

## Morning Rundown: Showdown Begins for Tribe After Wins Over Miami

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

Friday, August 02 2013 2:10 PM - Last Updated Monday, August 05 2013 9:27 AM

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Several things can happen at this point. The Indians can sweep the Detroit Tigers and take over first place in the AL Central division. That is highly unlikely. The Tigers can sweep the Indians and put the Indians seven games out. That too would seem unlikely the way the Indians are playing. Each team has to win a game in this series.

They could win three of the four and still drive the Indians back, or the Indians could win three of four and pull within a game of first place. Or the teams can split and we are back where we started with just a few more games left before the two teams.

I was driving in from Mentor yesterday and on Route 271 there was an electronic billboard. Battle for the Central Division, Monday-Thursday. The old English D and the new Block C. This is for real people. Before we can get into that, we have some weekend business to attend to.

**INDIANS - 2 | MARLINS - 0**

**W: Scott Kazmir (7-4)**

**L: Nathan Eovaldi (2-2)**

**S: Chris Perez (17)**

### [BOXSCORE](#)

I remember doing the statistics and going through everything from last year and this and noting how Derek Lowe was downright atrocious in his four-five games following the break. It wasn't long after that he was axed and let go. I was comparing the "veteran addition" the Indians had in **Scott Kazmir** and Lowe.

My remark was a simple one. Kazmir is only getting better. That's why this team can stick around more than last year's team.

And would you look at that? Four starts after the break, Kazmir is 2-0 with a 1.44 ERA in 25 innings. He's walked just seven and struck out 20. I thought we were all hopeful that Kazmir could somehow make this comeback, but did a large portion of this fan base think he'd do it to this extent? Add in some breakout seasons from McAllister and Kluber, returning to form for Masterson as the ace.

This rotation is better than we all thought. And it is hard to pick one, but I think Kazmir is the key to it all. Not only has he given the Indians a viable left-handed starter, he's a veteran presence who now knows how to pitch, and the fact that they didn't know if they were going into this season with a fifth starter, or even a fourth starter has just added to his importance.

*"He's been pretty good," Francona said. "He's worked hard to not only maintain, but to answer the bell whenever he pitches. It's been fun to watch."*

Kaz went six strong with no runs off two hits and two walks, very little traffic at all with seven strikeouts. He went through a point in the game where he didn't allow a hit, spanning from the first inning after a one-out double, to the sixth inning with one out (15 outs) when Christian Yelich singled. But Kaz ended that inning emphatically by striking out the side in the frame with pure authority.

He got rid of any traffic earlier with some great defense, including a pickoff play in the third

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where **Yan Gomes** was able to peg Jeff Mathis at first after pitcher Nathan Eovaldi botched his bunt attempt and Mathis went too far.

*"Yan was heads-up," Kazmir said. "He went straight for it, and Kipnis was there to receive the throw. That was awesome. It was a great play."*

Gomes wasn't just awesome behind the plate defensively, he brought his stick with him to the dish when he was batting. The Yanimal collected three hits and scored a run, bringing his average up to .310. It wasn't a big part in the offense that scored the two runs, but it contributed. The guy is simply amazing right now. In his past six starts he has multiple hits in all of them. In that span he is 14-for-22. That's a .636 average.

The start on Sunday was one Gomes had been waiting for for an entire year after he was optioned down to Triple-A right before his Blue Jays squad was supposed to play in Miami. Yan [got to play in front of family](#) and friends behind home in Miami.

*"It's definitely cool to be home," Gomes said. "I got to hang out with my parents last night. That was exciting. And I'm definitely looking forward to batting practice, because I know a lot of my buddies will be out here. It's definitely exciting being out here."*

Even though Reynolds had a few hits in this one, you have to keep Gomes' bat in the lineup the way he is swinging. You can DH Santana or Swisher and play the other at first to keep that guy's bat in the lineup. He has been on fire and having started three games this past week, and that's cause Kazmir made two starts. But you can't go away from him right now, not the way he's swinging. He'll start once with Kazmir on the mound, but he has to be in there for someone else too. You have to keep playing him while he's hot.

The Kazmir-Gomes battery was super effective on this afternoon. And it netted the Indians a series win after they dropped the first one to Jose Fernandez. Dropped being the operative word. It salvaged the series and set up the "Battle for the AL Central", even though it is August.

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### Random Notes...

The shutout the Indians posted was the 15th this season, which is tied for the most since 1976. They've got just two more to go to reach that, but 11 more to reach the record of 26 seems a little much. But hey, that was the 1948 championship team, so it is understandable if they can't get that far.

Lonnie Chisenhall knocked in the first run in the second with a one-out single to score Gomes. Credit Lonnie because with a base open and Kazmir on deck, they should have been really pitching around Chiz. But he made them pay for giving him anything to hit. Lucky too because Kazmir proceeded to ground into a double play to end the frame.

The one run was all that the pitching staff needed, but that didn't stop Michael Brantley from doing what he does best. With two outs Brantley singled a ball up the middle to score Mike Aviles, his 53rd RBI of the year. It also bring his two-out RISP average up to .382 on the season. Dr. Smooth? How about Dr. Clutch.

