

Time for the Tribe to Forget Detroit, Focus on the Wild Card

Written by {ga=tommoore}

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It's all over for the Cleveland Indians and it is still early in August.

No, it's not the season we are referring to but the Tribe's hopes of catching Detroit for the A.L. Central Division.

After losing the first three games of the four-game series to the Tigers in some pretty dramatic ways, the race for the division title is effectively over. Even if the Tribe can pull out tonight's final game of the series, the Tigers will have extended their lead in the standings to five games with just 47 games to play. That may not seem like an insurmountable obstacle to overcome, but when you consider that the Tribe is just 3-12 against Detroit this year, including an embarrassing 1-8 at Progressive Field ... well it's safe to say it's over.

But unlike the last two years when the Indians stumbled in the second half of the season, this year's squad still has something to play for as they are still just 2.5 games back in the wild card standings. The Indians need to get Detroit out of town, put the last three days behind them and get back to business because there is still a lot to play for over the final weeks of the season. (Winning tonight's final game of the series would be a nice start.)

On a certain level we almost wish the Indians did not have a game tonight so they could get away from the past few days for a few hours. From Chris Perez giving up a ninth-inning home run on Monday night, to Justin Masterson having one bad inning on Tuesday, Danny Salazar having his "welcome to the big leagues, kid" moment with Miguel Cabrera on Wednesday and Corey Kluber (who had posted an ERA of 2.53) going on the disabled list with a sprained finger,

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it has been quite a week so far for the Indians.

The good part is this team has shown all season that it is capable of bouncing back just when people are ready to write the season off.

And it is encouraging, we suppose, that even though they have lost three in a row to Detroit, the Tribe hasn't been steamrolled by the Tigers. Detroit won the first two games despite being shutout in 16 of the 18 innings played, and giving up a home run to Cabrera is certainly nothing to be ashamed about. It doesn't make the losing better, but it shows that if the Indians play well they can hang with a team as talented as the Tigers. Although it would be nice to beat them once in a while.

There is even a small silver lining in Kluber's injury in that it means that Salazar will stay in the rotation at least for a while. He was outstanding in just his second major league start on Wednesday and he did strike out Cabrera the first three times he faced him in the game - the only pitcher to do that to the reigning Triple Crown winner.

In just two starts Salazar has totaled 17 strikeouts, joining Herb Score as the only starting pitchers in franchise history to post at least seven strikeouts in their first two major league appearances, [according to the team's website](#) . Salazar's strikeout total is also the most for a Tribe rookie in his first two starts since Luis Tiant pulled off the same number in 1964.

So the Tribe has that going for them.

What they don't have is much of an offense as they are struggling to put runs on the board.

The team made a move to correct that on Thursday by designating Mark Reynolds for assignment. Since May 7, Reynolds has the lowest batting average among qualified players in that time span and the second-lowest OPS. He has also only driven in two runs since July 1. Of course, Nick Swisher has only driven in six runs in that same time frame in almost twice as many at bats, but he's from O-H-I-O so that's apparently not an issue. Maybe Reynolds was not "grizzled" enough to earn a spot on Francona's bench next to Jason Giambi, who is carrying

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around a .171 average since July 1 but can do no wrong in the manager's eyes. (Although to be fair to Giambi, he has driven in four times as many runs as Reynolds since July 1 in half the at bats.)

Reynolds leaves the Tribe tied for the team lead in home runs with Jason Kipnis, which is kind of bad when you realize that Reynolds hasn't hit one since June 28.

Also not helping matters is that Asdrubal Cabrera is hitting just .189 since July 1 (we had to double-check our math because that did not seem possible). Why he is still batting in the No. 4 slot in the lineup is a mystery to everyone but manager Terry Francona.

But none of that needs to matter if the Tribe can just get back on track. They have played the Tigers close these past three games, proving that why they put their minds to it and play sound baseball they can be competitive with anyone.

Figure out a way to pull out a win tonight, have a good weekend series against the Angels and suddenly they are right back in the mix for a chance at the post-season.

With less than 50 games left to play in the season the Tribe finds themselves with an opportunity to play meaningful games in September for the first time since 2007.

What they do with that opportunity is entirely up to them.

(Photo by The Associated Press)