



I feel bad that my first (and probably last) game of 2012 came in the final homestand in September. I really do. I feel even worse I couldn't make it to more games. But that is the life of a grad student, at least this one...

Man, it was worth the wait though. I've been dying to make it. Trying to figure out ways all season to make it work financially to no avail. So when I got tickets as a gift, I was elated. Not many years I can make it an undefeated season in terms of games attended. So, I'll take it!

ASTROS - 2 | INDIANS - 9

W: Corey Kluber (10-5)

L: Erik Bedard (4-12)

[\[BOXSCORE\]](#)

[This was playing](#) when I took my seat yesterday at the ballpark.

And I'd be shocked if everyone who left that game didn't leave with Indian Fever. Perhaps, it's just the Astros and it is ordinarily nothing to get excited about, because a win against the Astros is as common as... Well, it happens a lot.

What's that? You want Indian Fever too? Well, if you didn't get it after listening to it the first time, perhaps you should listen to it again [and watch this brilliant photo slideshow companion](#) .

I about lost it when the UFO had Indian feather.

If you've caught the fever, continue on with me...

Yesterday's game had a good showing fan-wise, and myself and all the others in attendance got to see a great game all-around. Corey Kluber was not his sharpest, but you don't need to be against the hapless Astros, as long as the offense comes to play, and after a few cracks at Erik Bedard, the Indians found the hits they needed to bust this one open.

For Bedard, his 12th loss is one the perils of playing for a team that has lost 105 games. For the Indians, it was just a product of hanging in there and figuring out how they had to attack him. The first three innings looked pretty bad for the Indians. The strikeouts were piling up again. The team was 1-for-8 their first time through with five strikeouts.

After that? Money. The approach changed. From my view, Bedard was attacking with strikes. He threw them early and often and the patient approach was not working. Things changed in the fourth the second time through. Carlos Santana's double that scored Kipnis was on the first

pitch. Kipnis offered at a first pitch changeup with a bunt that went foul, a few balls later he found himself in a hitters count and just took a fastball the other way.

When they chased him away in the sixth, Cabrera singled on the fourth pitch, Brantley on the first. The approach changed and that's what a good hitting team needs to do. Adjust to the pitcher and turn it around. It turned what was looking to be a good start from Bedard, eight strikeouts and all, into a feasting situation for the Tribe offense who just started unloaded on him and Phil Humber, who followed up Bedard's outing with, more hits and more runs.

The biggest hit of the game? Michael Brantley's two-out RBI single to tie the game up in the fourth. Without that, the Indians don't tie or take the lead in that inning. They don't shift momentum in their direction. Brantley [came up in the situation he's become so accustomed to doing well in](#) and, well, he did well.

"He's just a plain ol' good hitter," Francona said. "He doesn't try to do too much. He kind of takes what the pitcher gives him, especially off a lefty. He'll hit the ball to left field. He stays up the middle, as we saw twice today. And then when you make a mistake, he can hammer it."

I joked about putting up that there is two outs when the guy is at the plate, but you might as well. He comes up with the big hits when you need him to. It doesn't just seem like it. It is completely 100-percent the case. He's .360 with runners in scoring position and with two outs and runners in scoring position he's .349. With two outs regardless? He's hitting .300.

So, six and a half times when he is in that two-out runners on situation, he doesn't come through? I guess, but it seems as if the three and a half times he does come up in that situation and he does get the hit that it is in a situation where the Indians absolutely need a hit. The Indians absolutely needed that hit. They got it from Brantley, and the team keeps rolling on.

That big fourth inning came in response to the second run the Astros put up on the board. It would be the last run. Corey Kluber was mixing his innings in this one, a good, a bad, a good, a bad. Luckily his bad innings consisted of a solo home run and run that scored on a double play.

He threw a lot of pitches to get guys out. He went full to a lot of hitters. Guys fouled off a lot of pitches too. That looks like to me he is a guy battling with control. He's still not there quite yet in terms of what he was early. He still has these spotty starts. But the stuff is there. He has his fastball, his secondary pitches. It is all working for him. He just can't get the ball placed where he needs it to get the outs quicker. Those foul balls would turn into swings and misses, the balls that are just missing turn into called strikes, he works through a little quicker than he has been.

