



When you consider the events of the first three months and two weeks of the 2013 season, it's rather incredible that the Indians are even in the hunt. Battling injuries, streaky play, and players not meeting expectations, the Tribe has bobbed and weaved through the season to this point and trails by just 2.5 games in the AL Central race. One of those players that has battled both injuries and subpar performance is the team's shortstop, Asdrubal Cabrera.

Cabrera was the subject of many trade rumors over the offseason, with the Indians making it pretty clear that they were interested in maximizing his value. In 2012, Cabrera was fourth among full-time shortstops in OPS and wOBA, third in wRC+, and 10th in WAR, mostly because the fielding metrics have never been favorable towards Cabrera. Nobody offered enough for Cabrera and the Indians held on to him. It was clear from Mike Aviles's two-year contract extension, with the option for a third season, that the Indians were covering their bases if Cabrera was moved last offseason. Top prospect Francisco Lindor is still a couple of years away, but he is undoubtedly the team's future at the shortstop position. Reports surfaced yesterday that the Indians and Cardinals [have resumed trade discussions](#) about Cabrera. The two teams spoke at length at the Winter Meetings about a possible deal and the Cardinals may need to make a splash with the Pirates and Reds making the NL Central one of baseball's best divisions.

Any trade value Cabrera built up in 2011 and 2012 has been watered down this season. Battling a quad injury early in the year that finally cost him a stint on the disabled list from June 3-26, Cabrera's performance has suffered this season. (All of the following stats are through July 11.) He's posting a slash line of just .251/.312/.421/.733. Among shortstops, those numbers aren't bad, especially the SLG, but he ranks 14th in WAR at 0.6, putting him in replacement-level territory. He still ranks sixth in wOBA at .320 and sixth in OPS, despite what seems to be a down year for him, with a career slash of .276/.339/.416/.755 and a .332 wOBA.

What immediately jumps off the page about Cabrera this season is the drop in on-base percentage and the enormous spike in strikeouts. Last season, 8.4 percent of Cabrera's plate appearances ended with a walk. This season, that number is down to seven percent, which is still more than he walked in 2010 and 2011, but below his career average of 7.8 percent. The strikeouts are what have been a killer. Cabrera struck out in 16.1 percent of his plate appearances last season, which is below league average. For his career, Cabrera has struck out in 17 percent of his plate appearances. This season, however, Cabrera has gone down on strikes 24 percent of the time, a mark that is above league average.

When you consider that Cabrera is batting second, a no-no among sabermetricians and those who subscribe to lineup theory because the second spot in the order is supposed to be a top OBP guy to set things up for the middle of the order, that's far too many strikeouts. The Indians already have a plethora of guys who struggle at making contact and Cabrera adding to that list puts a lot of strain on the rest of the offense.

So, what's changed? What has gone so different from 2012 to 2013 for Cabrera? It's simple really. His plate discipline has dropped off considerably. For his career, Cabrera is right around average in terms of how often he swings at a pitch, which is 46.7 percent of the time. This season is no different at 46.8 percent. What is different, however, is what Cabrera is swinging at.

The following chart shows Cabrera's O-Swing%, or percentage of pitches swung at that were outside the strike zone, also known as "chase rate", Z-Swing%, percentage of pitches swung at that were inside the strike zone, and SwStr%, swinging strike percentage, or "whiff rate", and wOBA, [weighted on-base average](#) . These stats are courtesy of Fangraphs and Baseball Info Solutions.

Year

O-Swing%

Z-Swing%

SwStr%

wOBA

2009

23.9%

67.1%

6.6%

.351

2010

27.4%

62.4%

4.9%

.303

2011

31.4%

69.0%

7.4%

.344

2012

29.6%

70.4%

7.3%

.332

2013

34.6%

63.3%

10.4%

.320

This simple chart with just four stats on it tells us a lot. For one thing, it confirms common sense, which dictates that the more strikes you swing at and the fewer balls you swing at, the more success you'll have. It's clear to see what Cabrera's major problem is this season. He's swinging at too many bad pitches and taking too many strikes. It's not included in the chart, but Cabrera is being thrown fewer pitches in the zone this season than in any other year. There are plenty of reasons for that, but one of them is that pitchers, clearly, don't have to throw him strikes to get him out.

Cabrera has been down in the count 0-2 or 1-2 in 140 of his 287 plate appearances this season. That's not a recipe for success as a hitter. After 0-2, Cabrera is batting .212. After 1-2, he's hitting .171. When Cabrera does get ahead in the count, he's batting .312 with a .999 OPS.

According to PITCHf/x data provided by BrooksBaseball.net, Cabrera has put 95 balls in play that were in the strike zone. On the balls in play (BIP), he's batting .368 (35/95). On the 88 BIP Cabrera has hit on pitches outside of the strike zone, he's batting .250 (22/88). Of Cabrera's 129 swings and misses (whiffs), 44 have come on pitches in the strike zone. Keep in mind that home runs do not count for BABIP. For what it's worth, six of Cabrera's seven home runs have come on pitches in the strike zone.

It's clear to see why being selective matters and it's even clearer to see why Cabrera is not performing up to his usual capabilities. He's a guy that the Indians need to get going. If he continues this all season long at the top of the batting order, it's going to seriously impact their ability to score runs consistently.

Cabrera is mired in a 5-for-35 slump this month, which definitely makes his overall stats look much worse since he's missing three weeks worth of at bats from the disabled list stint. There's reason to believe that Cabrera is due to start hitting better. His line drive rate batting left handed is 26.9 percent, a well above average number, and line drives tend to go for hits, yet Cabrera is batting just .241 from the left side. The league batting average on line drives is .696, so there's all the proof you need that line drives generally equal hits. If Cabrera can keep that line drive rate up, it should bump his batting average and lead to more extra base hits. Inexplicably, Cabrera is batting just .200 at home, despite a career mark of .272 at The Jake. That may not level off, because there's no rhyme or reason for it, but we can certainly hope that it will normalize throughout the last two-and-a-half months of the season.

Ultimately, the problems for Cabrera are pretty clear. He will have to make adjustments to the way pitchers are approaching him. This season marks the third consecutive season in which Cabrera has seen fewer fastballs, and the sixth time in his seven seasons as a Major Leaguer that has been the case in consecutive seasons. Pitchers don't have to throw him fastballs if he's going to chase breaking stuff out of the zone.

Baseball is a game of adjustments. Either Cabrera needs to make some or Terry Francona needs to make one and move him down in the lineup. His numbers, while good for the shortstop position, are unacceptable in the second spot in the order and are one of the many reasons why the Indians have been plagued by so much inconsistency this season.