



I have a little bit of a sore throat this morning. Normally I'd blame my allergies, which are not fun to deal with at this time of the year. But I know exactly why there's a little raspiness.

I did nothing short of scream in my motor vehicle last night. You see, I wasn't able to be home for a portion of the game, so I naturally listened to it on the road in my car. That is never a good thing, because when I'm in that confined space, I'm more likely to yell and holler at the game. It didn't help that so much was on the line.

If I'm at my apartment? Oh no, don't worry, I'll let out a "COME ON!" or something of the sorts. But in the car? Forget about it.

INDIANS - 5 | ROYALS - 3

W: Cody Allen (6-1)

L: Wade Davis (7-11)

S: Chris Perez (25)

[BOXSCORE]

I about lost it when Michael Bourn hit his solo home run in the ninth inning. Even though the Indians already had their lead, when Bourn took the seemingly untouchable Luke Hochevar deep and Hammy went berzerk, I went berzerk with him.

That's just how life is in the car when the Indians are on. Thankfully the trips were short. If I had to listen to the entire game in the car? I may be communicating through text and pen and paper today.

The best thing about this is that it was all worth it, because the Indians are back to half a game status from either wild card position and if they win tonight, they're going to be a leader come this time tomorrow. That possibility looked bleak after five innings of last night's game.

But just when you are getting ready to hang your head and wonder what it is this team needs to do to break through and just get what they need. The grit and determination rises up. Last night they did one of the two things that seemed to be impossible this year. One is beating the Tigers, of course, because that hasn't happened and unless there is an October meeting, it won't happen. The other is not beating the Royals, but beating the Kansas City bullpen.

There's no better bullpen in the American League, with a 2.60 ERA the Royals are the best the AL has to offer. Once Hochevar is in there, it seems impossible to win because it pretty much is. Hochevar and Holland have been the lock-down guys. Beyond that, they've got guys like Herrera, Crow, and Collins, who are not untouchable, but can be relied upon.

Well, Kelvin Herrera couldn't be relied upon last night. Think about this. [The Indians came back on Herrera and the Royals](#) with just a single hit to tie the game up. The sequence they used to knot the game up at 3 was a hit-by-pitch, a triple, and a sac-fly.

"Every last one of their dudes throws hard. Every last one of them," Bourn said of Kansas City's bullpen. "You've got to be ready and try to do what you can against them. That doesn't happen too often against them, but we were able to do it tonight. It's not easy against them. You've got to really fight."

That's what it was going to take to try and chip into what has seemed like an impenetrable fortress that is the Royals bullpen. A sequence that is just so gritty and tough that shifts the momentum in your favor in an unlikely way.

A guy who has been struggling, and making it openly clear that he's struggling in Michael Bourn to come up and do what he did. This is your leadoff hitter. He's supposed to hit triples with his speed. He hasn't provided as many as you thought he would this season. He hasn't stolen as many bases as you thought he would this season. He hasn't exactly hit in that leadoff position like you thought he would. If anything, you could call his acquisition a bit of a disappointment because he hasn't lived up to the numbers you would expect.

But he still goes out there and plays excellent defense every night and has been there in spurts. It just hasn't been the complete season you signed up for with that money you gave him.

Last night though, you saw why he was signed to the contract that the Indians signed him to. Because he has the ability to do that. He has the ability to alter and improve a lineup in that sort of way. We've talked about Nick Swisher getting hot, and Asdrubal Cabrera coming up with some hits, guys that are really important to the production of this team.

Well, if Michael Bourn is on the verge of putting it together, when he's on base two-three times a game like he was last night, things are going to happen on a nightly basis. When your leadoff hitter gets on, it is more than just a guy on base. There is a tone that is set when the first game

to hit is the one getting on. Not only does it increase your chances to score runs because the guys who are better at knocking them in are getting more opportunities, it just sets a more quicker pace for the offense. Things have already gotten started, no one else has to start them, they just have to finish them.

Speaking of finishing. This club did not start the game well, but they certainly finished it. After the fifth inning, about the time when the bullpen came in to relieve Corey Kluber, the tide turned. The kid the Royals threw out there in his major league debut was really tough, and it is hard to do well against an unknown who is throwing gas out there. It isn't common for that type of stuff to happen, especially if the pitcher has command and is throwing strikes, which Yordano Ventura was doing for KC last night.

"Other than the fact that he was throwing 100 mph?" Swisher said with a laugh. "You've never seen the guy. You get scouting reports, but those aren't always right. So, yeah, we've just got to get ready for that next time. He really went out and did a good job."

The Indians didn't touch him until the sixth inning when they were able to fight a run off of him before he was removed from the game. He finished with just a run off five hits and a few walks. He gave the Royals exactly what they needed and with a 3-1 lead, you figured that was it because of that bullpen.

But because of the Indians bullpen, it was the exact opposite. Last night's game got a little out of control when the pen came in to relieve Kazmir. Granted, things started to spiral right before he left, and everyone felt that that was essentially the game when the back-to-back triples were given up. Last night was a different story because the bullpen came in much earlier in the fifth to relieve a struggling Kluber, who couldn't quite get his command like we are accustomed to.

