

Morning Rundown: Kazmir, Brantley Help Cleveland Claim the Cup

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

Sunday, May 26 2013 11:00 PM - Last Updated Sunday, June 02 2013 7:30 AM



The Cup is OURS!

Sorta. Whatever. A split is huge. Coming off five straight losses, to come back and find a way to win both home games against a really good NL Central team and playoff contender was a big way to start off this mini-homestand. The Indians are about to enter into that AL East portion of their schedule once again.

So, this was big. And it came down to one big inning that people should still be talking about.

REDS - 1 | INDIANS - 7

W: Scott Kazmir (3-2)

L: Homer Bailey (3-4)

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[\[BOXSCORE\]](#)

We've kind of been throwing it around and talking about how awesome the Indians seem to be with two outs and runners in scoring position. It's a nice little aspect to this team. It is a great thing for this club to be able to do. It makes them lethal. When you can come up with the clutch hit and do it well, you will win some games.

Up until last night's game, it was something that this offense did, an aspect. Now? Dare I say that this defines them? There is no better team in baseball than the Indians when it comes to the two-out hit. They pretty much [pounded a team into submission on Thursday night](#) by utilizing that two-out hit.

And it matters to me none that The Tribe Daily Invitational II's current leader, Chiz in the Hall, managed by yours truly, features Homer Bailey on their pitching staff. I'll eat that seven-spot with joy. Because there is nothing more beautiful than the clinic the Tribe put on in the fourth inning. There's good hitting and then there is good, clutch, two-out hitting. These were not just good hits, but great at-bats that made the half inning go on and on and on.

Bailey got Swisher and Reynolds to strike out, but not before Cabrera was hit by a pitch and Santana singled to ultimately set up the next six at-bats, all hits, all knocked in runs.

Brantley's at-bat was first and perhaps the most impressive one. Bailey goes up 0-2 on him early on with a few foul balls. So really, not only was Bailey an out away, he was a strike away from getting out. And not just a strike, but a strike with an 0-2 count. The situation was in his favor, he should have been able to get out of that no problem.

But he didn't, because Michael Brantley singled to knock in Asdrubal. And the flood gates opened.

"I think hitting's contagious," Brantley said. "That was a big two-out rally we had. It kept going."

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Momentum was great. The positive vibe we had in the dugout was great. That was a big inning for us, and that won the game for us. Just clutch hitting by everybody. It's a team effort."

Yan Gomes singles a 0-1 pitch, Santana Scores. Brantley puts himself on third with a steal and then scores on a Ryan Raburn double to left. At this point, from Brantley on, Bailey has only thrown two balls. Bailey is starting to struggle, he doesn't want to hit the zone because of what's happening. A ball to Bourn on the first pitch and on a fastball on the next pitch, Bourn smacks one to left that knocks in two and the Indians are officially rolling.

Enter Jason Kipnis, who goes in and falls behind 1-2 with a few foul balls. A tough, gritty at-bat. One hit will knock Bailey out of the game, and perhaps put this one out of reach.

Single, Bourn scores, Bailey is out, the Indians are splitting this series.

"That was impressive," Tribe manager Terry Francona said. "We were having a tough time breaking through. Bailey's got good stuff. Brantley staying on that two-out, two-strike pitch -- that was a tough pitch -- and he hit that line drive that kind of gave us a little bit of a break. And then we just kept extending the inning. That was really fun to watch."

Of course the guy that started the inning with the first run, Asdrubal Cabrera, would come in and greet reliever Alfredo Simon with the final run-scoring double to make it 7-0. And then the story shifts to this one's starting pitcher.

Scott Kazmir gave up eight hits, but he walked just one hitter and danced around all the difficult traffic he had to worry about. He let up a run later, but had some really clean and impressive innings (especially that sixth), starting to look ever more like the Kazmir of old, blending in with the Kazmir of new. He struck out five and when he was striking out Reds hitters, he was using his offspeed stuff effectively, getting hitters to swing ugly or freezing them completely.

"To be able to stretch it out that far, it felt good," Kazmir said. "Getting [through] that seventh inning today really meant a lot. I was attacking the strike zone," he said. "Mainly, that helped me

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out, being able to expand the strike zone after that, after I got my first strike of the at-bat. Everything was working for the most part. Breaking ball was a little erratic, but at the same time I was able to get it in a location where I wouldn't get hurt."

