



So...that was an interesting week. The Indians came into August within shouting distance of 1st place in the AL Central with a big series against the division-leading Tigers looming. Trailing the Kitties by 3 games headed into the 4-game series, even as poor a mathematician as myself could connect the dots and see the significance of the Indians protecting their home turf and at least winning the series against the Tigers. As we all know, game one started off well enough until Chris Perez picked a poor time to have his first bad outing in quite a while, giving up 4 runs in a 4-2 loss. Perez hadn't allowed a crooked number on the scoreboard since his disastrous blown save in Boston back on May 26, (and as we know he landed on the DL after that outing). Worse even than losing that game to the Tigers, starter Corey Kluber wound up with an injury of his own, spraining his finger and going on the shelf for at least the next 4 weeks. The Indians then proceeded to drop the final three games in the series, and then Friday night's game against the Angels for good measure. A three game deficit in the division suddenly turned into a 7.5 game chasm, and control of the 2

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wild card spot ceded way to a 3.5 game hole. After Friday, the Indians found themselves just a half game above the streaking Royals for 2

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place in the Central Division. What a difference a week makes.

None of this means the Indians are out of the playoff hunt, mind you. The Central Division may be a foregone conclusion at this point, as the Tigers have a 7.5 game lead and the best run differential in the major leagues. They're going to be awfully tough to catch at this point, depressing as that may be to admit. But the other contenders for the two AL Wild Card spots are having their own issues. Tampa Bay is the favorite for one of the spots, but their #2 starter (Matt Moore) is on the DL. Texas lost Nelson Cruz to the Biogenesis suspensions, although they did manage to trade for Alex Rios (and Alex Rios' contract) on Friday. Baltimore's starting pitchers have struggled all season, and they play a far more difficult schedule the rest of the way out than the Indians will face. It's an uphill climb and it's going to involve a lot more scoreboard watching than the usual September playoff fight, but there's still a chance for the

Indians to snag a wild card slot for the first time in team history. Even after the Tigers debacle, [Baseball Prospectus playoff odds](#) had the Indians at a 28.5% chance of making it to the postseason (and a 1.1% chance of winning the World Series). That's a far cry from the Tigers MLB-best 99.5% chance at the playoffs and 23.9% chance at taking home the hardware, but hey, at least we're not the White Sox. There's a lot of baseball left to be played, and the Indians schedule remains undaunting. This team is much better than last year's edition that skidded to an 18-45 finish after The Verlander Game™, and I fully expect to be able to watch interesting baseball down the stretch in September. I'm not going to go out on a limb and predict a playoff spot or anything, but I'm also not ready to write off the season just yet. When the Indians lost 8 in a row back in June, the club responded by going 14-5 over the next 3+ weeks to get right back in playoff contention. Do they have a similar bounceback run in them after the August debacle? Time will tell, but I certainly think they're capable.

Speaking of writing things off, the Indians finally got around to DFA'ing Mark Reynolds last week, a move that has been several weeks in the making. After an uncharacteristic and electric start to the season that saw Reynolds hit an impressive .291/.367/.645 with 11 HR and 29 RBI in the first 31 games of the season, he hit just 4 HR the rest of the way and was sporting a paltry .680 OPS when he was finally designated last week. Besides the stunning demise at the plate, word around the team suggested that Reynolds wasn't exactly a leader in the clubhouse, either. Whispers from the corner of Carnegie and Ontario started leaking out a few weeks ago that Reynolds was not handling his reduced role with a veteran's poise, and was particularly galled when he was (more and more frequently) pinch hit for late in games. [As Francona put it to reporters following the move, "I think it was becoming harder for Mark to handle not playing."](#) Simple words from Tito, but read into that how you will. I know from watching the walkoff celebrations against the White Sox, Reynolds was nowhere to be found, having hit the showers early rather than sit in the dugout and support his teammates.. Giambi, Kip, Swish, Asdrubal and even Santana were front and center in the traditional home plate mobbings, but not once did I notice Mark Reynolds join into the fray. I'm not sure exactly how long that trend has been in place, but if in addition to his well-documented struggles at the plate, Reynolds became a drain in the clubhouse, then it really was past time for the Indians to cut bait and move on.