"I still think he's not in mid-season form as far as his command," Francona said. "I thought he missed some on the plate, some off. But he still competes. You saw what he gave us. I just think he's still kind of clawing his way back. The good news is I think once that command comes back, then we have the guy that was pitching before, because he's healthy as all get-out and he's strong. We've just got to keep getting him reps."

He's still effective and he's still giving the Indians huge starts, but you gotta hope he gets that command fully back here in his next start as we potentially embark on a postseason trip. Kluber probably could have worked through that sixth inning, taken out after getting Altuve to ground out, but with a lead and the lefty coming up, Tito wanted to start playing matchups.

After that double by Scrabble in the sixth, the bullpen took over. Shaw got three outs, Cody Allen struck out a pair, and a cast of others would finish it out after the offense busted it open and made it a no-contest for Houston. That's how you win a ball game.

The way this team has taken charge of the situation they are in, shows they're ready. It shows they are here to compete and that they've got that level head. This team could fair very well in the postseason, talent be damned. They play above their competition and it shows [when they play these teams that are not as good as them](#)

. Even Houston's Brandon Barnes said that manager Bo Porter could tell that this team is on a mission.

"He pulled us aside and talked about how locked in they were the whole series," Barnes said. "They're playing for something right now, and it's something special to be able to play for something. He just wanted to let us know that we're going to be there one day, and when that times comes that's how locked in we have to be and to appreciate the momentum. It's just being prepared for that moment."

There's a lot of cool stats in that Bastian post, most of which I'll rehash in Random Notes, but the coolest one is how this team has six four-game sweeps in one season, which ties the franchise record and marks the first time that feat has been accomplished since 1961. And they have a chance to add on with one more four-gamer left against Minnesota to end the season. I don't have to tell you that with a sweep of the Twins, the Indians are guaranteed 90 wins, and I don't need to tell you that makes it likely they win a wild card spot....But more on that soon.

Random Notes...

Carlos Santana's solo home run was a freaking laser. That's one of those hits off the bat that you can tell is gone. It wasn't high, just a streamer headed right for the seats. Santana had a few big hits in this one and he seems to be quietly anchoring that middle of the lineup and it is no coincidence that he's done so with Nick Swisher's bat coming alive. He was 0-for-4 in this one, but had a nice weekend overall.

If Jason Kipnis is starting to kick it back into gear, the whole lineup is going to start doing this, regardless of team that the Indians are facing. 100-loss or 100-win. Three hits yesterday, two on Thursday to sandwich some 0-3s, but it is progress from the wall he seemed to hit in KC. He's got Chicago coming up, and that always gets him swinging hot.

So how about that bullpen? Tito continues to use guys for one, maybe two hitters at times, simply playing matchups, or just getting outs however he can. I honestly got tired today. That door was opening and someone was trotting out every few minutes. And that isn't an exaggeration. That bullpen has taken up a lot of innings as was noted in the Bastian post, 20-plus have come from guys who have been called up primarily in September. The main thing it is doing is keeping the primary guys fresh and at Tito's disposal when it counts.

Carlos Carrasco was mighty impressive in the ninth, getting that strikeout to end the game.

Clay Rapada, untouchable, one-hitter at a time. Literally.

One more note about Kluber, who managed to strike out eight hitters in the game. He struck out

130 hitters, which marks the fourth pitcher to do that this season for the Indians. That's the first time the Indians have had four pitchers strike out that many hitters in a season since 1968. If Z-Mac was healthy all year, they could have probably had five. [They also have three with 150 strikeouts](#). Again, a healthy Kluber all season probably makes that number four.

The staff as a total has topped the franchise record and will top 1,300 on the season.

"They've done a good job," Indians pitching coach Mickey Callaway said. "The overall approach is just to get ahead. The more times you get ahead, the more times you're going to strike guys out. That's the approach we've taken. Maybe look for a ground ball early and then, once you get ahead, then you have a chance to punch a guy out."

I could feel all sorts of awesome energy on that Michael Bourn triple. I mean, all the hits were huge, and I have probably said one of the other hits was the most important, but I could feel all sorts of good things when Bourn came up with that triple. You could feel the jolt that the hit provided.

