



If it really is going to take just 89 wins to win the second AL Wild Card, like I thought it would. Man, the Indians are in the drivers seat. I guess I underestimated the final schedules and how these teams were going to play. Tampa is on fire, absolutely crushing it. Texas had that skid, but even in that, they've turned it around somewhat (thanks Astros!) and are still just a game back, keeping pace as much as they can.

I guess I also underestimated the Indians ability to completely run right through their last two opponents. Granted, we're talking about the two worst teams in the American League, was six wins over all of them realistic? I mean, perhaps, but odds are, you aren't winning all six. Maybe five.

They did just that and now set themselves up in a four game sprint. Win 'em all, you in. Simple as that, and there's no reason to not win them all. The Indians are the best team in baseball in September record-wise, and that's impressive with the way some teams have been playing.

WHITE SOX - 2 | INDIANS - 7

W: Danny Salazar (2-3)

L: Dylan Axelrod (4-11)

[\[BOXSCORE\]](#)

What's more impressive is the amount of games the Indians have won from the White Sox. This now marks the 14th straight victory over Chicago, something the Indians haven't done since they beat Kansas City (before they were the Royals) in 1960. And 17 overall. Just two losses this year to that team. Incredible.

I mean, we kind of know how it feels, having lost 15 games this season to the Detroit Tigers. We aren't talking about the comically bad Houston Astros either. Detroit is 12-7 against them, the Royals 9-10. This is just a White Sox team [that the Indians have had the edge over all season](#) . It really is something.

"They just outplayed us," White Sox manager Robin Ventura said. "Any time even when we had leads late, they just seemed to fight and kind of have the ability this year to come back late. A few walk-offs and things like that. They are kind of hitting their stride here."

Last night's win also marked the 51st home victory, which is the most obviously since 2007 when the team went to the playoffs. That has to mean something, right!? Let's hope so. Right now, it doesn't seem as if this is the last home game. There's something brewing in Cleveland and I don't think the Indians are ready for that to be the last time they pack that house. Not yet, not quite yet.

"Right now, we're clicking, and that's outstanding," Brantley said. "We're getting big hits when we need them."

Big hit in this one came from that guy once again, Michael Brantley, and guess when? You got it, with two outs. After Salazar gave up a leadoff homer to Avisail Garcia in the second, the Indians responded immediately in the bottom half of the inning. Giambi singled in between a few outs, and a wild pitch and an error helped extend the inning and put the Indians on the board. Then, Brantley came up and did what he does best, collect a two-out RBI hit with a runner in scoring position.

Automatic. It's hard to believe he's not hitting 1.000 in that situation, because it seems like he has a hit every time he's up there with a guy on base and two outs.

That lead gets extended in the fifth when Swisher hits a monster home run to center field to follow up Brantley's double. It looked like that stadium was ready to explode at that point. THAT is playoff baseball people, get into it and enjoy it. Seriously.

The Tribe would add runs in the sixth and seventh innings to pad things up. But that was all they needed with an electric Danny Salazar on the mound and a bullpen that is just handling their business.

Salazar pitched into the sixth inning and exited having thrown 89 pitches. He struck out eight hitters... How does someone strike out that many hitters on so few pitches in so few innings? He struck out half of the hitters he recorded outs on. In fact, he's recorded 156 outs so far this season. He's struck out 65 of those hitters. That's 41 percent of the hitters he's recorded outs on, have struck out to him.

Just for comparison's sake, Yu Darvish has recorded 612 outs this season. His 269 strikeout total is insane, and it rounds to being almost 44 percent of the outs. So Salazar is right in line with the best strikeout artist in the game. I think Darvish is a little bit of a freak though, people don't do what he's doing on a regular basis.

Take Max Scherzer as more of an example. He's struck out 240 hitters over 643 outs. That comes out to about 37 percent. So you have Salazar falling right in around there. Darvish's K/9 is crazy at 11.87, Scherzer's is pretty higher than most too at 10.08. The next closest, is A.J.

Burnett at 9.98. Danny Salazar?

11.25!

Am I trying to say that that's where Salazar is going to end up when he's a full-time starter getting 30 starts a season? No, not really. But that's his potential. That's his ceiling. The Indians have one heck of an electric arm on their hands. I think they knew that for a long time. That's why rostered him when they did. When you have a kid like this, who can do this sort of stuff, it's all about if he can get his control and be consistent. Well, so far, as a rookie no less, Salazar has done just that.

Someone has a bright future ahead and boy is it exciting that he is on our team. You wanna talk about historic, he's done some things in terms of strikeouts that haven't been done or haven't been done in awhile, from topping Herb Score as a rookie to the other things that I'm sure we'll get final numbers on soon. That is special and that has to make Indians fans salivate that he's on our team.

Random Notes...

How about the bullpen monster in this one? To complete the final 3.2 innings, Tito used five guys. That's five guys for 11 outs. Yup, but it got the job done. The bullpen didn't give ground, making it pretty ho-hum the rest of the way through.

