

Morning Rundown: Baseball Smells Better in October

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

Thursday, July 25 2013 11:00 PM - Last Updated Thursday, August 01 2013 7:51 AM



Out in the wilderness for the weekend and no while I could scrounge for a signal to get my Indians fix, I decided that when service wouldn't push through, I'd be in for a surprise Sunday evening upon my return.

Would it be a good one? A bad one? It wasn't on my mind much. For a bit, I even forgot who was invading Progressive Field. Then I fired up the good old internet to see a stunning headline. Ubaldo...dazzles? DAZZLES?

Then the word. Sweep. SWEEP!?

I'll let you guess what kind of surprise I thought it was.

I had an excellent weekend being incommunicado, sleeping in a tent, flying through the air attached to a wire, and spending my nights by a campfire. But as good as the fresh air smells in the morning, you know what smells the best? October baseball. Not only does it smell good, it smells like it may be closing in.

RANGERS - 0 | INDIANS - 6

W: Ubaldo Jimenez (8-5)

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L: Alexi Ogando (4-3)

[\[BOXSCORE\]](#)

One of the reasons it may be closing in. The Indians rotation is suddenly really good, five deep, and winning some ball games. **Ubaldo Jimenez** capped off quite the weekend for the pitching with the best start of them all, an eight inning two-hit gem with no runs and six strikeouts. He picked up his eight win of the year, and his ERA that has slowly but surely been decreasing due to his few innings in each start, got a huge boost in his win over Texas.

Inching ever closer to getting it under 4, Jimenez isn't reclaiming former glory, but [rather creating some new, more different glory](#), but glory nonetheless.

"I think it was the fastball, and the other thing was staying aggressive," Jimenez said. "I've been aggressive in prior games, but I wasn't able to stay aggressive. I would get hitters in 0-2 counts, and I've been walking them. But today, we were able just to go after hitters and stay ahead."

And that aggressiveness, getting guys after going 0-2 instead of walking them let him get a little deeper into the game. Francona even pushed it a bit and let Ubaldo go eight innings on 110 pitches, definitely one of, if not the best start he's had as an Indian in the few years he's been here.

Perhaps after the first, there wasn't much that threatened Ubaldo. He let up a double and a walk with one out in the first, but got an Adrian Beltre double play to exit the frame. Then he got in a zone. He retired 12 straight before a single by Punch A.J. and a walk by David Murphy would start the fifth, but would work around that and a bunt. He'd walk one more in the sixth and then retire nine more to end his outing.

Where has this Ubaldo been? We've seen flashes like this before. We've seen him go out and have good games, look really good. But this. This seemed to be the culmination of all year what he's been doing. Granted it has taken him a lot of pitches to get through some innings and thus

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ending his outing really early in the game.

But he's seen results. He's been getting ahead of counts. Like he mentioned, he's been getting ahead but then walking. But this seemed to be the tipping point of what he's been doing. He got ahead of hitters and put them away without having to use as many pitches, and the result was eight innings of shutout ball.

All but one of his strikeouts were products of counts that were not full. He worked ahead and got the results. If this continues, Jimenez isn't going anywhere. He'll be staying in that rotation and if he keeps getting better in that regard, shoot forget worrying about losing his rotation spot, we're talking about a solid 1-through-5.

"It just shows you the quality of pitching we have," said Mike Aviles, who hit a two-run homer in the eighth inning. "When you have an offense as potent as theirs, you don't usually see a team like that get shut out twice. I think that shows how nasty Masto was and Ubaldo today."

Let's talk about that rotation.

Combined, over the three games this weekend the three starters went 2-0 with 14 hits, 3 earned runs, 17 strikeouts, and 5 walks in 21+ innings. That's a 1.27 ERA in three starts. That's just 5.1 innings not pitched by starters in regular frames, giving up just 3 runs, one run per game, to a team who has been a perennial offensive powerhouse.

A team that this year is still good offensively, scoring four runs a game and by no means a pushover.

