. Holding the Indians' first real chance to make some noise at the plate all day, Diaz grounded into a game-ending 4-6-3 double play. It was enough to make it interesting but, in the end, it was another day of far too many poor swings.

"We're certainly not swinging it great the last 3-4 days," manager Terry Francona said. "Some of that had to do with Tampa's pitching. That's just the way the game goes. It was nice to see Frankie take that swing in the last inning. Hopefully that gets him going. Josey took his walk. That's good. We'll be OK. It's not a lot of fun going through it, but we'll be OK."

Indians starter Adam Plutko was hit for four runs on seven hits, most of the damage coming on three solo home runs, one from Jorge Bonifacio and two by Ryan O'Hearn. The Indians had trouble getting much of anything going for most of the day, but the Royals teed off.

"There's been a lot of good, but the long ball has beaten me," Plutko said. "I gotta keep the ball in the yard. That's the bottom line."

Making his second major-league appearance since 2015 after being called up on Saturday Jon Edwards gave up a solo home run to Hunter Dozier to make it 5-0 in the eighth.

The Minnesota Twins lost to the Houston Astros on Monday in a game that's connected to the Indians in two ways. The Twins' loss dropped the Indians' magic number to clinch the American League Central title to 12, but the Astros now have a 7.5-game lead on the Indians for the No. 2 seed in the AL playoffs.

Akron Beacon Journal LOADED: 09.04.2018

### **Indians notebook: Josh Donaldson placed on 10-day disabled list, hits grand slam in first game with Triple-A Columbus**

By Ryan Lewis

CLEVELAND: The plan is set. Josh Donaldson will continue his way back from his on-going calf injury in the minor leagues.

Donaldson was placed on the 10-day disabled list on Monday, but it wasn't due to any kind of a serious setback. In order for Donaldson to get at-bats and time in the field in the minors, he had to be on the disabled list. The club can also retroactively set his placement on the DL back to Sept. 1, which rendered his arriving in Cleveland later than expected moot.

The Indians took a few days to meet with Donaldson and allow him to work out and take batting practice in front of medical personnel.

"[We] just felt like [this would] put him in the best position to succeed," manager Terry Francona said. "I know I say this a lot, but nobody has a crystal ball, so you try to do what you think is right. And we included him in the communication. He was outstanding. When you try to not get overexcited about him being here and getting on the field, you know what's right. We felt like him playing a handful of games would put him in the best position to be healthy where he could come back [to Cleveland] and play and maybe play back-to-back and play multiple games."

His road back to the Indians started off well enough. In his first game with Triple-A Columbus on Monday, Donaldson belted a grand slam.

Donaldson is expected to return to Cleveland for a workout on Tuesday before joining the RubberDucks, who are home Wednesday and Thursday and then travel to Altoona over the weekend. Donaldson will start out playing third base and logging around six innings but could have that expanded. He could also see time as a designated hitter if playing back-to-back games, according to Francona.

Donaldson will be eligible to come off the disabled list Sept. 11, when the club is in Tampa Bay. As it relates to Jose Ramirez and Jason Kipnis, it doesn't necessarily mean that the Indians will wait for Donaldson to move them around the diamond.

The Indians have until the end of the regular season to have Ramirez and Kipnis acclimated to second base and center field, respectively. However, that goal also includes the variable that Ramirez told the team he was willing to move to second base, but that he didn't want to be shifted back and forth.

In that sense, according to Francona, Ramirez and Kipnis will start taking reps around the field and will only make the in-game switch when they are ready, even if it comes prior to Donaldson's activation. Yandy Diaz could receive some additional time at third base in the meantime. There's also no guarantee that Donaldson is ready by Sept. 11.

"So, that would be the hope, but we're going to go off of him," Francona said. "If he came to us and said, 'I need more,' that's what we're going to do. I think he's going to be OK. Now, again, certainly hope there's never a setback or anything like that."

