

Not a Bad Week for the Indians, All Things Considered

Written by {ga=tommoore}

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The Cleveland Indians come back home for today's home opener after what, for them, has to be considered a nice road trip to open the season.

Sure, 3-3 on the road doesn't sound good on the surface, especially since the Tribe won the first two games of the trip in Toronto. But this is a Tribe team that has averaged 89 losses a year for the past five years, has been a collective 77 games under .500 on the road during that time, and was facing Toronto and Tampa Bay – only two of the American League's better teams – and, well, splitting the season's first road trip isn't a bad deal at all.

Even though six games is a small sample size, Tribe fans got a glimpse during the first week of what they will see from the team this year – and what the Tribe needs to do to be competitive.

In their three wins, the Indians received very good starting pitching. Justin Masterson won the first and last game of the trip, working 13 innings and giving up just five hits, one run and striking out 13.

In his lone start on the trip, Ubaldo Jimenez teased fans by working six innings of three-hit, one-run ball. That makes us more than a bit nervous, if you know what we mean, as Jimenez is scheduled to start today and he has been, if nothing else, the model of inconsistency during his time in Cleveland.

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The not-so-good part of the rotation came from Brett Myers, who brought his gopher with him across the boarder. While many Tribe fans wanted to write off that game as “well, what do you expect from Myers?”, he is the team’s No. 3 starter and that’s not going to change anytime soon.

Then there was Trevor Bauer, who falls somewhere in the middle for his spot-start on Saturday. Bauer walked the first four batters he faced, which seems pretty rare but, according to ESPN Stats & Information, Chicago’s John Danks did the same in 2009 and Bartolo Colon did it as well for the Tribe, on June 29, 2000, vs. the Royals.

Despite that inauspicious start, Bauer somehow carried a no-hitter into the fourth inning. He only lasted five innings, however, because he threw 105 pitches and only 59 of them were for strikes. (That’s not a good ratio for those of you scoring at home.)

Bauer is now back in Columbus for the foreseeable future, but after just one game in a Tribe uniform we get the sense that things are going to be interesting any time he takes the ball for a start.

It’s not realistic to expect Masterson to pitch the way he has so far every day he takes to the mound – at least we don’t think it is – and it’s important to remember that the Indians are only going to go as far as their rotation of third and fourth starters (on a good team) can carry them.

Offensively it’s been pretty much the Mark Reynolds and Carlos Santana show with a few cameos (Michael Bourn and Michael Brantley) from the rest of the lineup.

Reynolds homered twice in Toronto – one a game winner in extra innings – and hit two more on Sunday along with a double. Of his six hits this year, four have been home runs (matching the home run total of Johnny Damon, who played 64 games for the Indians last season). Add in his six strikeouts in 20 at bats so far, and Reynolds has either homered or struck out 50 percent of the time. He definitely is getting his money’s worth at the plate.

“He’s going to miss sometimes, but when he does (hit) it’s a game-changer and it was tonight,”

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[Tribe manager Terry Francona said of Reynolds after his game-winner against the Blue Jays](#)

. “You just have to be patient and let him swing because he’s going to run into something. Hopefully he runs into a lot.”

Santana only had one game on the trip where he did not get at least one hit, and after going 5-for-5 with a home run and three RBI in Sunday’s 13-0 win, Santana is now batting .500 on the season.

As for the rest of the lineup ... well ... when you look at the numbers it’s kind of amazing that the Tribe is coming home at 1-5.

The Tribe’s 2-3-4 hitters have been, to put it mildly, abysmal. Asdrubal Cabrera is batting .083 after Sunday’s 0-for-4 showing; Jason Kipnis is batting .136 and got the day off on Sunday; and Nick Swisher, he of the largest free-agent contract in franchise history, is down to .182 after going 0-for-5 on Sunday. (Good thing he’s a “bro from O-H-I-O” or else fans might start worrying about that \$56 million).

The trio has also combined to strike out 19 times while only driving in four runs, creating quite a hole in the lineup.

Throw in Lonnie Chisenhall hitting .227 and Drew Stubbs hitting .182 – and that is after both players getting two hits on Sunday – and that’s a lot of drag on the Tribe’s batting order.

It also goes a long way toward explaining how the Tribe had a 20-inning scoreless streak that started Thursday night in Toronto and didn’t end until the second inning on Sunday.

“We’re scuffling a little bit,” [Francona understated after Saturday’s game against the Rays](#) .

“These type of things tend to get exaggerated because it’s early. I hang my hat on these guys having a track record.”

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Once the Indians got going on Sunday, however, they never stopped, putting up 13 runs and 17 hits (including eight runs and 10 hits against David Price, who came into the game 5-0 in his career against the Tribe with an ERA of 1.64).

Hopefully Sunday's effort was a sign that the offense is going to start finding a groove as well as a happy medium between the scoreless streak and Sunday's output. While neither extreme is likely to occur very often this season, hopefully the offense that struggled during the week is not the one we see on a regular basis this season.

Despite the midweek struggles, the Tribe comes home just a game out of first place in the A.L. Central Division. Today marks the start of a 10-game home stand that features the only Cleveland appearances by the New York Yankees and Boston Red Sox, as well as the first three of several visits from the Chicago White Sox.

While we're not sure which Tribe team will show up, judging by what we've seen during the first week of the season we're pretty sure the next 11 days should be interesting.

(Photo by The Associated Press)