



The Indians failed in their quest for a sweep of the Chicago White Sox, but still won their second series of the season, taking two out of three from the Pale Hosers. It certainly could have been both worse and better, as the Indians managed just one hit for most of Friday night's game and were a Brett Myers mistake away from possibly winning Sunday's game. Either way, by taking two out of three against a Central Division foe, which is never a bad thing, the Indians put themselves in a position to have a .500 homestand with a series win over the Red Sox.

The good obviously starts with Justin Masterson, who has been nothing short of fantastic so far this season. Masterson improved to 3-0 on the season with a 0.41 ERA. More importantly, he has a 2.50 K/BB ratio early in the year. Lefties are batting just .146 off of Masterson who leads MLB in wins, ERA, innings pitched, complete games, shutouts, HR/9, and total baldness.

For there to be meaningful September baseball, Masterson has to be the ace of this staff. Nobody expects him to continue this pace, but if he can post numbers similar to 2011, this offense and bullpen will help him win a lot of ballgames. It remains to be seen if this is a small sample size mirage, but it's certainly promising.

Moreover, it's important to note the role Terry Francona has had in this whole thing. Francona, who watched Masterson grow up in the Red Sox organization, clearly has a way with players and Masterson needed somebody like that. After departed Tribe skipper Manny Acta often left Masterson out to dry on the mound, much to the chagrin of some of his teammates, Masterson went to the hill as a pitcher without confidence. Francona showed Masterson one of the utmost displays of managerial confidence when he left Masterson out in the 8th to get out of a jam against left handed hitter Alejandro de Aza and let Masterson face the 2-3-4 hitters in the White Sox lineup in the 9th. Don't think that was lost on Masterson or his teammates. That was a big statement from Tito and everybody in that clubhouse took notice.

The excitement, the enthusiasm, and the personality of this team could not be any more different from what we have had in recent years. Nothing should surprise us about Nick Swisher, whose infectious passion for the game, and life in general, is pretty evident on a daily basis. Swisher's walk-off single on Friday night was his first big hit as an Indian and he, and the rest of the team, let everybody know it. He followed it up by hitting his first home run as an Indian off of Chris Sale in the first inning of Saturday's game.

Not only is he tremendously important for clubhouse morale, but he's a big part of the middle of the Indians order. With Asdrubal Cabrera in desperate need of a slumpbuster and Jason Kipnis both ineffective and injured, Swisher needs big hits. He had drawn eight walks in his first seven games, which was great, but he also had just one extra base hit. He had two on Saturday, including the home run. He also walked, was hit by a pitch, and scored three runs.

How about the job that Zach McAllister did on Saturday? It was a horrible day to play a game. I was there. It went from sprinkles to moderately heavy rain to sleet to more rain to a damp cold wind. In other words, it was ugly outside. In the first inning, Mark Reynolds failed to lead McAllister to the bag on what should have been the second out of the inning. It led to an unearned run and Paul Konerko singled home another after what should have been the third out.

In the past, McAllister might have folded. He allowed 19 unearned runs in just 22 starts in 2012. This is the second straight outing where McAllister has allowed two unearned runs, but hasn't folded the tent. He's growing up as a pitcher. After the first inning, McAllister allowed just three hits, two in the second inning. An inherited runner of his scored after he left the game.

He probably could have kept going but, with the game well in hand and the bullpen needing work, Francona opted to go the pen with McAllister at just 89 pitches. He threw 66 of them for strikes and threw a first-pitch strike to 19 out of 26 batters.

I've said all along that McAllister is a big key to this rotation. He wasn't hit very hard in Tampa in his first start and he was dominant in his second start. With the uncertainty from the other three spots in the rotation, every good start McAllister can give is magnified that much more. He was terrific on a very tough day to pitch and has already shown more maturity in two starts this

season than in all 22 of his 2012 starts.

Yan Gomes has been phenomenal for the Indians in place of injured starting catcher Carlos Santana. At the plate he has had his struggles, sans the home run on Saturday, but he has been a major asset to the pitching staff. It certainly wasn't pretty on Tuesday night against the Yankees, but that wasn't all on Gomes. In the Chicago series, Indians pitchers allowed just seven runs, struck out 17, and walked just two. He has shown poise beyond his years behind the dish, with several key mound visits and a great feel for calling games.

