

Morning Rundown: Brantley Keeps Hope Alive, Saves Bullpen; Kluber Dazzles Again

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

Sunday, July 07 2013 10:11 PM -



Two straight losses with some big crowds. A big weekend series against the team you are battling toe-to-toe with for the division. A chance to win over some fans. A chance to put a little fear into the cats from up in the northern part of the country.

Something about game three, with an undefeated All-Star pitching Monday, felt like a win was oh so crucial. No one wants to get swept in four games. Just as they had done to the White Sox not even a week ago, the Tigers were threatened to perhaps step on the throat of the Tribe and crush them before they could even get to the All-Star break.

And then they were saved, somehow, someway. The will to win prevailed, and we can all keep our sanity and hope.

TIGERS - 6 | INDIANS - 9

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W: Cody Allen (4-1)

L: Al Alburquerque (1-2)

S: Chris Perez (9)

[\[BOXSCORE\]](#)

Before we even talk about anything that was bad or Brantley, **Corey Kluber** needs his due once again. Six-plus, two earned, one of which he didn't actually surrender, 10 strikeouts. Aside from Miguel Cabrera being Miguel Cabrera, this guy was awesome.

And he did something to the Tigers lineup the previous two pitchers couldn't do. In fact, he did something to the Tigers lineup that no Indians starter has been able to do this season. [He looked dominant.](#)

Now, Kluber has done this once before against the Tigs this season. He faced them back in May and struck out hitters in 6.1 innings. But he gave up three runs off eight hits.

He looked way different, even though that was a good start by the books and he simply went up against a guy in Scherzer who is still undefeated going into today's game.

"He stayed ahead in the count," Francona said. "He was aggressive. He was really good. When you start throwing in with your best velocity, that's very impressive."

Kluber's 10 strikeouts matches the season high he set in Boston, and wouldn't ya know that was the last time the Indians bullpen had a major meltdown, kind of like the one they almost had yesterday afternoon, but more on that in a second. When you look at the games he hasn't won this season, I'd say, that rain-drenched two inning performance aside, he's really deserved a win (or at least not a loss) in all but two of them. He's had two really bad outings, the last one in June against Baltimore and the first time he faced the Tigers when he gave up eight runs.

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This guy has been consistent and consistently good. He's stopped losing streaks, started winning streaks, he has been the biggest surprise this season if you ask me.

You may not be enamored with his overall numbers, but the guy has gone out there since getting a starting gig and has impressed. The Klube Abides.

Now there's a reason he didn't get a win in this game. Of course, we all know it. The bullpen let us down once again. We'll get into particulars and the long-term outlook of that section of the team, but the only thing that can be said now is that they almost let a season-crippling type loss happen.

Things got dicey for Smitty in the seventh when he took over for Kluber. But it was the disappointing outing for **Vinnie Pestano** that should have us all a little worried with this pen.

Pestano came in with a clean slate in the eighth inning and he did nothing but struggle. He starts by walking Andy Dirks on five pitches and then gives up a single. He manages to get two outs though, which is perfect because all you need to do is get Hunter out. That happens, Cabrera comes up in the ninth with nobody on and leading off. He can hit a home run, but at least it would only score a run.

Ya gotta get Hunter though.

Yeah about that. Pestano's slider came over very slow, and, well, it didn't really slide. It was right down the middle. He practically threw a batting practice pitch to Hunter and he did what you are supposed to do.

So that begs the question. What's wrong with the guy? His fastball had velocity, he was actually getting good results with that. But the breaking pitch, it just wasn't sharp. Mechanics? He can't be hurt, he seems to be good in that regard. But he's so quick to the plate, I'm not sure what would be out of whack. Whatever it is, it caused him to throw that ball right down the center of

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the plate. I know it was supposed to break, but it didn't and that's on him, he's gotta figure out why.

Thankfully, the offense wasn't about to let this "collapse" happen.

"I think we're mad. But you're at home, and you're not losing," Indians manager Terry Francona said. "We just had to play."