Rich Hill came in to finish off the fifth and from there on, the relievers combined to give up two hits and one walk over the span of the last 4+ innings. Francona unloaded his entire cast of arms on the Royals to get through that one. The good thing is he didn't overwork a single one. You would prefer to not have to use that many arms, but if you do, at least it was in a nine-inning game and not one guy went over an inning or threw a whole mess of pitches.

All of it, from the bullpen's heroics, to the Bourn sparks, to touching the KC bullpen, to the

situation. That KC crowd? You could HEAR them on the radio the entire game. They were totally into it and behind their squad. If there wasn't 30,000 people there, you could have fooled me (there was 21,000). Even Tom Hamilton said you could feel the energy.

THAT was a playoff game. A situation that everything is on the line. And who was the team that came out on top?

"Tonight was one of the more gratifying wins I've been a part of," Indians manager Terry Francona said. "You've got two good teams playing hard. Fortunately, we got out of here with a win."

It feels gratifying. It feels as if this team has something special going on now. It feels like there is a energy and a pulse to this team that isn't going to be denied. To go into another situation where your back is against the wall, and to be down facing the odds you faced, and to come back and out on top? You have to like where this team is headed.

Best win of the year.

Random Notes...

How about best save of the year? Chris Perez had his best inning of work he's had in a long time. The situation, who he was facing, and what he did to them. He threw 12 pitches, 10 for strikes, two strikeouts of Kansas City's best and most dangerous hitters. After getting Bonifacio to roll over and hit a groundball out for the first out, he faced the powerful Eric Hosmer and the always difficult Billy Butler. This is where a closer earns his saves and his money.

We've been over the psychology of pitching to Hosmer, something Kazmir struggled with. Perez just attacked him from the gate and it helped that his fastball was working last night because not only was he hitting 95 of the gun, he had movement that we've seen in the past. It took three pitches, two of them called strikes to retire the big guy. He straight up attacked him, painted the corners and it Hosmer was back to the dugout in a blink of the eye. Same deal with Butler, called, foul, called strike three looking, paint the corner, the most painless save he's recorded all

year, in the most tense situation.

Credit where credit is due. Asdrubal Cabrera did come up with a few hits, a double and a single, one of them scoring the go-ahead run. He also walked. So maybe he is starting to find his way out of that rut with something other than pulled fastballs for home runs. We can only hope.

You saw Tito take the pressure of Yan Gomes, who had a rough game the previous night by moving him back down to the nine-hole with Stubbs out. You gotta love the way Tito has mixed and matched his players. I've not had a huge problem with his lineups this year really, he really strategizes well and you can tell he's got the big picture in mind when constructing his well-thought out lineups.

A rare 0-for-4 for Ryan Raburn. Get that rake back out buddy!

[THE RACE FOR THE WILDCARD]

So as noted, the Indians for the third straight night remain just a half game back of a wild card spot. By virtue of Texas' win though, they are back to the situation they entered Monday's game with, being a half game back of BOTH spots. Which means a win tonight, regardless of who wins between Texas and Tampa Bay will put the Indians in that second wild card spot.

Kind of hard to pick which team you want to win, or if you want Texas and Tampa to split. If the Indians keep winning, and the teams split, that's good for the Indians because they're the ones gaining ground on a nightly basis, while the other two are being stopped every other night.

What we've talked about though in the given situation is 89 wins. The Indians are now seven wins away from that magic number. The Rays and Rangers are seven wins away (but them facing each other slows that process down for one or both of them, which is why the Indians are in the advantageous spot) as well. The Rays and Rangers both have an extra game to play though. Everyone else be damned, because everyone else needs nine or more wins to reach that spot, and unless they catch fire (and it would be at one of the other contenders, except for Cleveland's expense) in an insane way and go undefeated the rest of the way (highly unlikely),

the focus is on just winning games.

Seven games. 11 left. That's a good ratio to have to shoot for with the schedule the Indians have. Winning last night was huge for that reason. If not, it would be eight of a 11. Which is fine and not difficult. But seven of your last 11, 10 of which are against Chicago, Houston, and Minnesota?

That's the spot you want to be in. If they can make it six out of those last 10... Even better.

In other contender news, Baltimore got a huge win over Boston, 3-2 to pull within two games of a spot. Both the Royals and Yankees are now looking in on the situation both 3 and a half back because of their losing efforts.

[RANDOM RUNDOWN]

Michael Bourn was once again very outspoken about the fan support in the post-game comments. He mentioned how the Royals fans got behind the club and were supporting their team in that environment. He mentioned that it would be nice if the Indians had that when they got home.

I can't blame those players for wanting that. Based off how they played in that situation last night, it would be hard not to feed off the intense energy of your fan base getting behind you.

