

Bauer's declaration: 8 K's, win, Tribe sweep

By Jordan Wolf MLB.com

KANSAS CITY -- The first two innings provided all the fireworks the Indians needed this Independence Day.

The Tribe snuck past the Royals, 3-2, Wednesday night at Kauffman Stadium to complete the sweep over their divisional foe. They logged just four hits all night, and didn't score after the second inning, but starter Trevor Bauer made sure that was enough.

Bauer tossed 7 2/3 innings and allowed seven hits and two runs while striking out eight, a sharp outing on a night when the offense was relatively quiet. He was by no means perfect, but was able to work out of any trouble he got into.

"I thought he was good ... they had some opportunities, and he kind of buckled down," manager Terry Francona said. "They made him work, but he was up to it."

The offense got off to a quick start before stalling, as Francisco Lindor walked to start the game, and was doubled in by Michael Brantley in the next at-bat. Brantley scored when Edwin Encarnacion lofted a sacrifice fly to center.

Cleveland got right back at it in the second, as another leadoff walk -- this time to Jason Kipnis -- resulted in a score after a walk, a sacrifice bunt and another sacrifice fly. Despite having recorded only one hit, they were already up 3-0.

Bauer got into some trouble in the eighth, when Whit Merrifield led off with a deep double to left. After Rosell Herrera flied out, Merrifield took off for third during the next at-bat. Bauer's pitch was a bit erratic, coming in close to the chest of Salvador Perez, but catcher Roberto Perez threw down to Jose Ramirez in time to catch Merrifield stealing and end the rally.

"That was a big, big play in the game," Francona said. "If he gets to third with less than two outs, we got to play the infield in, they've got a good hitter up. That was a really good play."

Perez said postgame that he was going to call a curveball on the pitch, but when he saw Merrifield dancing with a lead off second, he called for the heater up and in.

"He gave me the sign pretty much," Perez said. "He was being aggressive and faking he was gonna try to steal. Bauer, he threw a lot of breaking balls, and I just called fastball up and in. I thought that was the game right there."

Merrifield had been 9-for-9 stealing third this season and 19-for-20 in his career before being caught by Perez.

The Tribe was able to navigate past Royals starter Trevor Oaks, but largely couldn't crack the code against the team of relievers called on after him. Heath Fillmyer, making just his third appearance in the Majors, threw three no-hit innings. Tim Hill followed with a no-hit frame, and Willy Peralta surrendered two with two outs in the ninth.

Cleveland closer Cody Allen picked up save No. 18 on the season, but more notably, No. 140 in his career with the Indians. He passes Bob Wickman for the all-time franchise record, after tying him on Tuesday.

It didn't come easy, though, as a one-out Alex Gordon double spelled some trouble. Allen did not crack, however, as he struck out the last two Royals to end the game and receive a water cooler bath from his teammates.

"This is something I'm gonna be extremely proud of, and I am extremely proud of," Allen said. "It's one of the things that -- hopefully I get to do a few more -- I get to hang my hat on for my career, get to look back on. This will be one of those trademark moments."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

In the fifth, Kansas City strung together a few hits and a Merrifield sacrifice fly cut Cleveland's lead to 3-2. With runners on first and second, the Royals' Perez stepped to the plate with a chance to tie the game. Bauer would not yield another run, however, getting Perez to strike out on a ball that bounced well in front of home plate.

HE SAID IT

"I should be an All-Star. I imagine I will be, and if I'm not, they didn't do it right." -- Bauer, on his prospects of being selected for this year's Midsummer Classic

UP NEXT

Right-hander Carlos Carrasco (8-5, 4.24 ERA) will make his return to the Tribe rotation against the A's at 7:10 p.m. ET on Friday at Progressive Field. Carrasco had started 15 games for Cleveland before taking a line drive off his throwing elbow and hitting the disabled list. Righty Paul Blackburn (2-2, 6.46 ERA) will go for Oakland.

Allen becomes Indians' all-time saves leader

KANSAS CITY -- It was only fitting that Cody Allen etched himself into Indians' history on a day as historically significant as July 4.

Allen picked up career save No. 140 with the Tribe on Wednesday night, closing out a 3-2 Independence Day win over the Royals at Kauffman Stadium. With the save, he became the franchise's all-time saves leader, passing Bob Wickman for the top spot in Cleveland history.

