



They don't call him Big Game James for nothing. They also don't call it a strike ZONE for nothing. There was a multitude of things last night. This is playoff baseball though, so no excuses. Onto the next one today, but let's take a quick look back at last night.

INDIANS - 1 | ROYALS - 7

W: James Shields

L: Scott Kazmir

[\[BOXSCORE\]](#)

I know I said no excuses, but that's why I have to lead off with this.

HOLY SMOKES was that umpiring crew all-around horrible last night. Look, umpire's have their own strike zones, that's fine. Not one is the same. But at least make sure it is same the entire night. That's all a hitter and a pitcher asks for.

Brian O'Nora's zone last night was not consistent. Most notably, he had an issue with the low and outside strike. Kazmir was not getting the call at all, and had he did, it probably would had got him out of that first inning without damage. It didn't, he went on to give up a single to Billy

Butler, and then showed a bit of anger towards the situation.

Not the way to handle it, but also early in the game, so maybe we'll give O'Nora that. Until later on that same pitch gets Jason Kipnis looking for a strikeout, when earlier in the inning Nick Swisher took it for a walk. So, I ask you, where is the consistency? There is none, and that is what is frustrating about it. Shields seemingly got the calls all night, which doesn't help when he's already good to begin with. He didn't need them, but he got them, and it just made the Indians job last night that much tougher.

More on Shields in a bit, but the strikezone wasn't the only problem. A huge turning point in the game was in the sixth inning when Salvadore Perez led the frame off with a triple. Or should I say, a double BARELY stretched into a triple. It was a close call, but Chisenhall had the tag slapped on Perez's hand right before it touched the bag, and surprise surprise, Bill Welke appeared to make the incorrect call.

Scott Kazmir even said that the call changed the game. For him, it did, because he couldn't get out of that inning, and neither could the bullpen after they came in.

How was this crew so all-around bad? [As TCF's own Adam Burke astutely pointed out](#) , this is the same crew that [made a mess of the Houston/Los Angeles situation](#) earlier this year. So, no shock at all really that they blew a few one's last night.

Bad umpiring aside, the Indians did not lose because of it. It only compounded things and made it a little more frustrating that the Tribe had to play not only the Royals, but the guys in black.

Playing the Royals was tough enough, [mainly because of that guy on the mound](#) . James Shields was as tough as he was the last time out.

"I thought he was really good tonight," Francona said of Shields. "He always has that offspeed kind of in his back pocket. He'll get a roll-over, but we had a lot of strikeouts. Some looking. Some swinging. That means, he's staying out of the middle."

The one difference between this week's start and last week's start was the amount of pitches he threw. The Indians did make him work significantly more than last time, which resulted in him only going six innings. But it also resulted in 10 strikeouts. The Tribe did make him work though and took him deep into counts. But again, they just couldn't finish him off or get the big hit that they needed.

Kansas City got four two-out hits. Butler in the first, Perez in the third, Escobar and Moustakas in the seventh to end the scoring. The ones by Butler and Perez hurt the most. Mainly because Kazmir should have been out of the inning and those were pretty much back-breakers. The only reason Bonifacio scored in the first was because he stole second on a delayed steal. That allowed him to get to third on a Hosmer fly-out. Had that not happened, he'd be stuck at third on the single and would have only advanced to third and Kazmir would have gotten out of the inning.

And in the third, Alex Gordon ended up scoring because he reached first on a strikeout wild pitch. Perez's single came after Kazmir had technically already recorded three outs. Them's the breaks though and you have to credit the Royals for executing on their extra outs. The Indians had several sloppy plays, those two included, that just added on to the Royals night. So not only was Shields effective, the defense for the Indians behind Kazmir wasn't sharp. That's what happens when the other team plays well and you don't. You don't win the game.

"They give themselves opportunities," Indians designated hitter Jason Giambi said. "With their starting pitching and bullpen, you're going to win a lot of games doing that. They put it on us tonight. You take your cap off. They played great baseball."

Can't say it was a bad outing for Kazmir, who struck out six and walked just one in the five-plus innings he pitched. He could have very well had fewer runs given up and perhaps went a bit deeper if things went his way. But as mentioned, some bad plays behind him defensively and just lack of execution.

Point is, you won't win every game. It would have been nice to win this one and get a series started off on the right foot against this team, keep the momentum of last weekend going. But the thing is, that was their best pitcher. The Indians have a favorable matchup tonight in Corey Kluber going up against a wide-eyed rookie making his first start. You just have to take this one

game at a time.

Random Notes...

Lonnie! The Chiz Kid is [definitely heating up](#) , unlike Asdrubal Cabrera who is giving off the impression that he is heating up. More on that in a second. Chisenhall hit his 11th home run of the year to lead off the fifth inning for the Indians against Shields. It looked like it was going to start something because Bourn followed with a bunt single, but the Tribe, as they did in every other situation, was stalled offensively after that.

Chisenhall though doesn't just have a few homers in his last few games, he's getting hits. He's hitting .346 in the month of September with a .393 on-base percentage. The thing is he doesn't play every night, so he's getting hot while still being used as a part-time player. Tito is using him effectively in the matchups (mostly righties) he thinks favor Chiz better. And it's working.

Bad night for the Yanimal. Yan Gomes was one of the guys up in several key spots and he couldn't get the job done. So was Jason Kipnis, both went 0-for-4, both combined for five of the Indians 17 strikeouts. Which set a Kansas City record for one game. When you think about that, well over-50 percent of the outs KC record was a strikeout.

