

## Morning Rundown: The Cleveland Indians, Hottest Team in Baseball

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

Sunday, May 19 2013 9:10 PM - Last Updated Monday, May 20 2013 8:39 AM

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Regardless of what the Tigers did against the Rangers on Sunday Night Baseball, YOUR Cleveland Indians were coming into this week in first place of the AL Central and the hottest team in baseball. They've got one more left against the Mariners, and win or lose, they're going to welcome Detroit into Cleveland as the leaders of the AL Central for a first place show down.

Is this what it's going to be all summer? Because it sure as heck looks like it. Detroit and Cleveland look like the class of the Central right now. Kansas City looks okay and they may be in it, but the way the Indians look? Detroit and Cleveland could be taking this one to September.

First things first of course. There's this little matter of Eric Wedge's Seattle Mariners, who are one game away from being swept in four games.

**MARINERS - 0 | INDIANS - 6**

**W: Justin Masterson (7-2)**

**L: Felix Hernandez (5-3)**

[\*\*\[BOXSCORE\]\*\*](#)

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In his past three starts now, Justin Masterson has had ONE bad inning.

Seriously, go back to his start against Oakland, and other than a fourth inning in which he gave up a bunch of singles that scored three runs, Masterson has been untouchable. Date back to that fifth inning against Oakland and he's gone 19 straight scoreless spanning that game, the shutout against the Yankees, and yesterday's excellent start against the Mariners.

Sunday's game also marked the fourth game Masterson has pitched where he has gone seven innings and hasn't given up a run. He has two complete game shutouts to his name this season and two more of those starts and in both he has struck out eight. I mean coming into this year, he has had one complete game shutout, and now he has two.

Oh and the most impressive stat of Masterson's 2013 season thus far? He's 3-0 pitching in games with former Cy Young winners. If he keeps this up, he's going to add that title to his resume. He is now in the company of seven game winners in Major League Baseball, and has his ERA below 3.00. He's pitched more innings than anyone in the game and who would have thought, but he's third in the AL in strikeouts.

He came just one shy of his career high of 12 in just seven innings against the Mariners. In fact, it was his first double digit strikeout game since he struck out 12 in nine innings against the White Sox in his last start of 2009, the year he arrived in Cleveland. He was absolutely brilliant and incredibly fun to watch. Little traffic on the base-paths, lots of strikeouts, [and he did it all in just over 100 pitches](#)

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*"When you're going against Felix, and there's not one guy in the clubhouse that didn't think we had a chance to win, that's a pretty big compliment to Masty," Indians manager Terry Francona said. "From the very first pitch of the game, he came out firing. And he not only was firing, but he was pitching. He was using both sides of the plate. He was using the two-seamer, four-seamer, throwing the breaking ball to both sides of the plate. He just kept going up, down, in, out and just worked ahead."*

And in the credit where credit is due department, the most impressive thing about this particular

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start? The Mariners filled their lineup with left-handers against him. Only three were hitting right-handed and they were mostly towards the bottom of the lineup. With a few switch-hitters, the Mariners were able to load up on Masterson's kryptonite. That didn't matter in this one though and that is a supreme credit to Masterson.

Of course we can't credit Mastey without crediting the offense that has been bashing these Cy Young pitchers. They made Felix Hernandez look completely ordinary. They worked him from the get-go, and chased him after five innings. He hasn't gone fewer than six innings all year, he hasn't given up more than four earned runs since June of last year. It was his shortest outing since May of last year. This guy rarely goes out and doesn't give you a quality start. And the Indians made him look like an ordinary starting pitcher.

What I love most about these numbers is the motivation behind it. Not only are the Indians aware of the fact that they have completely owned Cy Young award winners this season, they are making no bones about the fact that they want to dismantle all of them that they face off against.

*"Are we aware of it? In this locker room? Absolutely, we are," Brantley said. "We talked about it this morning before we came in. But it's more about our approach, making sure that we don't do too much, and like I said before, we want to work the count and get him out of there in the fifth inning if we can. We did a great job today."*

[As Sporting News runs down](#) , they have forced an 8.21 ERA and a 1.87 WHIP in eight starts against Cy Young award winning pitchers. They'll get a chance to do it again to Verlander on Wednesday, but these numbers alone are incredible. They have POUNDED these pitchers. Not just winning, but scoring five, six, eight runs off these pitchers. Forcing them out before five innings, collecting eight hits. It's incredible. MLB.com's Zack Meisel [even notes that they've scored MORE RUNS](#) than innings pitched against them. 42 runs in 41 and two-thirds innings.