It wouldn't come easy for Allen, however, as Alex Gordon rocketed a one-out double in the bottom of the ninth to keep things interesting. Allen responded with a pair of strikeouts to seal the victory, before being met by a water cooler bath from his teammates to celebrate the milestone.

"This is something I'm gonna be extremely proud of, and I am extremely proud of," Allen said. "It's one of the things that -- hopefully I get to do a few more -- I get to hang my hat on for my career, get to look back on. This will be one of those trademark moments."

He's not the only one proud of his feat, though.

"Whether he got a save tonight or not, he still means so much to all of us," manager Terry Francona said. "But it's nice to be able to brag about him. This is a kid that was drafted, I don't know, 26th round? (Allen was first drafted in the 16th round of the 2010 MLB Draft by the Indians, but did not sign. He was drafted again in 2011 in the 23rd round and joined the Cleveland organization.)

"Through being a consummate professional, he's now the Indians' leader. That's pretty awesome. That's a pretty big accomplishment. And he's not close to done."

Starter Trevor Bauer, whose 7 2/3 sharp innings set Allen up for the save, shared similar thoughts.

"He's been super dependable for us, and that's really what [the record is] a testament to," Bauer said. "The durability and consistency. Hasn't hit the DL, takes the ball every time, does a tremendous job on the back end for us. When you have someone that stabilizes the last inning like that, the back end, it makes things in front of him a little bit easier."

Tribe injury updates: Guyer, Miller, Zimmer

KANSAS CITY -- Indians skipper Terry Francona provided a few injury updates ahead of Wednesday's series finale against the Royals in Kansas City.

Brandon Guyer exited last night's game after fouling a ball off his left knee and collapsing in the batter's box. Initial X-rays came back negative, and while he's out of the lineup on Wednesday, he's largely doing fine.

"Shows up today, he's just sore," Francona said. "He got a bruise, it's kind of below his kneecap, above his shin there on the top of his shin. He just has a good old-fashioned good bruise, but he's OK."

Relief pitcher Andrew Miller will throw off flat ground again on Thursday at noon. Miller has been out since the end of May with inflammation in his right knee.

Francona had no new news on outfielder Bradley Zimmer, saying that "we're still a ways away" from knowing his status. Zimmer hurt his shoulder while taking batting practice with Triple-A Columbus back on June 13.

A concrete update on Zimmer will come Friday when the Tribe returns to Cleveland, per Francona.

Civale nearly untouchable for Akron

By Mike Rosenbaum MLB.com @GoldenSombbrero

• Indians No. 9 prospect Aaron Civale was nearly untouchable as he faced two over the minimum over seven scoreless innings and led Double-A Akron over Richmond, 8-0. The 23-year-old righty allowed a one-out double in the first inning but retired the next eight batters he faced, and 20 of the final 21 in the one hit performance. He issued one walk, struck out four and generated 11 ground-ball outs. Civale owns a 2.21 ERA in six starts since returning from the disabled list.

Cleveland Indians' Trevor Bauer displeased with start; says he should be an All-Star

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

KANSAS CITY, Mo. - Trevor Bauer wasn't happy with his performance Wednesday night at Kauffman Stadium, but that had no bearing on where he thinks he should be on July 17 when the best players in baseball gather in Washington, D.C.

Asked how it felt to be considered a possible selection for the American League All-Star team, Bauer said matter of factly, "I should be an All-Star. I'd imagine I will be and if I'm not, they didn't get it right, whoever they is.

"I'm glad I'm pitching well. That's been my goal. I feel like I should be an All-Star every year. That's the standard I hold myself to."

Fan voting for the All-Star teams ends Thursday, but the fans don't vote on pitchers. The All-Star teams, starters and reserves, will be announced on Sunday. The All-Star Game will be played July 17 Nationals Park.

Bauer (8-6, 2.45) pitched 7 2/3 innings as the Indians beat the Royals, 3-2, to complete a 5-4 trip. He struck out eight, walked one and allowed two runs on seven hits. But he was not happy. It was written on his face.

Terry Francona on Trevor Bauer vs KC: "I thought he was good."

He was happy that the Indians won. Happy that closer Cody Allen set the franchise record for saves, but he was not happy with himself.

"Frustrating in a lot of ways," said Bauer. "I made some good pitches and gave up some really weak hits. Too many two-strike balls put in play is the thing I'm most frustrated about. I have to clean that up."