[THE RACE FOR THE WILD CARD]

Quite the weekend for the Indians, but also the Tampa Bay Rays. After splitting with Texas they went on to take three from the Orioles and can pretty much eliminate them from the fun with a sweep today. They're still in it, but one more loss for both them and the Yankees should do it. Baltimore sits four and a half back from the Tribe, the Yankees four games. The AL East looking inside from the outside.

The Royals? Well they didn't quite sweep the Rangers, but they took two of three to keep themselves somewhat in it, but they are teetering on the brink. They're problem isn't losing, it is the other teams not losing.

Which is of course, the reason why the Indians are in prime position to take this thing with one week. At this point, there is something even more important than just winning the Wild Card

spot, and that's finishing ahead of Tampa Bay so we can get a home game. You don't want to go on the road to face the Rays in one game. You want that game at home.

So with an off day tomorrow, the Indians will sit and wait and see if the Rays pull a full-game ahead, or make this six-game sprint to the finish highly interesting with an even record for both teams. The Rays are spitting in the face of this "tough" schedule so far, but will definitely be tested this week with going on the road to far New York and Toronto, teams that will be looking to spoil their finish and have the capability to do so.

The Indians. Just need to handle their business. They're 50-19 against teams with losing record. They've dominated them, as they should. They beat who they are supposed to and that is just one key to getting to the postseason.

Just to point this out, the Indians are five back of the Central after a loss yesterday. The Tigers are two wins (or a win and a loss) away from clinching things. They'd have to lose out and the Indians would have to win out, not going to happen, but how crazy is it that the Indians are mathematically still alive in the final week of the season? A few wins against the Tigers in the season would have made all the difference.

[RANDOM RUNDOWN]

Masty's coming back!

The Indians are getting their horse back. Although it will be in limited action this week, **Justin Masterson**

will toe the rubber and give the Indians some innings when they need it. Masty tossed a simulated game (one inning, so, simulated inning), on Sunday and all went well. Callaway [said he is healthy, and Masterson says his arm felt great.](#)

"I'm just excited to get back in a game," said Masterson, who is coming back from a strained left oblique. "However that comes, that one-inning situation, whatever it may be, critical or non-critical. Just getting back in the game, get the feet wet for this playoff run, and then

hopefully a playoff run, that would be pretty exciting."

Masterson could pitch on Wednesday in relief, which lines up with Danny Salazar's start. If the Indians make the run in October, they'll determine if they can use him in a start. Remember, he hasn't missed too much time, so "stretching him out" shouldn't take entirely too much time. You could get him in Wednesday and probably later in the weekend. The ALDS would start on Friday if the Indians were to win that play-in-game. Not to think too far ahead and give wins to the Indians they don't have yet, but that would be plenty of time for Masterson to be ready to start a game and at least have the capabilities of going five or six innings.

Tito said though it [would be unrealistic for him to get deep into a game](#) . Right now, I think it is. But in two weeks? Try and hold him back from going out there and throwing a bunch of pitches if he's close enough to where he can.

And again, not to look too far ahead, but Ubaldo is going to make two starts this week on Tuesday and Sunday, at least, that's how it is lined up. If things get clinched before Sunday, they could not start Ubaldo and save him for the Wild Card game. If not, they could end up with **Scott Kazmir** starting that game against his former team. That would be wild, but it would just be a little bit of a full-circle type of story for a guy who's been to the top, and down to the bottom, and now is back on his way up.

Kazmir spoke [about the similarities that this Cleveland team](#) has in that young Tampa team did in 2008

"Yeah, I think so," Kazmir said. "We kind of have that loose, free-and-easy attitude. That's something that you can't teach, the kind of chemistry that we have in the clubhouse. I knew we were on to something. Just the way everyone goes about their business, it's great to be at the ballpark, great to be in the clubhouse."

Remember, Tampa went from the absolute gutter to a World Series. Not saying that is what the Indians will do, but just look at the change of attitude Joe Maddon brought. That team had talent that started to blossom, no doubt, but the spirit and attitude had changed, much like it has with the Indians.

This team has a lot of that young swagger to them that Tampa did. They haven't collectively won a lot, but they have players who have and they play like they can win any game. Tampa played like they could with anyone and they did in a tough AL East. I know, there's some wins from Detroit missing, but this team's drive this last month has been much different than it was prior to. Maybe it is the same ending, who knows, but lately, it feels like it wouldn't.

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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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