Akron Beacon Journal LOADED: 09.04.2018

### **Josh Donaldson hits grand slam in minor-league rehab debut with Columbus Clippers**

By Joe Noga

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Josh Donaldson wasted little time demonstrating he is already in game shape during his minor-league rehab debut for the Cleveland Indians. Donaldson drilled a two-out grand slam in the fourth inning Monday for Triple-A Columbus as the Clippers defeated Toledo, 8-1.

The 2015 American League MVP, acquired last week in a waiver trade with Toronto, was placed on the disabled list earlier in the day retroactive to Sept. 1. Indians officials said the move is part of a plan to build Donaldson's workload so that he is ready for major league games at some point this month.

He is eligible to come off the DL Sept. 11 when the Indians are in Tampa Bay, according to Indians manager Terry Francona.

"It sounded like everything else went well, too," Francona said. "I think he had a walk and it sounded like he made all the plays. That was good."

Donaldson played six innings at third base for the Clippers. In the second inning, ex-Indians prospect Willi Castro singled on a ball that hit Donaldson in the glove at third.

Josh Donaldson just hit a 2-out Grand Slam in his rehab start for Cleveland's Triple-A affiliate, the Columbus Clippers. [?] [?][?]  
[pic.twitter.com/T4OPTy1cck](https://pic.twitter.com/T4OPTy1cck)

-- Tim and Sid (@timandsid) September 3, 2018

He will return to Cleveland on Tuesday to work out with the Indians because all of the club's minor league affiliates have the day off. On Wednesday, he will join Akron as the Rubberducks open the Eastern League playoffs.

"We felt like him playing a handful of games would put him in the best position to be healthy where he could come back and play and maybe play back-to-back and play multiple games," Francona said.

Donaldson told reporters Sunday he's confident that he no longer needs help getting his body back to performing at a high level.

"Now it's just kind of managing the load process, and managing how many games and the schedule of how many games I'm going to play in a row," Donaldson said. "It's not a matter of getting me back on the field. I feel that I'm ready for that."

Francona said the club considered playing Donaldson a game at the big-league level and then sitting him, but decided against letting their excitement over Donaldson's availability get in the way of making the proper decision. Francona also wanted to show respect to the other players affected by the move, Jason Kipnis and Jose Ramirez.

"They'll be starting to take balls at other positions," Francona said. "We'll make that move when they're ready, even if it's before Donaldson's back with us."

Donaldson arrived in Cleveland late Saturday and was in the Tribe's dugout as the Indians played Tampa Bay. He worked out prior to Sunday's game at Progressive Field, going through agility drills and taking infield and batting practice.

The 32 year old is making his third trip to the DL this season. In 36 games for the Blue Jays, Donaldson hit .234 (32-for-137) with 11 doubles, 5 home runs and 16 RBI. He was on the DL from May 29-August 30 with a strained left calf.

On Friday, Indians president Chris Antonetti first indicated the possibility that Donaldson would be put on the disabled list in order to participate in minor-league rehab games before making his debut with the Indians at some point this month.

"Whether that's at the middle or end (of the month), or some time sooner than that we don't yet know, but we want to partner with Josh in developing that plan," Antonetti said.

Cleveland begins a four-game road series in Toronto on Thursday, meaning Donaldson will not play in any of the games at Rogers Centre against his former team.

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 09.04.2018

### **Cleveland Indians dumped by Kansas City, 5-1, but Magic Number keeps shrinking**

By Paul Hoynes

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- The Indians keep getting closer to clinching the AL Central even though they keep losing. Yes, it's a two-edged sword, but it's not one manager Terry Francona wants to swing for long.

In the span of 11 days, the AL Central cellar-dwelling Royals have beaten the division-leading Indians three times in four games. On Monday afternoon at Progressive Field they put the boots to the Indians, 5-1, behind the pitching of Jakob Junis and the home-run hitting of rookie Ryan O'Hearn.