Bauer didn't get a lot of runs to work with and his defense wasn't particularly sharp when the Royals scored their two runs. But it was more than that.

He said he's not getting enough strikeouts. He's had 16 in the last two games and ranks third in the AL with 156 behind Chris Sales at 164 and Gerrit Cole at 158.

But that's still not enough in his mind. A strikeout prevents a ball from being put in play and that's what Bauer wants.

"More balls put in play, more chances for hits, especially when you have one of the league's worst batting average on balls in play, like I do," he said. "So it's just more opportunities to score."

The Royals scored their first run a double steal in the second inning. Alex Gordon, who stole home, was hit by a pitch. Hunter Dozier, who stole second, reached on a slow roller down the third baseline.

They scored again in the fifth on a sacrifice fly by Whit Merrifield following a pair of singles, the second of which escaped a diving Yonder Alonso at first base.

"I found two barrels (line drives) and they both happened to be outs, and I still gave up seven hits," said Bauer. "Weak ground balls. A squibber down the first baseline. A bloop to right. It's just frustrating. When you can't get swing-and-miss (strikeouts) that stuff happens and there's a lot more chances to score."

Bauer and his defense were much more aligned in the eighth. Merrifield opened the inning with a double with the Tribe leading, 3-2. After Rosell Herrera flied out to left, Merrifield, for some reason, tried to steal third. Catcher Roberto Perez hung him out to dry with a strong throw to Jose Ramirez for the second out.

After Salvador Perez singled - shortstop Francisco Lindor knocked it down on the outfield grass so Merrifield may or may not have scored - lefty Oliver Perez relieved and struck out Lucas Duda.

Perez was excited about the play.

"I could tell Merrifield wanted to steal," said Perez. "Bauer was throwing a lot of breaking balls, so I called a fastball up and in."

Bauer's fastball put Perez in a perfect position to make a good throw to third.

"I thought that was the game right there," said Perez. "That's on Bauer."

So at least Bauer had something to smile about.

New Balance likes the idea of replacing the LeBron banner with Francisco Lindor. Do you?

By Joey Morona, cleveland.comjmorona@cleveland.com

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Ever since LeBron James left to sign with the Los Angeles Lakers, Cleveland sports fans have been tossing around ideas on who or what should replace him on the giant banner outside the Sherwin-Williams building.

Joe Thomas. Stipe Miocic. J.R. Smith. (OK, maybe that last one was a joke.)

The leader in the clubhouse, however, appears to be Indians shortstop Francisco Lindor. His case was given a boost this week by New Balance, the sneaker outfit for which Lindor has an endorsement deal.

"We have an idea for open banner space in Cleveland," the company tweeted along with a thinking face emoji and a mockup of what a banner of Lindor would look like. Interestingly, the picture didn't even include a look at his shoes, just a New Balance logo on the upper right.

We have an idea for open banner space in Cleveland [?] @Lindor12BC pic.twitter.com/zpGCBdYCxl

The giant LeBron banner, which was erected in 2014 after James came home to play again for the Cavaliers, was taken down by Nike on Tuesday. Sherwin-Williams is still mulling what to do with the wall. During the years James was in Miami, the side of the building featured images of Cleveland landmarks.

Cleveland Indians sweep Royals; Cody Allen sets franchise record for saves

By Paul Hoynes, cleveland.comphoynes@cleveland.com

KANSAS CITY, Mo. -- Once again the Indians didn't spoil Trevor Bauer with too many runs. But they scored just enough for Bauer to win his eighth game and send the Indians home happy after this 10-day, three-city trip.

The Indians scored early and then rode the pitching of Bauer and the bullpen to a 3-2 victory at Kauffman Stadium Wednesday night to complete a three-game sweep of the reeling Royals. Kansas City has lost five straight and 18 of its last 21 games. Cody Allen pitched the ninth for the save. He is now the franchise leader with 140. It was his 18th save of the season.

Allen, who allowed a one-out double to Alex Gordon, has converted 91 percent (140-for-154) of his save chances for the Indians. He is 18-for-19 this season.

"Whether he got a save tonight or not, he still means so much to all of us," said manager Terry Francona. "But it feels nice to brag about him. This was a kid drafted in the 23rd round (2011) and by being consummate professional, he's now the Indians all-time saves leader. That's pretty awesome.