And that was the Dr. himself, **Michael Brantley**. Brant had a great game overall and pretty much was the Indians offense. He was 3-for-4 with five runs batted in and three more scored. He hit a homer earlier in the game when he mashed a solo shot off Doug Fister in the sixth.

His June was not fun. After hitting over .300 in May, Brantley took a bit of a dive in the early part of the month. But the thing is he turned it around and kept managing to produce when needed. He rolled through his "slump" if you will. I feel like I've said it before, but the guy doesn't really slump. Yeah he gets into a rut where he doesn't hit as well as when he is right, but he still finds a way to produce and come up with big hits.

He propelled that momentum from the end of June into July now and is back over .300 and pushing his season average back up the ladder and producing in a big way. It would be really nice if he could settle into that five hole to protect Swisher, because I think that is a role he could really take well to and help both him and the team out in.

Random Notes...

Brantley's two-home run game is the second time he's done that. So if your tallying at home, he's got four of his seven homers in two games. Maybe he does have the pop/power that everyone thought he had. Perhaps though now he's just letting those homers come to him instead of trying to pull pitches he has no business pulling. He's turning into a great hitter.

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Joe Smith came in with a runner on and made the situation worse. He was getting ahead of the count, so it wasn't really an issue until he walked Victor Martinez. Particularly to Torii Hunter, he got ahead, but Hunter kept fouling all of Smith's offerings off. Really what turned that inning into the Tigers favor was Hunter getting a hanging slider (the first non-fastball Smith threw in the at-bat) and mashing it to score Santiago.

Maybe the rest of the bullpen should take a note from Cody Allen. Get just one out, you may get a win.

Relatively painless inning for Chris Perez to notch save number nine. Perez seems to be settling back in. If only they could get the ball back to him without issues.

Can we talk about Lonnie Chisenhall since he's return? He legged out an infield hit on what had to be a perfect play by Santiago to get him at first, then went on to steal his first base later in the sequence. He also hit his fifth homer of the year, a moon shot that stayed fair in the second inning. Chiz is 16-for-54 (.296) with a pair of homers and seven RBI in 16 games since returning from Columbus. He hasn't been miserable defensively either.

The other offensive hero is Carlos Santana, who rocketed one out with a runner on in the first. There were two outs, so it was especially a clutch hit because Fister could have very well exited that inning with just the two runs of damage. But Santana follows up Brantley's double with a rocket and that really let Kluber settle in and find his groove with a nice lead.

On Saturday, all of Jason Kipnis' streaks ended when he went 0-for-4 on the day. His hit streak dies at 16 and the on-base streak died at 36 games. He got back into it with a hit, a walk, and a run scored on Sunday.

[TRADE TALK HEATING UP]

Because we sit here with a team in contention, it obviously is going to come up as the All-Star break approaches.

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Most obviously hope the Indians are buyers when it comes down to it, and that they buy something nice that will help aid this 2013 squad.

Obviously the two things that would top the Tribe's wishlist are another starting pitcher and a left-handed reliever. Let Sheldon Ocker and Paul Hoynes start up, not rumors, [but rather ideas as to who the Indians should target](#)

With Ricky Nolasco already dealt to the Dodgers, the starting pitching market has one less option, which makes everyone else currently there a little more pricey. There was a report that the Indians were interested in Matt Garza. Who wouldn't be interested in Matt Garza, right?

That would seem like a tough grab to me though. Any starter of value may also be a little pricey for the Indians if they are looking to hold onto their core of Lindor and Naquin.

I'll let that talk develop a little more before sticking my nose into it. It would be nice to add another starting pitcher, but not if it becomes incredibly costly. What won't cost a lot is grabbing a left-handed reliever.

Among the options listed by Hoynes are Matt Thornton, Mike Gonzalez, Oliver Perez, and Charlie Furbush. Obviously Thornton would be the ideal pick up and best option for the Indians if they can get a hold of him from their division rival. The other options don't really seem, stunning. Granted they are relief pitchers, only Furbush's number against lefties leave you with any sense of confidence that they can come over and fill the Tribe's need. Both Perez and Gonzalez have higher averages against left-handers than they do right-handers.

