



So, it hasn't started the way we hoped it would. The Indians are now 3-5 after getting shellacked by the Yankees and their offense full of journeymen, has-beens, and Robinson Cano. After less than five percent of the season, it appears people are either preparing to jump off the bandwagon or have already done so. Eight games. That's all it is taking for "fans" to start writing off the Indians.

What's amazing about that is that most of the problems the Indians are having are things we were fully aware of before the season began. The starting rotation is not good. Justin Masterson has put together two very fine starts, but aside from that, the other four starters have posted an 8.70 ERA over 30 innings of work. Some people are treating this like it's a surprise development. It's not. This was the team's glaring weakness entering the season and it will remain that throughout the season. However, it's almost impossible for a starting rotation to continue to be that terrible. There's room for improvement here.

The bullpen innings have mostly been thrown by guys like Matt Albers and Cody Allen. Those guys are sacrificial lambs for when the team is trailing so that Francona doesn't have to use Joe Smith, Vinnie Pestano, or Chris Perez. Obviously, the amount of work that Albers and Allen

have gotten is disappointing, because it means the Indians aren't winning or leading late in the game, but it's the way it has gone thus far.

Defensively, the Indians have made some mental errors and have lacked focus. They have allowed too many extra bases in the outfield by overthrowing cutoff men or not hustling to balls. Mike Aviles has struggled at third base when spelling Lonnie Chisenhall and that's to be expected with a guy who had played less than 440 innings there in his career prior to this season. Asdrubal Cabrera and Jason Kipnis have taken their struggles at the plate out into the field with them. Pitchers have forgotten about baserunners and stolen bases have led to runs. A couple of lazy plays from Carlos Santana behind the plate have made an impact.

Those are things that absolutely cannot happen with the frequency that they have. This team is working with a small margin for error with the rotation and free runners and extra bases are really going to hurt them. The Indians cannot be lackadaisical in any facet of the game, especially the defensive one.

The complaints about the offense are what amuse me. Through eight games, the Indians have faced RA Dickey, Brandon Morrow, Mark Buehrle, Matt Moore, Alex Cobb, David Price, Hiroki Kuroda, and Andy Pettitte. In 2012, those eight guys combined for 106 wins, a 3.23 ERA, 1,185 strikeouts and 387 walks in 1,379.1 innings pitched. That's a 3.06 K/BB ratio. The league average K/BB ratio over the last five seasons is 2.196.

Arguably, through the first eight games of the season, the Indians have faced the best collection of pitchers of any team. This is a lineup with tons of expectations. There's the hype from the preseason, where everybody talked about how great the lineup could be and also the pressure of having to compensate for a poor starting rotation on a nightly basis.

The Indians are third in plate appearances with runners in scoring position after eight games. They're 20th in batting average, 22nd in on-base percentage, and 16th in OPS in that situation. They're getting chances, they're just not cashing in on them. Unfortunately, with the amount of runs they're giving up, they have to cash in on a much larger percentage of those opportunities than some teams do.

It's not good for morale that the Indians have gotten bombed by the Yankees in their first two

home games. Ubaldo Jimenez, regardless of the spin that the organization is trying to put on the radar gun, was and is a mechanical mess and is probably beyond repair. Carlos Carrasco was making his first start in 615 days. Not just Major League start, but first start period (no, Spring Training doesn't count). Brett Myers entered a game in a situation where he knew he was out there to take a pounding if necessary and didn't really seem to have much of an interest in being out there. The opinion of him is exacerbated by his start in Toronto, but it's ludicrous to read anything into a long relief appearance in a game that was decided when Myers stepped onto the mound.

There are three keys to making the playoffs or being in contention. One is winning within your division. Another is playing around .500 ball against the good teams outside of your division. Another is beating up on the bums. The Indians have yet to play a division game, are 3-5 against three teams from the American League East, and have not played Houston or Minnesota yet. The schedule makers didn't give them any favors early in the year and this is a team with a lot of moving parts, new faces, and a transitional period that needs to be completed. They began the season with 13 straight games and no off days with 10 of those 13 games against AL East competition.

Terry Francona is still learning about his guys. The team is playing very tight right now. Not to mention, through eight games, the Indians have already used six different starting pitchers and will use a seventh on Wednesday night in place of Brett Myers. Two of the team's key offensive contributors, Asdrubal Cabrera and Jason Kipnis, are batting a combined .136 (8-for-59).

No, the problems with the starting rotation will not go away and the 2013 debuts of Carlos Carrasco and Trevor Bauer did very little to ease the fans' fears. Right now, neither guy looks like a viable option to take over for Ubaldo Jimenez or Brett Myers. But, the sky is not falling. There is a lot of baseball to be played.

Step back from the ledge, Cleveland. A lot of you are making your return to caring about the Indians for the first time in a few years, so your leash is much shorter than others. But, panicking after eight games is ridiculous. The problems that the Indians are experiencing are things they expected and planned for. They're not taken aback nor are they surprised by any of them. It's a long season and things are going to level out. The starters are not as bad as they have performed and the offense is better than it has shown.

Most people believe that the 40-game mark is where you can start making true observations

and assumptions. We're a long way away from that. Baseball is the longest season of them all, with 162 games and almost six full months of competition. You'll drive yourself crazy if you live and die with every game and blow it out of proportion. Put things in perspective and in the proper context.

Right now, the proper context is that there are 154 games left in the season and the final scores of the last two games mean very little in the grand scheme of things.