"It's a pretty big accomplishment and he's not close to done."

Allen, who tied Bob Wickman for the franchise lead Tuesday night, struck out Hunter Dozier and Alcides Escobar to end the game following Gordon's double.

After the game Allen was doused with blue Gatorade by his teammates.

"This is something I'm extremely proud of," said Allen. "Hopefully I get to save a few more. But this is one of the things I get to hang my hat on for my career. It will be one of those trademark moments."

The Tribe went 5-4 on the trip. The Indians should be thankful they got back to the AL Central on their last stop on this journey. They went 2-4 against the Cardinals and A's before taking three straight from the Royals. They have won their last 10 AL Central games and lead the division by 1 1/2 games over Detroit.

The 1995 Indians won the AL Central by 30 games. On July 4, they had an 11-game lead.

Bauer (8-6, 2.45), with fireworks going off beyond the outfield walls to celebrate the Fourth of July, pitched over some sloppy defense for the win. He allowed two runs on six hits in 7 2/3 innings.

It was Bauer's 15th quality start in 18 starts overall. Five of those quality starts have come in losses where the Indians have scored two or fewer runs.

Asked if he was getting used to pitching with limited support, Bauer said, "We always have this conversation. I'm not sure why. The answer is always the same. I try to do my job and execute my job. That's all I can do."

The Indians took an early 3-0 lead against Trevor Oaks, who was called up from Class AAA Omaha before the game to replace injured starter Ian Kennedy.

Francisco Lindor opened the game with a walk, stole second and scored on Michael Brantley's double to right. It was Brantley's 500th career RBI and stretched Lindor's AL lead in runs scored to 75.

Brantley took third on a fly ball by Jose Ramirez and scored on Edwin Encarnacion's sacrifice fly to make it 2-0.

The Indians stretched the lead to 3-0 in the second on a sacrifice fly by Greg Allen. Jason Kipnis and Tyler Naquin walked to start the inning, and Roberto Perez advanced them with a sacrifice bunt.

The Royals made it 3-1 in the second on a double steal in the second inning. Kansas City had Alex Gordon on third, Hunter Dozier on second and two out when Dozier broke for second.

Kipnis stepped in front of second to take catcher Roberto Perez's throw as Dozier stopped and Gordon started creeping off third. Kipnis started to chase Dozier back to first as Gordon went halfway home. Kipnis turned and made a poor throw to third baseman Jose Ramirez, who had to scramble to make the catch as Gordon scored.

With two out the Indians had set up the play to get the out at second, but Kipnis gambled and tried to get Gordon.

The Royals made it a one-run game at 3-2 in the fifth on a sacrifice fly by Whit Merrifield. Alcides Escobar singled with one out, and Butera sent a grounder past first that Yonder Alonso dove over as Escobar went to third.

Oaks (0-2, 7.24) went four innings, allowing three runs on two hits. He struck out two and walked four. He was 5-3 at Class AAA Omaha.

What it means

After scoring 10 runs in the first five games of this trip, the Indians scored 33 in the last four.

The pitches

Oaks threw 73 pitches, 44 (60 percent) for strikes. Bauer threw 108 pitches, 68 (63 percent) for strikes.

Thanks for coming

The Indians and Royals drew 22,001 to Kauffman Stadium on Wednesday night. First pitch was at 8:15 p.m. with a temperature of 92 degrees.

The heat index was 100.

Next

The Indians are off on Thursday before opening a 10-game homestand leading into the All-Star break. Oakland arrives for a three-game visit starting Friday night at Progressive Field.

Carlos Carrasco (8-5, 4.24) is scheduled to come off the disabled list and face the A's and Paul Blackburn (2-2, 6.46) on Friday night at 7:10 p.m. Also scheduled to pitch against Oakland are Corey Kluber (12-4, 2.64) on Saturday and Shane Bieber (4-0, 2.97) on Sunday. They'll be facing Edwin Jackson (1-0, 2.13) and Frankie Montas (4-2, 3.83), respectively.

Oakland took two out of three from the Indians last weekend at the Coliseum.

Cody Allen becomes Indians' all-time saves leader in victory over Royals

By The Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. >> Trevor Bauer made plenty of quality pitches, but it was Cleveland catcher Roberto Perez who made the best throw of the night.