It was Brantley's shot in the second inning that really put the exclamation point on the game. Felix would go on to give up one more run after that before exiting, but it was in the second that the game was really over for him. He got the first two outs of the inning, then proceeded to give up back-to-back singles to Bourn and Kipnis. Brantley then rocketed one over the center field wall. Bourn's hit was especially important in setting that inning up as it was an infield single.

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It was as important as his hustle double was the previous inning to lead off the game. Bourn's hustle and heads-up running on Michael Morse in right enabled that double to happen and enabled him to score on Brantley's single later in the first. Brantley was able to score later on because he got to second on another Morse defensive play when he threw past the cutoff man to "try" and get Bourn at home.

So, yes, King Felix's defense let him down in several instances, but the Indians were putting in some great at-bats. Only one of the seven at-bats went less than four pitches in the first inning against Hernandez and after the getting the first two outs in the second on five pitches, the next four hitters managed to make Felix throw 18 more pitches. And just like that, the King had thrown nearly 60 pitches before he even reached the third inning. That is how you make an ace work.

### Random Notes...

How about Mike Aviles? The heads-up baserunning by Bourn all game was fantastic, but the play in the fourth inning when Aviles rounded third on a weakly squibbed ball in front of the plate by Drew Stubbs was brilliant. Because Felix didn't cover home when Montero abandoned home plate, there was no one to cover for Smoak to throw home. That was all Aviles.

Jason Kipnis and Bourn had big games, each with two hits, Bourn with two runs scored and Kip with one. Combined though, they've really set the table for the lineup the entire series. They've combined for 13 hits, 6 runs scored, three steals and five runs batted in.

Call Brantley Mr. Fill-In. Brantley hasn't really been able to settle into the fifth-sixth spots that he was supposed to be occupying because he's been filling in at first for Bourn and everywhere else in the lineup. This was just his second start in the three-hole for Cabrera. He responded with the home run and four RBI game of course.

Jason Giambi, four at-bats, no hits, two walks. He's hitting .188 this year but his OBP is .293 and has knocked in 12 runs. When you have played in 15 games and have 12 runs batted in, plus eight runs scored, you can hit sub-.200. All his at-bats are professional, as was the one

early on that helped set up the rallying.

### [CHRIS PEREZ VS THE WORLD, AGAIN]

You know what is really tiring? The people who hate Chris Perez to the point of absurdity. I feel like we've been here before with this. Let me outline this real quick.

I don't have a problem if you:

- Dislike Chris Perez because of what he says
- Dislike Chris Perez because his saves are too exciting
- Dislike Chris Perez because he has a beard

Not everyone is going to like him, especially because of the things he said last year and because he can come off as a little outspoken. That's cool, great, don't like him, that's your opinion.

You cross the line though when you wish death upon someone, as was the case after Perez blew the save on Saturday, then proceeded to get the win after the Indians came back. Many if they didn't say they would "disrupt a moment of silence for him dying" tweeted profanities and derogatory comments toward CP. If he had previously blocked them ( [which he has been known to do](#) ) they would get even more feisty for having been blocked.

I wonder what those ignoramuses did to get blocked?

And to say he doesn't deserve the win is the most obvious comment to ever make. So obvious, [even Perez admitted it didn't belong to him](#)

. That's baseball though friends. It's a meaningless stat compared to how many times your TEAM wins the game.

And then to boo him.

Look, I've had this argument with people before and it isn't one worth having, because when it comes down to it, people have their right to boo.

Just as I have the right to call them crappy fans. Why are they crappy fans? Because you are there to support the team. Boo the other team for hitting the home run, but when Perez walks off the mound, you showing your disapproval for his performance is not helping matters. Do you think he wanted to go out there and blow the game? Of course not, he doesn't need the reminder. Booing him won't help him go out the next time and pitch better because someone booed him last time out, your exercise in displeasure is futile.