It was Kazmir's longest outing as an Indian this year and it continues a trend he's putting up thus far. He's now 3-0 at home, 0-2 on the road. He's significantly better in his four starts at home than he has been in his four starts on the road with a 3.69 ERA in 22 innings.

I know he looked like he may be the guy who should have been moved out of the rotation for a bit, but now he looks like he is coming around. He's still figuring things out, but these moments of brilliance are enough reason to keep him in that rotation.

Random Notes...

Yan Gomes is hitting .319, but the more impressive number with the kid is the fact that the team is 13-5 when Gomes starts for the Indians. He had three more hits and a run scored, and knocked in a run last night. How can you not play this guy at least a few times a week? Especially the way Santana gets beat up behind the plate.

Michael Bourn just keeps finding ways on base. A guy like that never goes in a slump because he just turns routine outs into hits. He did it again last night in addition to the big RBI double he had. Just wait til he pulls of one of these in a big spot. He runs HARD every time down the line and mixed with his elite speed, he's unstoppable.

Nick Hagadone has been truly awful. Since May 11 against Detroit, he's given up nine earned runs compared to five outs. Five outs to nine runs! That's insanity and incredibly horrible. His clean inning had to be a breath of fresh air for him. He didn't allow anyone on and struck out one. Same with Matt Albers, who had a clean ninth inning.

Ryan Raburn exited the game after he hit that RBI double with lower leg cramping. Terry Francona said it was something he has been dealing with for a little bit. Raburn was on base both times, also walking earlier in the game. He was giving Drew Stubbs a night off, but Stubbs

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had to come in for him in right field.

Nick Swisher was the only one to not reach base in the starting lineup. Everyone else had a hit, even Carlos Santana, who struck out three times. It is just the second time he has done so all year, but strangely the second time in less than a week that he has. The last time he did it before last week against Boston? April 28th of last year against the Angels. In fact he had two three-strikeout games in the month of April. Then went the rest of 2012 without one. Now he's had two in a week. Perhaps he'll go on to not do it again this year after he got his two out of the way.

[RANDOM RUNDOWN]

This bullpen keeps coming up. I'm sorry, it's the big topic of discussion right now. **Vinnie Pestano**

being the main guy now with Chris Perez sitting down for a bit. There was concern over Pestano after one of his outings last weekend in Boston with a dip in his velocity.

And despite his hiccup home run on Wednesday, Pestano looks to be getting things right and in-line. Pestano [was sitting more regularly on the 90-92 range](#), which is closer to what we've come accustomed to with Vinnie The K.

Pestano said he was aware of that dip and admittedly tried to "muscle up" and just sling the ball. But all seems to be good now as Pestano gets his footing and readjusts himself at the major league level.

"I think he's getting better," Indians manager Terry Francona said. "He gave up a leadoff solo homer, and it looked like he got a little aggravated. But I think each time he throws, he's getting closer to being Vinnie, and I think he probably feels the same way, too."

"I think he still feels like he has a little ways to go, but thankfully, or fortunately for us, he's such a competitor that while he's working himself back into top form, he'll compete and get people out."

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So, despite what a lot of people thought, even myself to a certain extent, Pestano is in fact coming back into form and not hurt. He's recovering from being hurt, but he is no longer hurt.

To shift gears though, the Pittsburgh Pirates are trying to give the Indians a run for their money. At least in terms of bullpen nicknames. Years after I helped coin the "Bullpen Mafia" name for our beloved Tribe pen, the Pittsburgh Pirates have come up with something just as cool. But, let's face it, not actually equivalent in cool factor.

They are called the "Shark Tank" because, as their closer and former Indian Jason Grilli termed it, they smell blood and go in for the kill. I mean, that's pretty good. It's a nice little moniker that he's set up for his pen and his mates.

So much so that he has [orchestrated the installation of an actual shark tank](#) into the clubhouse of the Pirates. Yeah, he did.

But really, on a more serious note, the Indians sit just a half a game back of the Tigs thanks to the red-hot Pittsburgh Pirates. The Buccos helped out the Tribe this week with a 3-1 series win over the Tigers, including a 1-0 walk-off win yesterday when Russ Martin singled in Neil Walker.

Thanks Pittsburgh!

Look for **Asdrubal Cabrera** to continue dealing with minor scrapes and bruises. Cabs limped into second on Wednesday and Tito says [he has been bothered by the same quad issues](#) he had earlier this year. Cabs always seems like a guy who is hobbled, but still plays hobbled, and plays really good regardless.

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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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