

Morning Rundown: Say It With Me, Cleveland Is a Playoff Team

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

Monday, July 29 2013 11:00 PM - Last Updated Saturday, August 03 2013 9:01 AM



We've talked about magic, being special, being good, among other things. But now, you can say it with me if you need to. The Cleveland Indians are a playoff team. At least, a playoff contending team. If the postseason started today, on August the 2nd, your Tribe would be the second wild card and in the American League postseason.

If that isn't exciting to think about, then you need to go home and wallow in the sorrow of your misery with the Browns. That may have been a really harsh thing to say, but if that is the case, you probably deserve it.

This team is proving that it is for real. Unfortunately the Tigers and Royals are winning just as much as they are. The good news, they're winning regardless. With the Sox dispatched, the Indians get a nice three game series against the Florida Miami Marlins before the "Showdown for First Place" gets underway next week.

The way both teams are playing, that will probably be a showdown and first place will probably

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be in the balance, because neither team is losing to other teams right now.

WHITE SOX - 1 | INDIANS - 6

W: Justin Masterson (13-7)

L: Chris Sale (6-11)

[\[BOXSCORE\]](#)

As hard as you could try, the big story that has to be jumping out at you on this one is **Ryan Raburn**

who is really known around these parts as simply Rakin' Raburn.

This is a part-time bench player with 13 home runs, 37 RBI, and an OPS of .961. Are you kidding me? .961? That leads the Indians, despite having only played in 62 games, that's not much less than full-season's worth. If Raburn qualified, his .961 OPS would be tied for sixth with Colorado's Michael Cuddyer in all of baseball.

How about this? Notable players who have less RBI than Ryan Raburn and more games played. Andre Ethier, Joe Mauer, Jacoby Ellsbury, Bryce Harper, Paul Konerko Chase Headley, Giancarlo Stanton, Shin-Soo Choo, Nick Swisher, Shane Victorino, Melkey Cabrera, and Jason Heyward. Those are some names there. What does that say about Raburn? What does it mean for the Indians really?

This guy seemingly deserves to be a full-time starter, whether you get him in there at DH more often than not or what, I don't know. Perhaps you get him some time in at first and let Swisher be able to DH to give him rest. I don't know.

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But I do know that [Rakin' Raburn is living up to the name](#) .

"We're fortunate, because he's a good player," Francona said of Raburn, a bench player who led Cleveland to a walk-off victory with a three-run homer last Friday. "On days like today, he's a good guy to have in there, because they have to respect his bat, and he's a threat, and he keeps the line moving."

He's not doing this from the bottom of the lineup either. Raburn was in the three-hole yesterday. He was frequently up in the lineup when playing earlier in the year too. The guy is doing this in the middle of things. Francona said he's a good guy to start against lefties. And of course you do that because he's a right-handed hitter, but he's got the numbers to back that up. He's hitting .207 against them with 10 walks to 19 strikeouts. He has more home runs and RBI against righties though with that .265 average, but he strikes out more and walks less.

So more productive against righties, more disciplined against the lefties. Either way, the overall numbers are pretty and fun to see, especially for a guy who plays three times a week if that.

Speaking of getting lefties out. Poor Chicago, they just can't touch **Justin Masterson** this year. In four starts against the pale hose, Mastey is 4-0 in 31.2 IP, giving up just three runs with 9 BB, and 27 strikeouts. He's dominated them and that's where nearly 1/3rd of his wins come from.

In this one, it was all about the ground ball outs for Mastey, which he got eight of them on this afternoon.

"Real good sink," Francona said of Masterson, who induced eight ground balls and four flyouts. "And on a day when the ball was really flying to right, that's a good day to have sink. You saw on Raburn's ball, that ball got up in the jet stream. It could be a dangerous area. But he had real good movement on that, and it kind of set everything else up."

Throw in his seven punchouts and the amount of balls the White Sox actually hit up into the air in play is astounding. The homer and a few of the hits were line drives, and the Beckham single in the seventh was a ground ball. So when you add it all up, Masterson was incredible.

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And really, a side from that seventh when he gave up the three hits to load the bases, only for Rich Hill to wiggle out of for him, Masterson was relatively clean. He gave up a solo home run to lead off the sixth, but innings 1-through-5 were as ho-hum as you can get for a guy like Mast. In fact, the White Sox were 1-for-15 with the three walks in those first five innings. That's keeping the other team in check.

Random Notes...

Chris Sale has not had a good time against the Indians this year. He is now 0-3 in 17.1 innings given up 16 runs. At least they don't have any issues with the ace.