Bauer pitched effectively into the eighth inning as the Indians beat the skidding Kansas City Royals, 3-2, on July 4 for a three-game sweep. With the Royals trailing by one in the eighth, Whit Merrifield hit a leadoff double before Perez nabbed him attempting to steal third. "It was a huge play," Bauer said.

Merrifield, the 2017 AL stolen base champion, said he got a good jump

"They executed. I executed," Merrifield said. "They got me this time. It was the right play. If I had a chance to do it again, I'd do it again."

Perez gave credit to Bauer.

"He was thinking he was going to try and steal," Perez said. "He called fastball up and in and I thought that was the game right there. That was on Bauer. He hit me right in the chest and I made a strong throw, and (Jose) Ramirez made a good tag on him. I was fired up."

Michael Brantley had an early RBI double and the Indians scored all their runs in the first three innings on only one hit. Bauer struck out eight and walked one over 7 2/3 innings.

The plummeting Royals have lost six straight and 18 of 21. They have scored four or fewer runs in 25 of their past 26 games and are barely ahead of Baltimore for the worst record in the majors.

After winning on grand slams by Francisco Lindor and Yan Gomes the previous two nights, the Indians managed only four hits — two in the ninth inning.

Bauer (8-6) has struck out eight or more in eight consecutive starts. He allowed seven hits, six of them singles, and is 3-1 in his past four starts.

"It was frustrating in a lot of ways and I was happy the team won," Bauer said. "I made some good pitches and gave up some weak hits. I had too many two-strike pitches put into play. I need to clean that up."

Cody Allen worked the ninth to earn his 18th save in 19 chances. It was his 140th career save, breaking a tie with Bob Wickman for the club record.

Lindor walked to start the game, stole second and scored on Brantley's double. Brantley went to third on Ramirez's flyout and scored on Edwin Encarnacion's sacrifice fly.

The Indians manufactured a run without a hit in the second. Jason Kipnis and Tyler Naquin opened the inning with walks. Perez advanced both with a sacrifice bunt, and Greg Allen delivered a sacrifice fly.

Kansas City used a double steal to create a run in the second. Alex Gordon, who was hit by a pitch, and Hunter Dozier, who reached on an infield single, were at the corners with two outs. They pulled off a successful double steal, with Gordon scoring. It was Dozier's first career steal.

The last Royals player to steal home was Alex Rios on July 20, 2015, against Pittsburgh, also as part of a double steal.

Alcides Escobar singled in the Kansas City fifth and advanced to third on Drew Butera's one-out single. Escobar scored on Merrifield's sacrifice fly.

Royals starter Trevor Oaks (0-2), recalled from Triple-A Omaha to take Ian Kennedy's spot in the rotation, was removed after four innings and 73 pitches. He allowed three runs on two hits and four walks.

"The leadoff walks and not having good command, just really frustrating when I've walked like one or two guys an outing and now I'm back to four," Oaks said.

Oaks had a 0.62 ERA in his last seven Triple-A starts. Kennedy went on the disabled list with a strained left oblique.

Indians >> OF Brandon Guyer (bruised left knee) did not play after fouling a pitch off his leg in the ninth inning July 3. X-rays were negative. "He's got a bruise from the bone to the kneecap above his shin," manager Terry Francona said. . LHP Andrew Miller (right knee inflammation) is scheduled to throw a bullpen session July 5. . LHP Tyler Olson (shoulder strain) threw 17 pitches for Triple-A Columbus on a rehab assignment. He retired two batters, walked one, struck out one and did not allow a hit.

Royals >> 3B Mike Moustakas (back spasms) was held out of the lineup for the second straight game. "It's not serious at all," manager Ned Yost said. "He came in today and still felt it a little bit. With an off day tomorrow, there's no sense in pushing it." . OF Bubba Starling (oblique strain) was sent to the rookie-level Arizona League to begin a rehab assignment. Starling, a 2011 first-round draft pick, has not played since May 10 with Triple-A Omaha.

Indians >> Open a homestand July 6 against the Athletics with RHP Carlos Carrasco (8-5, 4.24 ERA) starting. Oakland will counter with RHP Paul Blackburn (2-2, 6.46).

Royals >> RHP Jason Hammel (2-10, 5.56) starts Friday night against the Red Sox at Kauffman Stadium. LHP Chris Sale (8-4, 2.41) gets the ball for Oakland.

