



The beauty of baseball was on display on Sunday afternoon in Tropicana Field. The Indians began the game with 19 consecutive innings without a run. A scoreless first inning against David Price pushed that number to 20, after they left yet another runner on third base with less than two outs. With Price on the mound and the Indians offense struggling mightily, it looked like it was going to be a long day.

Then, something happened. The Indians got a two-out RBI single from Drew Stubbs, who entered the game with an 0-for-9 slump with five strikeouts, and everybody in the third base dugout relaxed. By the middle of the third inning, it was 4-0. By the middle of the fifth inning, it was 8-0. All of the runs were earned and all of the runs were scored off of reigning Cy Young Award winner David Price.

In total, the Indians banged out 17 hits, five from Carlos Santana, hit five home runs, and put a baker's dozen up on the board. The 13-0 thumping made for a fun plane ride back to Cleveland with a 3-3 road trip against two of the American League East's best and four of the division's best pitchers in R.A. Dickey, Brandon Morrow, Matt Moore, and David Price.

Normally, it would be hard to take a lot of good out of a series where the team was shut out twice and salvaged just the series finale, but the Indians got a lot of encouraging things from two key parts of their rotation and some of the underlying differences from 2012 to 2013 showed themselves.

First off, let's start with the performance of Justin Masterson. According to his

Baseball-Reference Game Score, which I won't explain how it's calculated, Masterson's Game Score of 78 was the sixth-best start of his career. He was fantastic, holding the Rays to two hits over seven innings with eight punchouts. He threw just under 63 percent of his pitches for strikes and had a 5:1 GO:FO ratio. These are all fabulous signs for Masterson. Add this start to his start in Toronto and Masterson has pitched 13 innings with one run allowed on just five hits, 13 strikeouts, and seven walks. Oh, and, to top it off, both of those starts came on turf, where ground ball pitchers tend to struggle with the faster infield conditions and occasionally tricky hops.

I [wrote about Mark Reynolds](#) in late December shortly after the Indians signed him. Aside from the ignorant comments I led off the article with, which are totally worth reading again, the overall takeaway from the article was that Reynolds produces more than enough to hide his high strikeout totals. It's not to say that I expected this kind of start from Reynolds, who is now 6-for-20 with four home runs, but this is why the Indians signed him. He has a lightning bolt for a bat. Think about lightning during a thunderstorm. Most of the time, it hits nothing, just a release of atmospheric energy. Sometimes, it will hit a tree, a person, a building, or something else. When lightning hits something, it tends to have a really big effect.

Yes, Reynolds has struck out in six of his 20 at bats, and in each of the five games he has played, as well. He's also walked twice. And he has a game-winning home run, a monstrous blast at that. Indians fans seem to fall into these delusions where they expect a player to be something that he's not. Mark Reynolds is not a .300 hitter. Mark Reynolds is not a good defensive player. What Mark Reynolds is, however, is a guy with tremendous power, the ability to change a game with one swing of the bat, and a player who, over the course of the season, will out-hit his strikeouts.

How important can the addition of Michael Bourn be? In a game where everything can be measured, it may be almost immeasurable. Bourn scored just his third run of the season on a home run today, despite having been on base eight other times prior to the long ball. He stole his first base today, taking third base after Asdrubal Cabrera failed to advance him from second after his leadoff double. Ryan Raburn didn't drive him in, but Bourn took the base without a throw to put himself at third with less than two outs.

Bourn has been on base in 10 of his 28 plate appearances. Asdrubal Cabrera, Jason Kipnis, and Ryan Raburn have hit second and third this season. Cabrera is 2-for-24, Kipnis is 3-for-22, and Raburn was 1-for-4 batting third on Sunday. That's a .120 batting average for the guys immediately following Bourn in the lineup. Get Cabrera and Kipnis going and keep Bourn at a good pace offensively and this offense has a brand new dimension that they have not shown

yet.

Is this the Carlos Santana we've all been waiting for? He's hitting seeds all over the field. He's punishing mistakes and attacking pitches he can hit. Everybody knows walks are good and making outs isn't good. Santana fell into the trap of being too patient last season. This year, he's swinging away and he's hitting pitches with authority. Not only that, but he still has two walks to just one strikeout. It's a small sample size alert, but Santana is 12-for-24 with two home runs and two doubles.

We'll still have to endure Santana's growing pains behind the plate and the at bats where he pulls off of breaking balls on the outer half and weakly grounds out, but this is the Carlos Santana we have envisioned since we ripped off the Dodgers in the Casey Blake trade.

At some point, teams will stop throwing Santana pitches to hit and the onus will be on Mark Reynolds, Lonnie Chisenhall, Drew Stubbs, and Mike Aviles to make it hurt, but, for now, it's a thing of beauty watching that kid swing the bat.

We've got to talk about Trevor Bauer's start. Bauer walked seven batters in his Indians debut, four in the first and three in the third. In the second, fourth, and fifth, he didn't walk anybody. Ironically, Bauer gave up two of his three runs in an inning without a walk.

The context of Bauer's pitching philosophy is important here. Breaking balls, by definition, break. They descend on their way to the plate. Bauer believes that fly balls are better than ground balls. It's certainly not the common opinion, but damn near everything about Bauer is uncommon. If you watched Bauer's start closely, his fastball command was the problem and most of those pitches missed high. It's not that hitters at the Major League level are immune to chasing high fastballs, but they do it at a much lower percentage than minor league hitters do. Bauer will simply have to adjust. Living up in the zone is a dangerous proposition at the MLB level. It's not impossible to do, but only a small percentage of pitchers can do it with regularity. Cleveland will be a better fit for Bauer to do that because Arizona's Chase Field is one of the best hitters' parks in baseball.