But again, your hard earned money is being used to go to the game to see him pitch, so you can do what you want. I'm not going to tell you not to boo or to boo, but I will tell you that if you do choose to boo, you are not much of a fan you claim to be. The best example that I heard was from Andre Knott on the WTAM 1100 wrap-up show when a caller disagreed with him in his right to boo.

Knott simply said "Would you boo your mother after she cooked a bad meal at dinner?" No, of course not. The caller's response was that his mother isn't the closer for the Cleveland Indians. While that is also true, the point Knott is making is a valid one. Perez is a member of the team you support. He had a bad game. It isn't right to go out and boo him for that.

Do I come to your job and boo you when you make a mistake? Oh but you aren't getting paid millions of dollars? That's fine. Do you go and boo a lawyer when he loses a case? How about a doctor when he misdiagnosis someone? Do you boo a teacher for failing a student?

Of course this is sports, and those occupations don't have fans, no one is paying to go see them entertain you. You make your money and it is hard earned and you expect a good performance. But you are also a fan of the team you are watching and you are supposed to support them. This team is playing so well right now, winning games and playing an exciting brand of baseball. What reason do we have to boo anyone? Instead of that, can't we just get

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behind the rest of the team in the bottom of the frame and hope they rectify the situation (they did!)?

Booing aside, the people that want to trade Chris Perez or think he is "the worst closer ever" are sadly misinformed. Here are just a few statistics that I've seen boasted around in defense of Perez.

[Bastian notes Perez has saved](#) 89 percent of his opportunities dating back to 2011, which is the ninth best over that span. He's had 91 opportunities. Ten times he hasn't converted. Out of 91? Please people... He's one of the best.

Everyone blows saves! It happens. He's blown two this year and the Indians have managed to win both of those games. Craig Kimbrel is considered one of the best right? He's blown three. Fernando Rodney was awesome in 2012, right? He's blown three. Perez blew FOUR saves last year. That's six the past two seasons. Last year there were 31 relievers who blew more saves than him, nine of which had less innings pitched.

Aroldis Chapman is pretty good right? You know what he did yesterday?

He gave up back-to-back home runs to the Phillies in the ninth inning. Only got one out. He actually LOST the game for the Reds. He blew the save (his second) of the year. His ERA went up to 3.32. Chris Perez's team won (he managed to keep it at a tie, remember), his ERA only went up to 1.80, and he's made the All-Star team last year.

Stop your overrated garbage, stop your trade him rants, stop discrediting him for GETTING THE JOB DONE. Save your luck garbage too, this man finds a way to do the job 90% of the time. You want to know Mariano Rivera's all-time save percentage? He's 624 for 697, which rounds right out to 89 percent, the same number Perez has had these past three seasons.

So, there it is. Again, I'm not going to tell people not to boo. I don't support you if you do that, and I have my opinion on what kind of fan you are if you do. But withhold all asinine comments about a player to yourself. Because the next time you send out any sort of death wish through

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Twitter, [I'm going to find it and put it on blast](#) .

### [RANDOM RUNDOWN]

As expected, the Indians optioned **Nick Hagadone** [down to Triple-A Columbus](#) before the weekend series began to make way for the return of

#### **Vinnie Pestano**

. The Vin Man pitched Friday and picked up the win in his return, and [is now looking to adopt a "new routine"](#) during down time.

*"They think that may have been one of the reasons the elbow flared up," Pestano said. "If the situation arises where I go three days without throwing, I'll probably get off a mound, even if it's not in a game. It's just to keep throwing more consistently, so my arm doesn't have enough time to kind of regress. That's something I'm going to switch up going forward. ... It'll be able to stretch the arm, stretch that tendon, and make sure it's staying somewhat warm, even though there might be a lull or a slow stretch."*

Pestano has been super-reliable these past few years, especially in the health department. So whatever he can do to stay fresh, healthy, and sharp is necessary. This bullpen proved they can get along without him just fine, but they are way better with him in the mix.

Hagadone meanwhile has been shuffled out for David Huff. Hags has struggled his past few outings having given up six earned runs against Detroit and New York and collecting just one out. He had a clean inning with a walk against the Phillies before his demotion, but he clearly needs to work on some things.