Cody Allen sets Indians saves record, but the feat speaks to more than that

By Zack Meisel 1h ago 4

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Mere seconds after Cody Allen and Roberto Pérez embraced on the infield, the lights faded and the fireworks commenced at Kauffman Stadium.

Hey, if Allen won't marvel at his new position atop the Indians' all-time saves leaderboard, leave it to the opposing team to provide the pomp and circumstance. (OK, so maybe the fireworks were for the Royals' July 4 festivities, but the Royals did send over the lineup card for Allen to keep.)

Allen struck out the side in the ninth inning on Wednesday to capture his 140th save, one more than Bob Wickman, the previous record-holder, tallied during his Tribe tenure. Allen's teammates doused him with water and blue gatorade and, just this once, the closer permitted himself to soak up the moment.

"This is one of the things I get to hang my hat on for my career," Allen said. "I'll get to look back on it. This could be one of those trademark moments."

But really, it's not about the saves total. As Allen noted, Wickman notched a host of saves (128, in fact) with other organizations. And the save stat is a bit antiquated and ambiguous anyway. Braving the ninth inning on the mound requires a certain blend of mental toughness and pitching ability, but the stat itself doesn't paint the full portrait.

A closer can record a save for a one-pitch outing in a three-run game against a lowly opponent or for a six-out tightrope act, clinging to a one-run advantage against an imposing lineup. Allen entered with two outs in the ninth against the White Sox two weeks ago and earned a save for tossing two pitches. On Wednesday, he protected a one-run lead on the road before a healthy holiday crowd.

Allen's feat speaks more to his reliability and durability in the past six seasons. A glance at his numbers reveals that he's been a model of consistency.

2013: 2.43 ERA, 70 innings, 26 walks, 88 strikeouts
2014: 2.07 ERA, 69 innings, 26 walks, 91 strikeouts
2015: 2.99 ERA, 69 innings, 25 walks, 99 strikeouts
2016: 2.51 ERA, 68 innings, 27 walks, 87 strikeouts
2017: 2.94 ERA, 67 innings, 21 walks, 92 strikeouts
2018: 3.38 ERA, 66 innings, 25 walks, 82 strikeouts (on-pace stats)

"He's been super dependable for us," Trevor Bauer said. "That's really what it's a testament to, durability and consistency. He hasn't hit the DL. He takes the ball every time. He does a tremendous job at the back end for us. When you have someone that stabilizes the last inning like that, it makes things in front of it a little bit easier, because you only have to worry about covering two or three innings instead of four or five. It takes an inning away that you don't have to worry about. Obviously, an exciting and a big day for him. As a group, we couldn't be more happy for him."

Some reach for the nearest pack of Marlboros when he jogs in from the bullpen, but it's easy to become spoiled, especially when watching Andrew Miller up close for the past couple of years. Wickman made a habit out of playing with fire in the ninth inning. Joe Borowski and Chris Perez did the same. Few closers survive in the role with the same team for as long as Allen has.

And let's not forget Allen's path to this point. The Indians drafted him twice, once in the 16th round and once in the 23rd round. He breezed through the Indians' minor-league system and debuted in 2012, just 13 months after he joined the professional ranks. Terry Francona quickly assigned Allen to the fireman role, as he proved adept at escaping dicey situations in the later innings.

"He seemed to be at his best when there was traffic," Francona said. "He could get to his best stuff right away. He really took to it. Having a guy like that is so valuable. It made our bullpen way better."

"You have to find a pretty special guy. In theory, it's great, but you have to have the guys who can do it. One, you have to be able to neutralize the other split and Cody was really good against lefties. You have to be able to have the game not speed up (on you) because of baserunners. Obviously, not walking people is important. Some people have some of those, but not all of those qualities. When you get a guy who has all of those qualities, you have a chance to be pretty special."

When the Indians moved on from Chris Perez after the 2013 campaign, Allen graduated to the closer role, just a few years removed from pitching at High Point. And a few years later, he's a record-holder.

No, he couldn't have predicted this sort of milestone, but he'll remember the fireworks and the blue Gatorade.

"Nope. Never. Never," he said. "I think the organization probably believed in me more than I did at the time. And I've had some very, very high-character and great people within the organization (help me) get to this point. They saw potential in me and gave me the confidence I needed and helped me grind through some tough times."