There's something going on with this team that's definitely special. If you aren't on the bandwagon after that. Then let me tell you about the offense, because the pitching is just the start.

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Random Notes...

From the outburst, lost lead, and comeback, to giving Mastly the only run he needed, to settling things like they needed to be settled, the Indians offense took care of business this weekend and there are few offenses in the AL that are better, very few.

In this one specifically the Tribe got their runs later in the game, not scoring til the fifth. They would add on some comfort in the sixth with a three-spot, and then two more in the eighth after Jimenez left, just for good measure and an appearance from Vinnie Pestano.

Nick Swisher, the new two-hole hitter has took to his role this weekend had a nice three hit game. After a Bourn walk, Swisher's single not only put another runner on, it got Bourn to third, putting Kipnis in a way better hitting situation to just single Bourn home.

This past weekend, Swisher was 5-for-15 with a RBI and two runs scored. He hit a home run on Friday and these past two series has seen him raise his average from .238 to .246.

When he went a little cold, we forgot about him, but Yan Gomes with three hits, a run scored and a run knocked in. He now has three straight multi-hit games with at least a run scored and a run batted in in each one.

In the middle of it? Seems like **Michael Bourn** again. His walk and advancement to third on a Swisher double got the first run and then he went ahead and knocked in a pair with a double of his own. Despite being the leadoff hitter, has been coming up in run producing situations [and delivering in a big way](#)

"I don't have any certain thing that I'm trying to do," Bourn said. "I just try to put the bat on the ball. That's about it. I'm not going to say I'm never, ever thinking about hitting a home run, because that always crosses every player's mind every now and then."

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Bourny has also been homering, his fourth of the season came Saturday off Yu Darvish and accounted for the only run scored in the game and the difference. In July he's knocked in 16 runs compared to 11 scored. His role has reversed, but he's still coming through. Since the break he has a hit in every game except for one, but in that game he walked and scored a run. He also has 12 RBI of those RBI since the break and a pair of home runs.

This sweep over Texas is the first time since 1980 that the Indians have swept the Rangers at home.

[TRADE DEADLINE LOOMING]

Kind of suddenly, the Major League trade deadline has crept up on us. Wednesday marks the league's non-waiver deadline, meaning that a player does not have to clear waivers to be dealt. Trades can still be pulled off in August, but it is difficult for that to happen and is usually a much more low-key move. It does create more opportunities because teams are falling out, but the wavier system can get in the way.

The Indians don't seem to be desperately searching, which is a good thing in this market. Right now there a lot more buyers than sellers, which means the people available are prime targets that the teams expect prime returns on, inflated prices if you will. And if a team is interesting in trading someone despite being in a position to win some games, it may take more than usual to pry that player away. [Some teams may get desperate and do just that](#) . Don't expect the Indians to.

"Working through the realities of the market," Antonetti said, "if there's the right deal that makes sense, that we feel will improve us, we'll make the deal. But if there's not the right deal, we're not going to make a trade just to say we made a trade."

And if anything, the Indians are in a good position because the one big area that they need a player in seems to be the one where there is a market for. And Chris Antonetti even says that it is an area they are focusing in on.

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"I think in the bullpen we could be a little bit more consistent," Antonetti said. "I think that's one area where we haven't been as consistent maybe as we would like, especially our ability to get left-handed hitters out. That's an area that we'll try to improve, whether it's internal alternatives or external alternatives."

Really, this team is playing well enough to make the playoffs if things go right. They've got a whole lot of talent. I wouldn't be worrying about making a big move to push this team over the top either. They don't need a big move right now. They're in a position where they're only going to get better too based off the talent they have coming through the pipelines. Talent that they should hold onto right now, because there's not a lot that needs fixing on this team that has an easy or cheap remedy available, if one is even available.

"I enjoy our team, and that's a good feeling," Francona said recently. "The one thing I never really want to do is, I don't ever want to press [Antonetti] to do something. I know he cares, but I also know that we have some prospects in our Minor Leagues that we don't want to lose, and I feel really strongly about that. I know he does, too. This is a good group to see how good we can get. When we play the game right, we can win."