**Brett Myers** pitched three innings for Akron on Friday night [and was back in Cleveland](#) for all the walk-off dramatics that same night. He was so efficient (33 pitches, plus 17 more in the bullpen), that he was able to make the trip back up north after pitching for the Aeros. He didn't allow a run, walked one and gave up a hit. He now is set to make another start tomorrow, which paves the way for him to return rather soon.



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Which means the Indians will have a decision on their hands the way everyone else in the rotation is pitching. Does Kluber go? Does he stay in the pen? Does Myers to go the pen? The Indians are building him back up to start, so you would have to think Kluber is the odd-man out, which sucks the way he's been pitching. But I'd rather have him back in Columbus working as a starter and ready to go if the need arises, rather than pitching a few innings out of the pen every once and awhile.

Speaking of guys who are down in Columbus playing everyday, **Lonnie Chisenhall** has been down for less than a week now and he's already hit a pair of home runs. He's 4-for-21 with two walks, seven runs scored, and four RBI. He's faced mostly righties, going 0-for-4 with a pair of strikeouts against left-handed pitching.

**Yan Gomes** is hoping to avoid visiting Columbus yet again as he [continues to impress in the little time he gets](#) as a backup catcher. Gomes threw out another guy on Saturday and seems to get hits any time he plays.

Think about this though. Even though he isn't playing every single day, the longer Gomes sticks around Cleveland, the more time he spends with Sandy Alomar Jr.

*"It's definitely helping that I'm just catching now instead of being the utility guy," Gomes said. "Just working with [bench coach] Sandy [Alomar, Jr.] and [bullpen coach Kevin Cash] and all the catchers here, it's been a really big help for me."*

He's producing. He's learning from a great catcher about defense and working with a pitching staff. Every time he's in there, he does something great. Can't really see anything you don't like about Gomes right now and he's even making a case to play a little bit more than the routine backup start if you ask me.

And working with Sandy is going to help him more than anyone. He's done wonders for Carlos Santana over the years, and he'll do a lot for Gomes. Sandy is such a great resource for the catchers in the organization, so much so that [the Indians brought in newly converted catcher Tony Wolters](#)

to Cleveland.

*"It's going really well," Wolters said. "I'm learning something new every day. It's fun. I like it a lot. You're looking at things from a different perspective, from a different standpoint on the field. I feel like it's making my overall game better."*

On Sunday, Wolters returned to High-A Carolina to begin his trek as a catcher under former catcher and current manager Dave Wallace. Before that he got to meet with Sandy and Kevin Cash to get tips from them.

What I find amazing is that we now have found out that it was really Terry Francona who is the reason for Wolters getting converted.

*"I didn't really want to say anything to anybody," Francona said, "because he's one of the high-profile players in our system. About a week later, we were sitting in the conference room one day and I just brought it up. ... All of a sudden, Ross was like, 'Why would we wait, if this kid is up for it?' And when we talked to him about it, we kind of said, 'Hey, this is what we potentially see, but you have to be all in for this.'"*

And again, the Indians couldn't have picked a better guy to do this with. He's an intangibles sort of player who has a great eye for the game. He's going to be able to get back there behind the plate and be even more of a leader.

Continuing the theme of our minor leaguers, you'd be remiss if you didn't take a few minutes out of your day to read [the excellent piece Adam Burke penned](#) on **Trevor Bauer**. He goes into the integral parts of his approach and the aspect of how the Indians may be dealing with him, opposed to how the Diamondbacks did.

Bauer started for the Clippers [on Sunday against Scranton/Wilkes Barre](#) and improved to 2-0 for Columbus. He gave up four runs off six hits and five walks, showing that his control is still a work in progress. But he managed to maneuver through six innings on 101 pitches for the win, so you take the good with the bad.

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Finally, I'm finally starting to overcome all my business with my mouth. For those wondering, I ballooned up pretty good following my wisdom teeth surgery, but have been bouncing back, especially this past week. Things should be returning back to normal around these parts, if not more with summer ramping up. Nino's only class is online this summer, so that means more time to have fun with the Tribe. Expect more updates, more Positive Swish, more LOLTribe, and more ridiculousness, of course. Let's hope it is can accompany a winning squad this summer, yes?

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*Nino is in full baseball mode here and on [The Tribe Daily](#), his own Indians blog. Don't miss all the fun, photoshopped Indians players, and LOLTribe ridiculousness.*

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