Rookie Adam Plutko (4-5, 5.04) had the kind of game where pitching coach Carl Willis probably doesn't know exactly what to say to him. Plutko struck out a career-high eight batters, but along the way he allowed three homers -- one to Jorge Bonifacio and two to O'Hearn. The second homer by O'Hearn came with a runner on base in the sixth inning to give the Royals a 4-0 lead.

Considering that the Tribe's offense has all but stopped scoring, that was pretty much the game. The Royals made it 5-0 on another homer, this one by rookie Hunter Dozier in the eighth off Jon Edwards.

"He had periods today, with two strikes, he didn't locate and really paid the price," said Francona. "He couldn't keep the ball in the ballpark. I didn't think he pitched bad. He just paid for his mistakes."

In case you forgot -- and no one would blame you if you did -- it was O'Hearn and Dozier who stunned Cody Allen and the Indians with consecutive homers in the ninth inning on Aug. 24 at Kauffman Stadium for a 5-4 walk-off win. The Royals have been rolling ever since, while the Indians haven't been able to get back on track.

The Royals have won six straight, while the Indians have lost three straight and seven of their last 11 games.

"O'Hearn has really swung the bat well," said Francona. "He's hit the ball in all directions with power. He's hurt us."

The left-handed hitting O'Hearn is hitting .500 (7-for-14) with three homers and seven RBI against the Indians this season.

But the weight of the season still favors the Tribe. Their Magic Number dropped to 12 to clinch their third straight AL Central title following Houston's victory over the Twins on Monday.

Since scoring eight runs in the first game of this nine-game homestand, the Indians haven't scored more than four runs in a game. They're 3-4 with two games left before leaving on their second-last trip of the regular season.

Junis (8-12, 4.32) was 0-2 against the Indians this year, but he was a different pitcher Monday. In seven innings, he allowed two hits with six strikeouts.

Plutko allowed four runs on seven hits in six innings. He did not walk a batter for the fifth time this season.

"My job is to keep the game within one swing of the bat and as close to one swing of the bat as I possibly can," said Plutko, when asked about the lack of offensive support. "Whether it's 15 runs, no runs, one run, whatever the case may be. . . I let it go one more (run), and one more (run) and two more (runs). So it is what it is."

Junis and relievers Brian Flynn and Wily Peralta retired 13 straight batters before Francisco Lindor ended the avalanche of outs with a one-out homer in the ninth to prevent the Indians from behind shut out for the eighth time this season.

It was the Lindor's 30th homer of the season, making the Indians the only team in history have two switch-hitters with at least 30 homers. Jose Ramirez has 37.

The homer stirred the Indians to a mini-, but futile rally as they loaded the bases on Michael Brantley's single and walks by Ramirez and Edwin Encarnacion. Lefty Tim Hill relieved Peralta and induced pinch-hitter Yandy Diaz to hit into a 4-6-3 game-ending double play. It was Hill's second save.

What it means

The Indians trail AL West-leading Houston for home-field advantage in the ALDS by 7 1/2 games following Monday's loss to the Royals. Houston improved to 85-53 with a win over the Twins on Monday. The Astros have won three straight and eight of their last 11 games.



The pitches

Plutko threw 95 pitches, including 64 (67 percent) for strikes. Junis threw 93 pitches, 60 (65 percent) for strikes.

Thanks for coming

The Royals and Indians drew 20,536 to Progressive Field on Monday afternoon. First pitch was at 4:10 p.m. with a temperature of 85 degrees.

Next

Right-hander Mike Clevinger (10-7, 3.17) will face the Royals and lefty Danny Duffy on Tuesday at 7:10 p.m. SportsTime Ohio, WTAM and WMMS will carry game.

Clevinger is coming off a win against the Twins in his last start. He's 1-0 with a 2.57 ERA in three starts against the Royals this season. On Aug. 24, he allowed three runs on four hits in a six-inning no-decision against them at Kauffman Stadium.

Duffy is coming off a win against the Tigers. He's allowed 22 runs in his last 33 2/3 innings. Duffy is 0-3 with 10.80 ERA against the Indians this season and 2-9 with a 5.38 ERA in his career.