With it being so close to the postseason and the Indians chances of making it continuing to increase, the Tribe is in a position that they can sell a possible postseason ticket. [If you want to be there, if the Indians are there, tickets go on sale Monday](#)

But if you just want to start with Thursday, that would be great. Because that's where we need to start supporting this team. Not if they make it that far. Start with Thursday. If you have the

means, go ahead and get a 10 dollar bleacher seat and get your butt down there before the Indians make the playoffs, not after. This isn't over yet. Show this team and these players they have more reasons to play hard and that their effort hasn't gone unnoticed. That we have that same will and determination that they're showing us right now in how they're playing these games.

If you hate the Dolans, fine, whatever, continue to hate them. If you are scarred and snake bitten because of the distrust you have, fine whatever, continue to have that. But these players were assembled to get to the playoffs and their goal is to win. They're laying it all out there and THAT is who you are supporting if you go out to the park. Those guys wearing the Chief Wahoo or Block C on their hat every night. Don't worry about Dolan or Shapiro or Antonetti or anything else. Put aside your petty crap and back these players. They want it and completely 100 percent deserve it.

Mike Aviles talked about how [he always felt KC was a few pitchers away](#) from doing something when he was with the Royals. Well, now they're all pitching and it is tough to beat that team because of that.

"We had [Zack] Greinke and Gil [Meche] for a little while," Aviles said. "But you've got three guys there now. They've always had a good 'pen. The 'pen has always been good and we always were able to hit. But it was one of those things where you just couldn't win games. That rotation they're rolling out there now, it's night and day compared to what we had going on when I was here."

Aviles said the culture was trying to be changed when he was on the way out the door to Boston. I think we all saw the same thing with the Royals in terms of the turnaround coming. For years they were on the doorstep with the talent they were assembling and right now, it is starting to come together with some more moves that have put the Royals on the edge. The tide is shifting in the AL Central. The White Sox and Twins are on the way down, the Royals and Indians are on the way up.

How focused is **Ubaldo Jimenez** at this juncture? Pretty darn focused. Doesn't really matter how hard he's throwing. He's just throwing so well, it is unlikely

[he wants to pay attention to anything else](#)

. Horse vision. IF we could put blinders on him, shoot, I'd sign him to a contract.

"I'm not paying attention to that now," Jimenez said Tuesday. "That's something that I was working on [in the past]. Everybody was telling me, Velocity, velocity, velocity.' So I was trying to get back to who I was velocity-wise."

Jimenez said that he's finally accepted he isn't throwing as hard as he once used to, but that he's also fixed the mechanics that came with trying to throw too hard to make him the pitcher he has been lately. Mickey Callaway hasn't exactly "fixed" Ubaldo, because really, only Ubaldo was going to be able to fix Ubaldo. But you have to believe that it was Callaway who finally broke through with Jimenez in getting him to realize what he had to do as a pitcher. It was Callaway who worked and pushed the right buttons to get Ubaldo to focus on what he needed to focus on. Yeah, he threw in the pitching tid-bits I'm sure, but we've said it time after time. Even if Callaway helped with his mechanics, the one thing that was going to fix Ubaldo was Ubaldo getting out of his own head.

"I don't think I really understood that until I got to talk to Ubaldo," said Callaway, who is in his first year as the Tribe's pitching coach. "He was really concerned about that, but trying to throw harder led to more mechanical problems. It just kind of made his mind kind of speed up on him. That's not the best way to go about it. Asking him to throw harder wasn't working."

You have to credit Callaway with that. Getting Ubaldo out of his own head and getting him focused on what he had to do.

A little Twitter firestorm was started yesterday when I heard Jensen Lewis say he would re-sign Scott Kazmir over Ubaldo Jimenez this offseason. I had to agree with him. A lot of people disagreed with that stance. And I can understand it. A lot didn't want to it be an either or situation. A lot would have taken Ubaldo.

But I think everyone agreed upon this. Ubaldo's going to get paid this offseason. He might make a nice chunk of change. A chunk of change that I think the Indians would be willing to dish out for a top of the line rotation starter like Ubaldo. But one that I personally don't think they'd be comfortable with given the fact that at this time last year, The Big U was The Big Uh-Oh and there was doubt if they'd even pick up his option for this season. The fact that this fan base wanted to light the guy on fire should not be lost on anyone.

Is he fixed? Gosh, who knows, he looks like he's fixed. But how do you know for sure? How do you know he doesn't lose it mechanically and get back into his own head for two years again? You'd hate to commit a lot of money to one guy who starts 30 times a year and is going out and bombing it 25 of those times.

It's a tough decision and I never meant it to be an either or situation either. Kazmir comes with his own set of risks. But I believe that the Indians need to keep one veteran around, and Kazmir has a lot of things working in his favor in my opinion. A lot of people are scared off by his history too and that is understandable. But Kazmir has reinvented himself and hasn't displayed to be the head case that Ubaldo has been. He's got smoother mechanics and can still strike a whole bunch of people out without his blistering fastball. He's left-handed, and the biggest thing of it all, he's going to be cheaper and come on less of a longer term commitment.

But this is all a discussion for another day. A day when there isn't a playoff race to be won. We need both guys right now to get the job done.

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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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