The rise on his four-seam fastball is a good attribute, because it happens late. The Rays were a tough draw for him because they are a patient team and Dale Scott's moving strike zone didn't

help either. But, there was a lot of potential in Bauer's start. It was just hard to see.

According to [BrooksBaseball's Pitch F/X data](#) (select 2013 in the drop-down box), the average vertical movement on Bauer's fastball was 11 inches. That's going to induce a lot of pop ups and weak fly outs. Unfortunately for Bauer, too many pitches were up and out of the zone. Of the 58 four-seamers he threw, 28 were balls, 10 were called strikes, 13 were fouled off, and only one was a swing and miss. He got six swings and misses with his breaking stuff.

If it feels like I'm overanalyzing Bauer's start, it's the way he would want it. He would stop during bullpen sessions in Spring Training to look at a high speed camera frame-by-frame to look at his mechanics. He tirelessly studies his craft. Perhaps to the point where it's too much.

One spot start shouldn't define Trevor Bauer. He's 22 years old. The Indians have a very smart kid with good stuff and high upside that just needs some refinement.

On the subject of Trevor Bauer, let's talk about what was ugly from this series: The commentary of Matt Underwood and Rick Manning regarding Trevor Bauer. Not only did Rick Manning repeatedly refer to the Rays as "the Jays" or "Toronto" throughout the series, he sounded like he had a vendetta against Trevor Bauer. He began criticizing Bauer's mechanics without knowing the method to Bauer's madness. He and Underwood, as is to be expected, made a big deal about Bauer's long toss routine and that "stick" he uses. That "stick" is a shoulder tube designed by Oates' Specialties to exercise the shoulder muscles. The rhythmic action of the tube combined with the weights on the end exercises the shoulder muscles as a whole, rather than just stretching certain muscles in that group.

That's from a simple Google search. Underwood and Manning could have done that instead of sounding completely ignorant about it. Manning almost spoke in a snarky tone regarding Bauer's methods. They never explained WHY Bauer used the shoulder tube. Isn't that something viewers would want to know? Especially because most of them don't know much of anything about Bauer.

Underwood, who has an obsession with pitch counts, mentioned that Bauer "doesn't care about his pitch count" and "has no idea what it is". When [asked about pitch counts](#) by Diamondbacks beat writer Nick Piecoro in May 2012, Bauer said, "That's definitely the biggest concern.

Obviously, the more people I walk, the higher the pitch count and the less innings I throw. That's something that doesn't correlate to winning. The issue on that is, my goal for every at-bat is have the hitter either out or on base within four pitches. If I do a good job of sequencing pitches, then I'm going to get weak contact and stuff like that. That keeps me aggressive and it should limit my pitch count. If I get every at-bat over in four pitches or less, I end up going seven or eight innings. Let's say I give up five hits and walk two guys, in seven innings, that's 28 batters and every at-bat in four pitches or less, that adds up to 112 pitches. So that's a good outing. That's in the acceptable range."

Sounds like a kid who is pretty aware of it to me. Again, Google is your friend. Manning's reaction to the pitch count discussion, he laughed and said "he should care". Hard-hitting analysis.

Manning harped on how awful it would be to play defense behind Bauer because of the walks and all of the pitches, willfully ignoring the fact that Bauer is one of the few pitchers who thinks fly balls are good, something the former Major League outfielder should enjoy hearing.

Ultimately, Underwood and Manning are there to do play-by-play and give viewers something to listen to between pitches. But, is it really too much to ask to do some homework on what you want to discuss? If they want to banter about Matt Underwood's fear of putting his hand in a tank of stingrays, that's mindless chatter and I don't care. When they are mouthpieces for the organization and Manning is sitting there destroying Trevor Bauer, the team's prized offseason acquisition, it becomes an issue. Yeah, Bauer walked a lot of guys. Yeah, it's hard to play defense behind a guy throwing a ton of pitches with few balls in play. Manning knows that – he played centerfield. What Manning doesn't know is the ins and outs of pitching mechanics.

No, they don't have to sugar coat Bauer's start and be homers about it. The kid wasn't very good and he'd be the first one to tell you that. There was no mention of how Bauer thinks inducing fly balls is better than inducing ground balls, hence the dip in his delivery to get his momentum to get more tilt on his breaking ball and more rise on his fastball.

I like Rick Manning. I feel I'm in the minority there, but I do. I think he's insightful about baserunning and hitting. It's nice that he has a long-time connection to the Indians organization and that he has served as an instructor with the team's outfielders in previous Spring Trainings. He's occasionally witty and generally perceptive. But, in this instance, he was unfair in his criticism of Bauer. The kid is not Major League ready and very few would dispute that fact. But,

Manning sounded like he had completely made up his mind about the 22-year-old who is challenging baseball's conventional wisdom after seeing him a few times in Spring Training and in one regular season start.

It was disappointing to hear that Manning and Underwood were so ill-informed on Bauer, his routines, and his ideology. They should have a desire to learn about one of the most interesting players in the organization, but it didn't sound like they did. I think Manning has preconceived notions about Bauer because of the way he's challenging the way things have been done for a long time. It probably rubs a lot of people the wrong way. But, that wasn't the place to show it and I hope they sound more informed when Bauer is back up for another start later in the season.