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 09.04.2018

### **Josh Donaldson to make rehab start today at Triple-A Columbus after being placed on DL by Cleveland Indians**

By Joe Noga, cleveland.com

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Josh Donaldson has been placed on the 10-day disabled list by the Cleveland Indians retroactive to Sept. 1. The club announced he will begin a rehab assignment today with Triple-A Columbus.

Donaldson, acquired Friday in a waiver trade with Toronto, will play third base and bat second for as the Clippers host the Toledo Mudhens at 2 p.m. at Huntington Park.

Manager Terry Francona said Donaldson will return to Cleveland on Tuesday to work out with the Indians because all of the club's minor league affiliates have the day off. On Wednesday, he will join Akron as the Rubberducks open the Eastern League playoffs.

"We felt like him playing a handful of games would put him in the best position to be healthy where he could come back and play and maybe play back-to-back and play multiple games," Francona said.

Donaldson told reporters Sunday that the good news is he no longer needs help getting his body back to performing at a high level.

"Now it's just kind of managing the load process, and managing how many games and the schedule of how many games I'm going to play in a row," Donaldson said. "It's not a matter of getting me back on the field. I feel that I'm ready for that."

Terry Francona on Josh Donaldson's comeback plans

Francona said the club considered playing Donaldson a game at the big-league level and then sitting him, but decided against letting their excitement over Donaldson's availability get in the way of making the proper decision. Francona also wanted to show respect to the other players affected by the move, Jason Kipnis and Jose Ramirez.

"They'll be starting to take balls at other positions," Francona said. "We'll make that move when they're ready, even if it's before Donaldson's back with us."

Donaldson arrived in Cleveland late Saturday and was in the Tribe's dugout as the Indians played Tampa Bay. He worked out prior to Sunday's game at Progressive Field, going through agility drills and taking infield and batting practice.

The 32-year-old former American League MVP begins his third stint on the DL this season. In 36 games for the Blue Jays, Donaldson hit .234 (32-for-137) with 11 doubles, 5 home runs and 16 RBI. He was on the DL from May 29-August 30 with a strained left calf.

Indians president Chris Antonetti on Friday left open the possibility that Donaldson would be put on the disabled list in order to participate in minor-league rehab games before making his debut with the Indians at some point this month.

"Whether that's at the middle or end, or some time sooner than that we don't yet know, but we want to partner with Josh in developing that plan," Antonetti said.

Cleveland begins a four-game road series in Toronto on Thursday, meaning Donaldson will not play in a game at Rogers Centre against his former team. He is eligible to come off the DL next Tuesday for the middle game of the Indians' road series against Tampa Bay.

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 09.04.2018

### **Whatever happened to the signed beams at Jacobs Field?**

By Marc Bona, cleveland.com

CLEVELAND, Ohio - Progressive Field / Jacobs Field will mark a quarter century of hosting baseball games when the 2019 season opens.

Ground was broken in 1992 on the park that has hosted more than 2,000 games. But it was 25 years ago that fans had a chance to sign on to the project - literally.

Then-owner Dick Jacobs had suggested the idea for fans to sign support beams at the second Wahoo Winterfest held Feb. 6-7, 1993.

After drawing 6,000 people for the inaugural fest in 1992, the team attracted about 9,000 fans at the Marriott Society Center in downtown Cleveland in 1993. Admission was \$5 and included seminars, player appearances, displays and more.

Initially, four steel beams were placed outside the center for fans to sign, said Glen Shumate, then Indians director of community relations and coordinator of the fest, at the time. But they quickly filled with signatures so four additional ones were brought in for the fest's second day. Signatures soon were scrawled over them, too.

The Indians confirmed the beams are in the stadium but are not exposed.

They were incorporated into the East Ninth Street stair tower near the right-field gate, says Jim Folk, the team's vice president of ballpark operations.

He said the beams, which are approximately 12 feet long and are covered by brickwork and concrete masonry units, are supporting stairs in right-center field.