Brett Myers was significantly better on Sunday than he had been in either of his two previous appearances. It looked like Myers was working with a better rhythm than in his other two outings. He seemed to be in more of a groove right from the start and the one mistake he made wound up being his downfall. He probably won't pitch that good very many times, so it's a tough pill to swallow for the Indians to lose that game. But, it was nice to see Myers get a little confidence back and eat innings. And, for the record, no second guessing from me. I agreed with Francona's decision to let Myers stay in and pitch to Dunn and Konerko.

The Indians are facing some adversity early in the year and that's good. Their depth has been tested and guys like Ryan Raburn, Mike Aviles, and Gomes have answered the bell. They've played through bad weather and won games in various fashions. All of these things will help down the road.

It wasn't all happy for the Indians over the weekend. Carlos Santana managed just a lone pinch hit appearance and had some sort of contraption on his thumb that he had to adjust each time he stepped out of the batter's box. He managed to pulverize a ball foul before walking to culminate a terrific at bat. He is expected back in the lineup on Tuesday, possibly in a designated hitter role with the injury to Michael Bourn.

Bourn's injury could have been a lot worse. His finger was sliced open by the cleat of White Sox pitcher Matt Thornton on a head-first dive into first base in the eighth inning of Sunday's game. Had Bourn run through the bag, he and Thornton may have collided as ball and runner got to the base at almost the same exact time. The finger laceration is expected to keep him out of the lineup for a few games, but it's certainly better than what could have happened. Either way, the Indians acquired depth for this exact reason.

Asdrubal Cabrera continues to look totally lost at the plate. The issue looks like pitch recognition, as Cabrera has swung at just 51.9 percent of in the zone, but 30.9 percent of pitches out of the zone. He is completely caught in between, taking hittable pitches and swinging at bad pitches. Of the 28 balls Cabrera has put in play, he has squared up just four of them for line drives and has hit 57.1 percent of them on the ground. He's not staying on the baseball and not recognizing pitches well. These are fixable things, but they're also spawned from a lack of confidence, which 5-for-42 can certainly do.

For the ugly, I only have one thing to discuss and it actually benefited us. Robin Ventura is not a good manager. He may be the nicest guy in the world, though probably not, but he's not a good manager. On Thursday, the White Sox were tied 3-3 with the Nationals entering the bottom of the fourth. With one out, opposing pitcher Dan Haren doubled. With two outs, Jayson Werth singled and Haren stopped at third. Dylan Axelrod's first pitch to Bryce Harper was wild and Haren scored and Werth moved to second. Ventura made the decision to intentionally walk Harper, who had singled in a run the previous inning. The walk put runners on first and second. Ryan Zimmermann came up and promptly doubled them both home. The Zimmermann double pushed the Nationals' win expectancy percentage to 86 percent. It was the fourth inning.

The next night, Michael Bourn doubled with one out in the ninth. After Asdrubal Cabrera grounded out, the Indians had a 62 percent chance to win with Jason Kipnis at the plate and two outs. Kipnis entered that at bat hitting a paltry .125. He was 1-for-3 against Crain. Ventura opted to walk Kipnis, presumably to set up the force at second. It wasn't because of the righty-lefty matchup because the on-deck hitter, Nick Swisher, is a switch hitter.

Swisher entered that at bat 3-for-8 against Crain with a homer and a couple of walks. Swisher, in his own right, was struggling at the plate, batting below .250, but that's not .125. The correct move for Ventura here, if he wanted to inexplicably walk Kipnis, is to also walk Swisher to load the bases for Mark Reynolds, who is not a very good contact hitter. If you're going to avoid the left handed hitter batting .125, you might as well avoid the left handed hitter batting .250. The flaw here is walking Kipnis.

Swisher singled. The Indians celebrated. If Kipnis gets a hit, there's nothing to question. Since Swisher got a hit, there's everything to question. If Swisher doesn't get a hit, Ventura will wrongly be applauded for his decision, based solely on the fact that it worked.

People like to ask how much a manager actually affects the outcome of a game. There's a

pretty good example of it right there.