Not even going to touch up again on the errors and the misplays that weren't counted as errors. Just not going to do it.

The Kazmir-Hosmer battle was interesting, because it was clearly someone Kazmir was scared of given the past history between the two and Hosmer's recent success. I wouldn't say I had Miguel Cabrera level fear of him, but it just seemed like I got worried every time he came to the plate, and it was mainly because of the way Kazmir pitched him. HE seemed like he was scared of Hosmer.

In the first, Hosmer hit a huge deep ball to center field. It sounded awful off the bat, like it was going to crush the hopes and dreams of everyone. But because KC is such a big part, it ran out of steam. It might have been a home run in some other parks on a different night. He got all of

it.

In the third, Hosmer had a soft single off a broken bat to right field. But I think this is where Kazmir saw that he wasn't as scary as he was making him out to be, because even though Hosmer singled, Kazmir jammed him and won that battle. And that's where in the fifth he was able to really attack him like he attacked other hitters and got Hosmer to strikeout swinging. The psychology of that matchup was fascinating. Hosmer is a good hitter, and a good guy for KC to have in the three hole, but he isn't as dangerous as Kazmir seemed to make him out to be early on. He's really really good, don't get me wrong. I'd put him in the middle of the Indians lineup and be extremely happy. But Kazmir's nibbling made his night tougher.

[THE RACE FOR THE WILDCARD]

If you feel bad about last night, don't. The Indians are still in a good position. They need eight-nine wins in the final 12 games. They don't need 12 wins in the final 12 games. This team is still set up pretty nicely, even if they only win one game in this series. You'd like them to take the next two. You'd like them to win tonight and grab hold of a wild card spot. But keep calm for a second.

The Indians sit at 81 wins, and all you need to do is some simple math to figure this all out.

Given the nature of the schedule and how most of the wild card contenders play each other in some fashion down the stretch. Not all teams are going to get to win eight games. Let's assume that is what is going to take to guarantee a spot. Heck, it may only be seven wins, you just don't know.

Three more games between the Rays and Rangers, if they split, they both sit at 83. They've also played one less game than the Tribe has. If the Rays then split with the Orioles and take two from the Yankees, that puts them at 88. They would need two wins from the Blue Jays series to solidify 90 wins. That's just one wild card team.

If the O's lose two to the Sox, split with Tampa, win two against Toronto, and even win two

against Boston in the last series, that puts them at 85. If the Yankees win their series expect for the one against the Rays, they would sit at 86. If the Royals take two from each of their remaining series, and three from the Sox, they too would be at 86. And finally, that would put Texas at, given that they win and split against Houston and LA, at 88.

So IF, and a big IF, things shake out that way, the math is simple for the Indians. Win eight games, nine if you can. Texas doesn't look like a team that can win eight games right now, which is the beauty of them sitting at 81 wins and a team like KC sitting at 79. Those teams need more wins than the Indians, Rangers and Rays.

Stay calm. Tampa beat Texas last night to claim the top wild card spot. Toronto and New York kicks off tonight, as does Baltimore and Boston.

[RANDOM RUNDOWN]

Alright so let's rap real quick about this **Asdrubal Cabrera** "getting hot" business. Yes [he's been hitting a few home runs](#) in his past few games, which is great. Awesome contribution, has helped win some games. And hey, if the home runs relax the guys in the lineup and make them better hitters, all the better. But Terry Francona is lying through his teeth if he thinks Cabrera is right. Which is why he danced around that and just talked about how impressed he was about Cabby's "attitude" towards his struggles.

"I've been really impressed with Cabby all year," Francona said. "You can never tell if he's gets hits or not, and I mean that in a good way. He doesn't drag his head. It's been tough on him, I think. He's a good player and he just keeps playing. He doesn't want days off. I've been really impressed with that side of him."

I barely buy that. Cabrera looks angry every time he pops up and out. He's swinging for the fences most of the time. Manning even pointed it out. His swing is long and he's trying to hit home runs. That's why he's hit four home runs and has like, five hits in the past few weeks. That's all he's trying to do, so when he runs into a pitch that he can hit for a home run, he does it. That's why he had those pop-ups he did last night. The home runs are great, but if that's what Cabrera is trying to do, he might as well be Mark Reynolds and hit in the seventh spot in the

lineup. He's getting pitches down there, which is why he's getting these home runs now. He doesn't get those pitches in the three hole, which is why he was struggling mightily there.

Nick Swisher on the other hand is actually getting hot. Swish is hitting the all well over the past month. It has really been needed with him up in the two hole and he's making up for the struggles Michael Bourn has been through as it as at least someone on base for the guys behind them to knock in.

They may not get any start from him in the regular season, but if they could get him back for a possible postseason game? Shoot, you'd like **Justin Masterson** to get back. You just don't know when you might need him. Masterson

[tossed from 110 feet yesterday](#)

and will be slated to throw a bullpen session on Friday back at Progressive Field. And now he has a bet with his manager.

"He actually beat me to the ballpark today," Francona said. "That's a guy that's trying. That makes you feel good. He's logged a lot of innings. He's a leader for a reason. To see him try so hard to come back, that part is even uplifting."

It doesn't matter right now what he can do or how long he can go. You are piecing things together already, just having Masterson is gravy. It's like someone going around getting donations or something. Can I count on five innings from you? Great. Four from you Salazar? More than perfect. If he has to come out of the pen for three innings, that's better than not having Masterson at all.

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