The Indians were hoping early on that that the way Bryan Shaw was pitching would let him slot into that seventh inning a little more. With Pestano in Triple-A and Smith taking over the eighth, Shaw and others have been needed for the seventh. He came through in a big way for the Indians. While he did give up a pair of hits, he struck out the side and all but three of his pitches went for strikes.

The 17th save of the year for Chris Perez and he didn't even put anyone on this time. He did not mess around with 12 pitches and with it, comes his 11th straight consecutive successful save opportunity. Ho hum.. HO HUM I SAY!

### [RANDOM RUNDOWN]

I was very complimentary to the four guys in the rotation, but failed to mention one name in particular.

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Look, Friday was bad. The Indians played a very bad game defensively, offensively they had nothing going at all against the phenom Fernandez. It's whatever.

But **Ubaldo Jimenez** didn't help his case. We saw the real Marlins these past two games. They shouldn't have pounded the guy like they did on Friday. Yet they did. Jimenez has been great on the road, but for some reason, in this one, against a National League team, something he's accustomed to, he was bad.

Fair or not, it has led to the Indians doing something rather risky. But I have to say, I respect the move. The Tribe will essentially replace Jimenez for his upcoming start and essentially employing a six man rotation for one time around. They'll be giving rookie **Danny Salazar** [a start on Wednesday](#), pushing him to Friday against the Angels.

It will also give Kazmir an extra day of rest, as he is the one guy who was slated to miss the Tigers series until the decision.

*"It was some of that," Francona said. "Some of it's competitive and it also gives us a chance to give him a little [rest], too. I think we thought that would help him. There's been some times with [Scott Kazmir] where we've done the same thing. For Ubaldo, I think this will do some good."*

As you could see, rest was a factor, but the numbers against Detroit had to have played a role in this decision. Jimenez aside from one start has struggled against the Tigs. He's given up 10 earned runs in 13 innings, and that's in three starts. So yeah, just over four innings a contest.

Salazar meanwhile is a bit of an unknown for the Tigers. He made his debut against the Blue Jays and was stellar. Since he was demoted after that spot-start, he's been lighting it up in Columbus. He hasn't been pitching in many innings as the Indians are being careful, but he has made three four starts, given up two runs in 17 innings while striking out 29 hitters. Yes. 29 hitters.

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This move, if it pays off, could end up being the move that makes this team's season. If it doesn't work out, I don't think the Indians could have done any worse than what Jimenez has done against the Tigers this season, so no harm, no foul in my mind. But if he goes out and helps the Indians pick up a win in this oh-so-crucial series?

Boy oh boy, someone's pushing some of the right buttons.

[Good to see the speed](#) of **Michael Bourn** and Drew Stubbs come up big for the Indians in a game. The club has been fast, but not like they were on Saturday when Bourn swiped three bags and scored three runs. We've been seeing him knock in runs lately, but on Saturday, he and Stubbs showed that they can create some quick offense. Bourn is not stealing just to steal though, he's going to pick the right situation. And on Saturday, he saw a vulnerable catcher and pitcher combo and a prime situation to make something happen.

*"He's been very intelligent on the bases, and he hasn't run into very many outs," Indians manager Terry Francona said of Bourn. "That's important. When he gets on, every [pitcher] pretty much has been 1.1 or 1.2 [seconds] to the plate, so it doesn't always show up in stolen bases."*

Bourn's feat was the first time an MLB player did three runs and three steals in a game since 2010 when Juan Pierre, playing for the Marlins right now, did it. It's been nine years since an Indian did it, Coco Crisp in 2004.

**Marc Rzepczynski** [made his Indians debut over the weekend](#) and was really good. He pitched a solid inning of shutout ball. He joins the suddenly pretty good Rich Hill in the 1-2 combo of left-handers. Huh, go figure. Francona said that the Indians got him to primarily face left handed hitters, but it was nice to see him face all right-handers in his shot.

*"We got him mostly to face lefties," Francona said. "With the situation in the game, he faced all righties, but his velocity was good. He threw a couple pretty good breaking balls. When he missed, he missed so far out of the zone that it wasn't like a hanger. It was actually kind of what we expected stuff-wise."*

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The guy the Indians jettisoned to make room for "Letters", Joe Martinez, cleared waivers and was out-righted to Columbus again. They also traded Fernando Nieve to Oakland. Nieve was up at one point but had been in Columbus just hanging around. They also activated Boof Bonser from the DL and [released him for good measure](#) .

The DH-issues the Indians had last year [has not really been an issue this year](#) . And it has everything to do with the fact that Interleague games are spread out. It is also nice not having a permanent DH, with a guy like Giambi on the bench to pinch hit in situations.

But it is also nice having a guy to play in that DH spot every night. It's never a "hole" if you will.

*"For three days, it's not the end of the world," Francona said on Friday. "They used to have the schedule where you played sometimes nine in a row, a 10-day trip. That was hard, man. You guys lived through it with Hafner. I had Ortiz. I thought it was very unfair. Now, you're here three games, and we're not really tied into a DH anyways. We're probably fortunate in a lot of regards."*

I'm still in the camp that MLB needs to do away with the DH in the AL or adopt it full time in the NL. But the way things are right now with the mixed interleague schedules, it doesn't really present an issue if you ask me.

**Josh Tomlin** threw [another clean and scoreless inning](#) of relief for the Captains on Sunday. I'm sure the Indians would like to get him to a point where he could pitch multiple innings before they even consider him as an option.

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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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