

The Best of 18 Straight

Written by {ga=riverburns}

Saturday, June 01 2013 1:00 PM - Last Updated Friday, May 31 2013 3:54 PM



It was one of the strangest streaks in baseball, but it went on for all or part of six seasons and included four consecutive years of the Tampa chapter of Major League Baseball being swept in 4-game series at the Carnegie and Ontario in Cleveland. The streak last so long that a few Indians became Rays, Rays became Indians, and the Devil Rays were re-branded to just being the "Rays". Of course, from an Indians perspective, no game in the 18-game home winning streak over the Rays was as interesting as the one played on Memorial Day in 2009.

As much as it may disappoint the die-hards, I'm not in front of the TV or at the ballpark for every inning of the 162-game schedule, and I tuned into the contest on May 25, 2009 very late in the day, so late that I wasn't sure the game with a 6:06 first pitch would still be going. At first glimpse, I didn't like what I saw from my 17-28 ball club, but that was par for the course from a team that started 1-7 and never reached the .500 mark.

Despite the 10-2 score, I stayed tuned in to Sportstime Ohio.

At that point, the Tribe had won 13 straight over Tampa in Cleveland, a stretch that dated back to September 29, 2005, a CC Sabathia win in a 6-0 over Casey Fossum, which kept the Indians alive in the Central Division for literally one more day. The Devil Rays took the first two in the three game series, two games the Indians could not afford to yield down the stretch to an abysmal Tampa Bay team, which forced them to sweep the White Sox to take the division crown.

Instead, they were swept by the south-siders and watching the post-season on television, just like you and I.

Down eight runs in the seventh inning on Memorial Day, against the defending American League Champions, the game served mostly as background noise as we un-packed from our

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short weekend road trip to San Diego. If nothing else, watching the Indians poo the bed against a Florida team was a nice alternative to hearing about the Cavaliers poo the bed against a Florida team, having dropped Game 3 in Orlando in the Eastern Conference Finals the night before.



I turned it on just in time to see Jeremy Sowers pitch the away half of the eighth inning, and watched Carlos Pena fly out to Matt LaPorta, the guy who would someday make that CC Sabathia trade all worthwhile, for the first out of the frame. Three pitches and two 6-3 groundouts later, the Indians were coming to the plate, down to their last six outs.

I later found out that Sowers relieved Rich Rundles, who threw a scoreless fourth inning in the box score, but allowed both runners he inherited from Jensen Lewis to score to make it 10-0.

Fausto Carmona started the game, but didn't make it out of the second inning, so he and Lewis combine to allow the Rays to put up a 10-spot in 3+ innings of work, achieving fewer outs than runs surrendered.

With Dale Thayer taking over in mop-up duty for Joe Maddon's Rays, the Indians went back-to-back-to-back with singles from Shin-Soo Choo, Mark DeRosa, and Ryan Garko, loading the bases for their can't-miss prospect Matt LaPorta. As only Matt LaPorta can, the rally was killed with a 5-4-3 double play, but the Indians had their 3rd run of the day with two outs and Mark DeRosa on third base in a 10-3 ballgame.

If you're keeping track, no one that batted in the eighth inning of this game 4 years ago is on the 40-man roster in 2013, but the front office eventually flipped Choo, Garko, and DeRosa for Brian Shaw, Scott Barnes, and Chris Perez (among others), key pieces of their current bullpen.

Ben Francisco brought home DeRosa with a single, before Thayer got Jamey Carroll to fly out to end the inning, but it was now just a six-run deficit. The streak was still in some serious jeopardy, but 10-4 didn't look nearly as bad on paper as 10-2.

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Sowers pitched around a 1-out double from Dioner Navarro in the top of the ninth, getting BJ Upton to whiff with Navarro 90 feet away to end the inning, wrapping up a decent day in long-relief, giving Eric Wedge 5 innings of scoreless 3-hit baseball and doing some serious damage control after Carmona and Lewis had put them in that 10-0 hole. It doesn't make you love the fact that the Indians only got 18 wins in 4 years from the guy they took 6th in the 2004 draft, over Homer Bailey, Jered Weaver, and Gio Gonzalez, but it's all you can ask from a guy pitching in mop-up duty, trailing by 8.

He was still in line for the win, if the bats woke up in the bottom of the ninth inning.

Grady Sizemore, the Designated Hitter for the day, led off the inning with a 5-pitch walk, then Thayer got Victor Martinez to pop out to Evan Longoria at third for the first out of the inning. If you're counting outs, and we're suspecting that Maddon the Rays were, the Tribe was down to their last two.

Jhonny Peralta lined a single to left, moving Sizemore to second, and closing the book on Thayer.

Enter Randy Choate, stage left. The lefty got Shin-Shoo Choo to weakly chop one toward Longoria at third on what might have been a double play ball, even considering Choo running hard down the first base line, but it never came to that. Longoria threw the ball away, bringing Sizemore in for the 5th run of the day.

DeRosa would be up next, with runners on 2nd and 3rd, the Indians still needing five runs before the next two outs.

Maddon went back to his bullpen and summoned Grant Balfour.

On the 7th pitch of the at-bat, DeRosa lined-out to a busy Longoria at third, and the home team was down to their final out. It wouldn't end with Ryan Garko, who made this laughter of a game very interesting with a 3-run shot to left-center, making it 10-8. That brought up Asdrubal Cabrera, hitting for LaPorta, and walking on 4 pitches.

Maddon had seen enough, and asked Jason Isringhausen to find the strike zone and end the madness with Ben Francisco at the plate, representing the tying run.

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Four pitches later, Francisco is standing on first and Carroll stands in the batter's box with a chance to win the game with one swing of the bat. He didn't manage to hit a fair ball, but worked a 7-pitch walk, and the Rays relievers had walked the bases loaded on 15 pitches.

Grady Sizemore was up next, for the second time in the inning, and stop me if you've heard this one before...



Sizemore walks. Asdrubal scores, Tribe down 10-9, still down to their final out. Now, if there's anyone the Rays don't want at the plate at this point, it's Victor Martinez, who was hitting .400 the week before this Memorial Day clash.

His average had dipped 60 points in that week, and he was 0-for-5 on the day, making him 0-for-18 in his last four games.

However, that didn't make him ice cold, it made him due.

It probably meant he was overdue, and real-life tells us he was. He laced a single up the middle, scoring Francisco and Carroll, extending the Jacobs Field winning streak to 14 games.

7 runs, 3 hits, an error, and an 11-10 series-opening victory over the AL Champs.

Sowers got the well-deserved W, and it book-ended a pretty decent holiday weekend that began with a miraculous playoff winning buzzer-beater on Friday night.

The Indians rode that momentum into the week and swept the visiting team from Tampa in a four-game series for the 4th straight season. They even tacked one more on in 2010, before a former Indian beat a former Ray to end the streak at 18 games.

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It's my kind of team, Charlie, my kind of team.