Hold strong. If there's a lefty reliever out there that can be had at the right price, it may be worth jumping at. If not, the Indians can find some help elsewhere.

The other team looking for pen help? Detroit. They need a closer and are talking to a lot of teams about options. Joe Nathan's name is coming up, and Jonathan Papelbon remains probably their number one target. The Indians don't need that kind of help, so they're not exactly "in competition" with the Tigers in that regard, but it is interest that both teams could use some boosting in the pen.

Jake Peavy could be on the verge of being dealt by Chicago, which would mean the Indians wouldn't face him in this upcoming series against the White Sox. Which would be nice. It remains to be seen if the the Sox can pull off a deal before Peavy's start on Tuesday. I'm sure they would prefer to get rid of him before that start so the team acquiring him could get one more game out of the veteran right-hander.

Other than that, there's really no movement out there since the Garza deal went down. Alfonso

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Soriano went back to the Bronx, but clubs have not pulled triggers because there really are not many to be pulled. We'll see how the next few days shakes out, but right now, it may be looking like a tame deadline, for not just the Indians, but all of baseball.

[RANDOM RUNDOWN]

Some bullpen notes. The first with **Joe Smith**, who faltered on Friday and was a big reason the Indians had to play extra innings and win it in the bottom of the eleventh. Smith believes [he has a terrible month](#) every year and that right now, July is that terrible month.

"It seems like there's always one month in the year where I'm terrible," Smith said on Saturday. "This month, it's been tough. It's been a grind. I've just got to throw strikes, get ahead and I know good things will happen. I've been in the league long enough. I know I can get outs. I've been through slumps before. It's not anything I'm not familiar with. I'll come back and start rolling."

On Friday he coughed up the two run lead and accounted for his ninth earned run in his past 10+ innings. He was so angry with himself and determined to break this funk, [he begged Tito to pitch on Saturday](#)

"Smitty actually came into my office," Francona said. "He goes, 'Please let me pitch.'"

And despite Masterson pitching a brilliant game, Francona decided it was time to go to Smith for the last out in the eighth inning. Smith admitted he made a bad pitch to Beltre, but he had just hit it off the end to get the out he needed. Sometimes a little bit of luck can end a streak.

The other bullpen note has to do with the team's closer, who has really found himself [back to usual tricks after his DL stint](#)

. He's really on fire right now. And some of you were calling **Chris Perez**

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a useless bum.

"He looks like he's back to the C.P. of last year and the year before," Indians setup man Joe Smith said. "That's great for us, man. The guy is a two-time All-Star closer. He locks down games. That shortens up games by an inning for us."

He's also not really been talking to the media. He's off Twitter too, so that's why he's been so quiet. But that's okay. His job is to close out games. And since the DL stint ended he's given up just one earned run, struck out 11 hitters in 14 innings, and has notched eight of his 14 saves. He hasn't blown one since his return and on Friday when the club needed him to, he went two innings to pick his team up and get them in a position to win the game.

I made a call last week that suggest **Ryan Raburn** should probably be playing a little more, just because the way he's swung the bat.

[He delivered big on Friday.](#)

but that is nothing new to this team this year.

"Having guys that have the ability to play every day, want to play every day and accept not playing every day," Francona said, "while being a leader and contributing when they don't, that's the kind of guy you want, and good teams have those guys. Every good team I've been on has had guys like that, and I'd put him right in the middle of that."

That being said, Raburn has played in over half of the Indians games. And just in that short span of games he's knocked in 31 runs and hit 12 home runs. He's carrying a solid average, a great on-base percentage, and nothing that he does looks bad. Just keep truckin' Raburn.

Josh Tomlin is finally back on a mound. The right-hander [got to pitch one shutout inning](#) on Friday for the Arizona League Indians. That's great news for the Indians in that if he can continue on the way he is, he may be ready for the 2014 season.

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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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