

Are the Indians' Playoff Hopes Dead?

Written by {ga=kyleferrara}

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Coming off a come from behind, 4-3 victory over the Royals, the Indians have gone 5-2 in their past 7 games, which means their twenty-game, 4-16 debacle is finally over. Some credit has to be given to Terry Francona and his players for weathering the storm, but there has to be just as much concern.

Yes, those twenty games were against the likes of the Tigers, Red Sox, Reds, Rays, Yankees, and Rangers.

Yes, four of those six teams were in the playoffs last year, and all of them are playing above the .500 mark this season.

Yes, the fact that the Indians won 18 of 22 games before that stretch helped them to manage a 22-20 record from the second game of their double-header on April 28th through June 10th. And yes, that's a record that could be reasonably expected from this club over a tough 42 game span.

But can a team that expects to be taken seriously as a contender, to be part of the discussion come post-season, lose four out of every five games for almost a month and recover to make the playoffs?

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By taking a look at the hot and cold streaks from last season's five, American League playoff teams, we can predict if this last tough stretch has already doomed the Indians season, or if they can recover to make a serious run.

First, look at the American League's top two teams from last year: The New York Yankees and the Oakland Athletics.

The Yankees finished last season with the best record in the American League at 95-67. They won the American League East by two games over the Baltimore Orioles.

On their way to the league's best record, the Yankees never fell below .500. This year, the Indians have been as many as five games below .500, and after June 10th's loss to Texas, at the end of their 4-16 stretch they were three games below the Mendoza line. Last season on June 10th, the Yankees had a record of 34-24.

They did have a rough patch, however, as all teams eventually do. From August 20th to September 11th

, the Yankees struggled to the tune of a 7-13 record. That's only three games better than the stretch of baseball the Indians just played.

Their best stretch of baseball came from May 22nd to June 18th, when they went 20-4. That's two wins more than the Indians accumulated over the hot streak, which is one game better.

Here's what that means: Combined over their best stretch and worst stretch last season, the Yankees managed a 27-17 record. That's four games better than the Indians combined record of 22-20.

These Indians aren't going to win 95 games, and it is tough to compare them to the 2012 Yankees because that team didn't have a losing record at any point in the season. However, looking at this sample size, they're only four games off the pace of the Yankees. That would put

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them at 91 wins, another number which may be just out of reach for this group, meaning they wouldn't be able to match the record of the American League's second best team, the Athletics, either.

The Athletics finished last season 94-68, a game in front of the Texas Rangers, but this year's Indians are much more comparable to them than the Yankees. Just like the Indians this year, the A's were under .500 in early June last year. On June 10th they were 26-35, nine games under .500.

A dismal 5-15 stretch from May 15th to June 5th, only a game better than that of the Indians and occurring around the same time of the year, helped drop them to that mark. But an amazing 21-5 run from August 16th to September 12th propelled them to 94 wins and the top of the AL West.

The combined record for them over both these spans was 26-20, two games better than the Indians. Again, very few people are expecting these Indians to win as many games as the Yankees or A's last year, but over a third of the season they are just a few games off the pace of the team's with the best records last year.

The same holds true when looking at the American League's two wild card teams from last season. The Baltimore Orioles and the Texas Rangers both finished 93-69, and neither team played a single game under .500 all season. Again, this fact makes it harder to compare them to the Indians this year, but it is still doable.

The Rangers worst stretch came at the end of the season, as they finished the year 8-12 lost the AL West title to the surging A's. Their best stretch came in the heart of July, when they went on a 16-3 tear. Combined, that equals a 24-15 record, three and a half games better than the Indians record.

The Orioles were the opposite in that their hot streak didn't come until September, when they accumulated a 15-6 record from September 8th through September 30th. Their coldest streak spanned from June 18th until July 17

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, when they went 7-17. That boils down to a 22-23 record, which is actually a game and a half worse than what the Indians just accomplished.

For the best comparison, look no further than last year's American League Champions, the Detroit Tigers. The Tigers spent the first half of the 2012 season behind both the Indians and White Sox in the AL Central standings, before reclaiming their title as division champs by season's end. On June 10th, they had a record of 28-32, a game and a half worse than the Indians 30-33 record this season.

The Tigers worst stretch of baseball came, not surprisingly, early in the season. They went 7-14 from April 19th to May 12th, two and a half games better than the Indians cold spell. Their best stretch of baseball came in mid-July, when they managed a 15-6 record from the 4th through the 29th, two and a half games worse than the Indians hot stretch. The combined record is exactly the same as the Indians' is this season, 22-20.

The Tigers went on to win 88 games, more than enough in the AL Central. There's no reason to believe the Indians can't go on to win a similar number of games just because they had a short, abysmal stretch of baseball. All of the American League's playoff teams had their own struggles last year, and the Indians rough patch wasn't much worse than any of theirs.

There are still reasons for concern, though. The lineup is full of streaky hitters. The starting rotation still lacks a dominant ace. The bullpen has fallen far short of expectations this year, and it lacks quality left-handed options.

Those reasons may prevent this club from making the playoffs, but the 4-16 stretch they just experienced won't.