Thornton remains one of the best relievers in the game facing left-handed hitters. He's made his living that way with a career .229 average against lefties. He isn't primarily a left-handed specialist though, so he has more value than that.

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I wouldn't also rule out just going for a good reliever period. Shoot, after the Pestano/Smith issues from Sunday, I would almost think another arm in that back end would shake things up. Cody Allen has been great, but they don't seem to be wanting to challenge him in that regard quite yet. Why not bring in a more established veteran reliever who can slot in and get 7th/8th inning opportunities? You look at another White Sox like Jessie Crain, and I don't think anyone would have a problem adding him into the mix if he were to be made available upon his return from the DL.

This talk will intensify, especially if the Indians remain in the race. I can't say that I would see them making a "huge move" especially for a starter, unless the right situation with the right price comes up. It would have to be someone they could hold onto for more than a year if they're giving up anyone of really high value.

[RANDOM RUNDOWN]

Speaking of that bullpen... As expected, to make room for **Carlos Carrasco**, [the Indians optioned out](#)

Joe

Martinez to Columbus. And then Carrasco went out and threw up the stinker that he did on Saturday. The problem has become with the Indians making all these moves is that they're having to call up different relievers every time because they can't call up guys they just sent down unless they put someone on the Disabled List.

So they ended up sending Carrasco back down and calling up **Preston Guilmet** on Sunday.

The move actually indicates that

[they designated Carrasco for assignment](#)

for the purposes of optioning him to Triple-A. That may sound weird, but they've put him on optional waivers, so he won't be lost. It is a little confusing, but it has to do with him having made his Major League debut more than three years ago. He'll be in Columbus when all is said and done and still on the 40-man roster.

This is an excellent opportunity for Preston Guilmet though, who's spent time as the Clippers closer. He's pretty much had that role at every level he's been to throughout his career as an Indian. He was drafted in 2009 in the ninth round and has 86 career saves in the minors. He is carrying a 2.32 ERA this season and has walked just 12 in 42 innings.

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Now, because there is no off day, the Indians will need someone to start around mid-week for them. The obvious option is **Trevor Bauer**. He made a start last Wednesday against Toledo and went six innings. We should know rather quickly what the Indians will do as tonight against Indianapolis is Trevor Bauer's turn to start. If Bauer doesn't go, he should be the guy.

If Bauer does go, it may look like the start will go to **Danny Salazar**, who started Saturday, same day Carrasco went, and has been pitching well his last few times out. Slazar is on the 40-man roster, so no move would be required to get him there. He's 3-2 with a 3.40 ERA in 10 starts at Columbus and was 2-3 with a 2.67 ERA in seven starts with the Aeros.

Either way, Bauer or Salazar should get the spot-start before the break. After the break, it may be time to re-insert **Zach McAllister** back into the rotation right after or soon after, or at least that is what the Indians would be hoping for.

[threw another bullpen on Friday](#)

[McAllister](#)

, tossing 60 pitches in total, and is slated for a simulated game today in Cleveland. He also threw his breaking pitch on flat ground before the game on Saturday. Tito said a quick return after the break is possible, but not at a risk to Z-Mac.

"He's doing terrific. That's the good news," said Tribe manager Terry Francona, who mentioned that a rehab start soon after the All-Star break is a "distinct possibility" for McAllister. "And we want him back yesterday. But you can't do it that way."

The Indians do have an off day on July 25th, but they'll need a fifth starter coming out of the break regardless, so whoever spot-starts may get two. Z-Mac is close though, and that's great news moving forward if they can get him back.

Finally, one more round of applause for the Indians two All-Star selections, Justin Masterson and Jason Kipnis, both [managerial selections by Tigs' manager Jim Leyland](#) . If a catcher goes down, you would think Carlos Santana would be the next in line for that, but the two guys the Indians are sending definitely deserve it.

Masterson's next start is Wednesday unless the Indians juggle their rotation. It should mark his last start before the break, so he'll definitely be available to pitch in the game.

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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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