With the lefty on the mound, Tito employed the Stubbs leadoff hitter idea once again and it worked out better than you could have expected it to once again. Stubbs went 3-for-4 with a pair of runs scored and walk. That's ultra productive when you can sit your leadoff hitter and essentially put this lefty-dominator in when needed. Let's not forget that Jason Kipnis was also sitting with Aviles in the lineup. So that's two major players out against the Sox best pitcher and the Indians still won.

It was just a yard made for the boomstick yesterday afternoon because in addition to Raburn and Stubbs' three hit days, Calros Santana also had three hits and Yan Gomes had a pair. Brantley and Asdrubal could not pick up hits, but Cabrera scored a run.

Breaking news... **Mark Reynolds** knocked in a run. This is truth. It's sad that we have now gotten to a point where the man is hitting eighth and even though he's still third on the team in RBI, you can't count on him to do anything. And he knows it. It's on his mind. This situation [has just festered to this point](#)

. You kind of feel bad for the guy.

"The thing is it's there," said Reynolds. "I have the ability; it's just fighting the six inches between my ears."

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He says the situation he is in is tough. Of course it is. But he needs to find a way to turn it all around, because if he doesn't, the way the Indians are playing will force them to have to do something undesirable with Reynolds. Like, cut him or something.

I don't know if Rich Hill is turning the corner, but he had quite the solid outing yesterday and is actually looking much better in this past week. It would be nice if he were to just face lefties and be the matchup guy, especially with Rzepczynski around, but if he can give you a clean inning then Tito isn't going to say no. Hill was very good in the bases loaded situation and then getting a clean inning in the eighth.

[RANDOM RUNDOWN]

If the Indians make it to the World Series, I guess it's a good thing that the American League won the All-Star game. Because [Cleveland is unbeatable in Cleveland](#) .

"We play good at home," veteran Jason Giambi said simply. "We enjoy playing, having a good time. We're really believing in ourselves as a ballclub, especially when we play at home. We enjoy it."

The Indians are following that formula of playing really good at home and around .500 on the road. They've reeled off 11 straight at Progressive Field and are 37-19 overall, the best mark in the American League. The bad news is that the Indians have more road games left than home games, but only six more. The good news is that September has a nice long home stand and more home than road games, so they can play the pressure filled month where they play the best.

What's going to be the difficult challenge is the upcoming road trip they have. After a quick trip to Miami, the Indians return for that huge four game set against the Tigers and a weekend series against the sinking Angels. Then begins the rest of the month where they will be at home for just three games. There is a west coast trip in there that will see the Athletics and then back-to-back series with Atlanta and Detroit.

So that's why the upcoming series against Miami and this week-long homestand has become crucial. The Indians probably will hover around .500 on the trip, so getting some big wins now

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would be excellent. The good news is that many players are significantly better at home, especially the pitching. Cleveland's ERA at home is 3.70 compared to 4.45 on the road. 11 of their 14 shutouts have also come at home as well.

The even better news is that the offense doesn't really fluctuate based off being at home or on the road. They've scored 258 runs at home, for an average of 4.60 runs per game, where as on the road they've scored 261 runs, for an average of 5.01 runs per game, which is higher. So the offense will be fine regardless.

You can go a little deeper and aside from Ubaldo Jimenez, most of the starters fare better at home. Jimenez is actually better on the road at 3.30 ERA compared to his 5.16 road ERA. Go figure. But both Kluber and McAllister love Progressive Field, with Corey Kluber at 2.98 at home compared to 4.55 on the road and Zach McAllister sits at 2.82 at home compared to 4.36 on the road. Scott Kazmir is actually better on the road, but is 1-4 with a 3.99 ERA compared to 5-0 with a 4.25 at home while Justin Masterson fares the best, 7-2 at home with a 2.63 ERA and 5-5 with a 4.37 ERA on the road. Must just be a run-support thing with Kazmir.

Either way, this team is playing hot, so hopefully that carried around into this next week and the Indians can get halfway through the month in first place after their series with the Tigers. You would also take a split to if you would ask me.

Some encouraging words from an "American League Scout" in the notes on MLB.com on **Marc Rzepczynski**

. The scouts says that Zep should be able to help Cleveland in what they got him to do: getting left handers out.

"When I saw him earlier in St. Louis, it looked like his velocity was down a little bit. His out pitch is his slider, and he really wasn't getting to it ... he was behind a lot," the scout said. "To me, it looks like he's back a little bit. It looked like the slider was sharper. He had more command with his pitches."

He should be utilized soon, especially in the Detroit series with Prince Fielder right in the middle of that lineup. For the record, Fielder is 1-for-6 against Zep with two walks and four strikeouts. So the Indians definitely will be utilizing him in that situation.

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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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