Osborn Engineering, a firm with roots dating to the 19th century, worked on League Park, Cleveland Municipal Stadium and Jacobs Field.

The first game at Jacobs Field was played April 4, 1994. Eric Plunk earned the win in relief as the Tribe beat the Seattle Mariners, 4-3, in 11 innings.

The Indians' 2019 home opener is Monday, April 1, against the Chicago White Sox. Cleveland will host Toronto on Thursday, April 4, the 25th anniversary of the stadium's inaugural regular-season game.

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 09.04.2018

### **Royals flex power, control to dominate Indians while setting season-best win streak**

Jakob Junis allowed two hits in seven shutout innings, Ryan O'Hearn homered twice and the Kansas City Royals extended their winning streak to a season-high six games with a 5-1 victory over the Cleveland Indians on Monday.

Junis (8-12) gave up a two-out single to Francisco Lindor in the third and a leadoff single to Yonder Alonso in the fifth. The right-hander hit a batter, walked none, struck out six and retired the last nine hitters.

Junis was 0-2 with a 9.82 ERA in his first two starts against the Indians this season.

Brian Flynn pitched a scoreless eighth and Wily Peralta reliever began the ninth with a 5-0 lead. Lindor homered with one out, Michael Brantley singled and Peralta walked Jose Ramirez and Edwin Encarnacion on eight pitches.

Left-hander Tim Hill relieved and pinch-hitter Yandy Diaz hit a hard grounder that second baseman Whit Merrifield turned into a game-ending double play. Hill recorded his second save.

O'Hearn had the first multihomer game of his career. He led off the fourth with a home run and hit a two-run drive in the sixth. Jorge Bonifacio and Hunter Dozier hit solo homers for the the Royals, who have won eight of nine.

Kansas City Royals manager Ned Yost is considering using a six-man starting pitching rotations for the last month of the season. Ian Kennedy is close to coming back and he still wants to give the current rotation more chances to start.

Adam Plutko (4-5) gave up three homers and allowed four runs in six innings. The right-hander had a career-high eight strikeouts.

Kansas City took two of three from Cleveland at Kaufmann Stadium last month and Junis made certain that trend continued. He retired the first eight batters before hitting Greg Allen with a pitch in the third. Lindor sent Allen to third with a single, but the inning ended with an out on the bases.

Lindor broke for second and was caught in a rundown when catcher Cam Gallagher threw to shortstop Adalberto Mondesi. The rundown continued until Allen finally broke for home, and Merrifield threw to Gallagher, who applied the tag.

Nice debut

Josh Donaldson hit a grand slam in Triple A on Monday after the Indians placed him on the disabled list to give him more time to rehab a calf injury in the minor leagues. Donaldson, playing for Columbus, also walked and lined out against Toledo. Donaldson, acquired from Toronto on Friday, will continue his rehab assignment for Double-A Akron in the Eastern League playoffs this week.

Hear the buzz

The Cleveland National Air Show, held at a nearby airport, ended Monday. Players and fans turned their attention to jets that flew around the ballpark in the early innings.

The Kansas City Royals swept the Baltimore Orioles after Sunday's September 2, 2018 9-1 win, that included the major league debut of Royals' catcher Meibrys Vilorio. It was the third straight series win for the Royals.

Feel the heat

Temperatures for the three-game series will be near 90 degrees each day, a stark contrast from the first time the Royals were in town. The game-time temperature of 32 degrees on April 8 set a Progressive Field record.

Trainer's rooms

Royals: C Salvador Perez (sprained left thumb) sat out his fifth straight game, but manager Ned Yost said he is improving and remains day-to-day. The six-time All-Star last played on Aug. 28 against Detroit.

Up next

Royals LHP Danny Duffy (8-11, 4.72 ERA) takes on Indians RHP Mike Clevinger (10-7, 3.17 ERA) in the second game of the series. Clevinger has made three starts against Kansas City this season, going 1-0 with a 2.57 ERA.

The Kansas City Star LOADED: 09.04.2018