

Thumbs Up, Thumbs Down as the Tribe Hits the Halfway Mark

Written by {ga=tommoore}

Monday, July 01 2013 6:16 PM - Last Updated Tuesday, July 02 2013 7:16 AM



The Cleveland Indians hit the halfway mark of the 2013 Major League season over the weekend and, thanks to their first four-game sweep of the White Sox in Chicago since 1948 and Detroit's loss on Monday afternoon, will head to Kansas City in first place in the American League Central Division.

The sweep gave the Tribe a winning record in the month of June (15-13) for the first time since 2007. (We'll let you decide if you want to place any significance on the years 1948 and 2007.)

The [Indians lead Detroit by a half-game despite allowing 43 more runs than the Tigers](#) (while scoring the same amount), despite having their bullpen give up essentially the same amount of runs (4.4 per nine innings) as Detroit's sub-par bullpen (4.3), and despite blowing more saves (13 to nine) than the Tigers.

How the heck is the Tribe in first place now that the calendar has turned to July?

The weekend series with the White Sox provided a glimpse, as the Tribe continues to be a team that doesn't know when it's been beaten. Friday it was coming back from a first-inning five-run deficit to win the opening game of a double header and following that up with a four-run ninth to win the second game. Saturday, it was a game-winning single from Nick Swisher in the eighth inning. Sunday, it was Justin Masterson's turn, as he shut out the White Sox to seal the sweep.

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It has truly been a team effort through the first half of the season for the Indians, so let's take a thumbs up, thumbs down look while we wait for the Tribe to start the second half of the schedule in Kansas City.

Thumbs up: Jason Kipnis (especially in June).

Kipnis just completed one of the best Junes in franchise history, hitting .419 (trailing just Willie Kamm, who hit .426 in 1934, and Sandy Alomar, who hit .420 in 1997), with four home runs, 25 RBI, nine stolen bases, and an OPS of 1.216. He is tied for the team lead in batting average (.299), and leads in RBI (51), on-base percentage (.384), hits (82), OPS (.917) and is second in home runs (12).

He is tied for eighth place in all of baseball in stolen bases, is 17th in on-base percentage, is 11th in OPS, and is 16th in WAR.

And to think he finished the month of April batting .200 with one home run and four RBI.

Thumbs down: Nick Swisher (but mostly for June).

Swisher, who the Indians signed to the largest free agent contract in franchise history in the off-season, [had a brutal month of June](#), batting just .160 with one home run and 20 strikeouts. From May 26 until the start of the series with the White Sox, Swisher had driven in a total of six runs.

At least part of that slump can be attributed to a lingering shoulder injury, and if the last week of the month is any indication, Swisher may be starting to turn things around.

After sitting out six games to give his aching shoulder a rest, Swisher closed out the month by

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going four-for-11 with a home run, four RBI and four runs scored in the first three games of the White Sox series before getting a day off on Sunday.

If that means that Swisher is finally starting to feel better that is a good sign as the Tribe will need him producing to keep pace with the Tigers.

Thumbs up: The good Mark Reynolds.

In April, it was all strawberries and cream for Reynolds, who batted .301 with eight home runs and 22 RBI while striking out only 22 times – and RBI to strikeout ratio the Tribe could certainly live with.

Fans were excited by Reynolds big stroke and the Indians even talked with Reynolds, who is in town on a one-year contract, about a contract extension.

Then the calendar flipped to May 1.

Thumbs down: The bad Mark Reynolds.

Things started to dip for Reynolds in May, as he hit .218 and his slugging percentage went from 1.019 in April to .696 in May. He hit only five home runs, although he still managed to drive in 19 runs, while his strikeouts increased as he fanned 34 times in the month.

It only got worse in June, as Reynolds finished the month batting .187 with just two home runs, five RBI and an OPS of .541. He also notched 40 more strikeouts as fans and the front office saw the dark side of Reynolds' game.

There is reason for hope, though, Tribe fans. Over the past three years, Reynolds pre and post

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All-Star game numbers have been similar (47 home runs prior to the All-Star break, 45 after; 128 RBI vs. 112 RBI; a .217 batting average vs. .209; and an OPS of .794 vs. .755). Reynolds doesn't appear to be the type of player that wears down as the season goes along, so another hot month similar to the one he had in April is a possibility.

Just like Swisher, the Tribe is going to need Reynolds to get hot again to stay in the pennant race.

Thumbs up: The streaking Indians.

The Tribe had a streak from April 20 to May 20 where they won 21-of-28 to open a 2.5 game lead over Detroit.

Since June 11, they have won 14-of-19 to climb from 5.5 games behind the Tigers to a first-place tie.

Thumbs down: The streaking Indians.

We never thought we would see a stretch of baseball like the one last August where the Indians lost 24 of 29 games as the team fell apart under then-manager Manny Acta.

But this year's Tribe gave it a pretty good shot.

Sandwiched between the two winning streaks was a stretch of games that saw the [Tribe lose 16-of-20](#), which explains how they went from 2.5 games up to 5.5 games behind Detroit.

The big difference is that once the Tribe broke last year's streak it was already September and it

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was too late for the team to do anything. This year, the Indians had the foresight to have their big losing streak while there was still time to recover. Let's just hope they don't test that theory later this season.

We're still trying to figure out how a team can be so up-and-down (the schedule plays a role in it) but that is part of what has made this year's team so enjoyable to watch during the first half of the season.

Thumbs up: Carlos Santana at the plate.



The Tribe's primary catcher (for now, at least) cooled off after a hot start to the season (.389 average, five home runs and 13 RBI in April), but is still third on the team in batting average at .269, third in home runs with 10 and is second with an OPS of .837.

Thumbs down: Carlos Santana behind the plate.

As [Adam Burke pointed out a few weeks ago](#) , Santana is not exactly Sandy Alomar behind the plate. Or, as Adam put it, Santana is "lazy behind the plate, doesn't seem to have a great head on his shoulders and has trouble controlling the running game."

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On Sunday, Sheldon Ocker posed the question in *The Beacon Journal* [if this could be the last season that the Tribe will use Santana as a full-time catcher](#)

. Ocker pointed out that Santana “continues to struggle to block balls in the dirt; despite a strong arm, he is average at best in throwing out runners, and he is constantly getting pinged by foul balls and errant pitches that hit the ground.”

If Yan Gomes can continue to put up respectable numbers (a .284 average with six home runs and 22 RBI) and continue to play better defense than Santana, there may very well be a position change in Santana’s future.

But that’s not going to happen this year, barring a real injury to Reynolds or Swisher, so hopefully Santana can at least settle down defensively during the second half of the season.

Thumbs up: Starting pitchers Justin Masterson, Corey Kluber and Zach McAllister.

Following his shutout victory on Sunday against the White Sox, Masterson leads the Tribe in wins (10), strikeouts (125) and ERA (3.48). He had a couple of rough outings in June (giving up 13 earned runs in 12.2 innings of work against the Yankees and Baltimore), but for the rest of the month he was solid, giving up just seven earned runs in 29.1 innings (1.83 ERA).

The one negative on Masterson is he hasn’t been the same pitcher on the road as he is at Progressive Field. His 18 starts are split evenly between home and road, but while he is 6-1 with a 2.29 ERA and has given up just two home runs at home, he is just 4-5 with a 4.72 ERA and has given up eight home runs on the road. The rest of the schedule is split pretty evenly between home and road games for the Tribe, so how Masterson performs away from home will be worth keeping an eye on.

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