Until the ninth, when the fans got a nice surprise to close out the final regular season home game. Justin Masterson made his return to the mound and it was electric. You could hear the crowd completely into it and ready to back that guy. Mastey finished with two strikeouts and a broken bat hit surrendered to Danks. He was rocking and that was an exciting inning to have, especially on the brink of a possible postseason run.

"It kind of went from our ace getting hurt to all of a sudden having a weapon," Francona said. "And we will use him."

Slow down on your Mastey for closer chants. That shouldn't happen. It is certainly a way that I didn't think Tito would use him. I thought he'd be in more of a long relief role, especially with Salazar tonight. But it appears as if he is going to utilize Masterson as a back end arm. Which, can be incredibly dangerous if you are able to use him every other night. He means more to this team as a starter, but if it is going to take awhile to stretch him out, then why not?

The team as a whole was striking out fools left and right. Every single pitcher had one, including the two guys in Rich Hill and Cody Allen that only faced one batter each. Maybe they just caught the strikeout pitch bug from Salazar last night.

Two hits and two two-out RBI for Asdrubal Cabrera? That's a lot of twos, and a lot of good news. There wasn't a home run or a swinging bunt either. Man could this team really roll if he is going to hit like that most nights.

More Brantley gushing. The Dr. of Clutchonomics (see what I did there...) came up with three hits, another multi-hit game, his third in a row. It's also his ninth straight game with a hit and five multi-hit game during that span. He's also knocked in a run in four straight games and has five in his last nine. When Brantley gets hot, he gets hot. It's a complete turn around from the 0-for-10 he had in the last series against the White Sox. That was three games too, he had 9 at-bats in the two games this series and had six hits. That was his only lull period of the month. He is 25-for-66 in September, with seven multi-hit games and four three-hit games.

[THE RACE FOR THE WILD CARD]

As we talked about in the open, there is a four-game sprint to the finish now, with all three teams left separated by a game. Kansas City is one Indians or Texas win or loss of their own from being eliminated, and with four games left, that makes it nearly impossible, so they are effectively out and will soon join the newly eliminated New York Yankees.

Tampa Bay sits at 89 wins, Cleveland 88, and Texas 87. Just as quickly as the Rangers could jump up and tie the Indians, the Indians could quickly jump up and tie the Rays for the first wild card spot, which is equally as important as making things at this point. Tampa has one more

game against the Yankees and then a season-ender against Toronto. Texas now has the Angels on a four game set, like the Indians have the Twins for four.

There's not left more to analyze. The Indians can win them all and remove all doubt, or they can lose one and hope the Rangers match it to avoid a playoff. You would love to just win all four and remove all doubt, but you can never chalk up victories, especially with a team that is historically very scrappy. They're not a 100-loss team on a 12 game losing streak, or a team that you've beat 17 times this season. They're still pretty bad, but this is by no means four gimmie games.

Hopefully [you saw this ridiculous piece](#) on the final race from Ken Rosenthal last week. He pretty much discredits the Indians because of their schedule and says it isn't fair that with the unbalanced schedule, they essentially have an easier road than the teams in the AL West.

How is that the Indians fault? And, um, I'm sorry but the Indians can't spend as much as any team outside of Tampa Bay in terms of payroll in the AL East because of baseball's ridiculous rules. So how is that fair Kenny? I know he said he wasn't trying to diminish the Indians accomplishments, but sir, you are. Houston gets to play the 100-plus loss team 19 times! So does everyone else in that division. Yeah Chicago and Minnesota are bad, but seriously, come on, the Indians dominance of the White Sox is not an Astros situation. They are just bad against the Indians, the Astros as bad against everyone.

Yeah, four teams in the East are playoff contenders. Two of them were in the wild card race til the final week, they fell off cause they couldn't keep up. If the Yankees had handled their business and beat the Rays a few more times, they wouldn't be out of it like they are.

You already play 162 games. If you can't rise to the top with two wild card positions, then really, you aren't made for the playoffs. Whine all you want about the AL East. But seriously, the difference isn't all that much. You win your division, you are the best team in it and you deserve to not only go to the playoffs, but play in the ALDS. You win a wild card, you are where you are for a reason, you need to fight to get into the next round. That's the way it is, that's the way it should be.

[Unbalanced schedule. Actually, not really.](#)

[RANDOM RUNDOWN]

As we sort of touched up on on Wednesday, **Ubaldo Jimenez** is now in line to start the final game of the regular season against the Twins. And right now, that's the plan. That's the thought, that's the assumption. There is no "well, if we get in..." Yeah, get in first, talk about it later as far as the Indians are concerned.

"We're not there," Indians manager Terry Francona said prior to Wednesday's game against the White Sox. "We need to win tonight. That's the mentality we've had all along. And I think by getting out of that, if I start doing that, it's hard to ask the players [not] to do it."

Right, and ask Ubaldo and he gives you the same spiel. Of course he'd love to do it, but you gotta get there first. And that's understandable. But I think it is a 100% given that if the Indians lock things up before Sunday, they'll most definitely be saving Ubaldo for that Wild Card game next Wednesday. What if they don't though? Shoot, probably Corey Kluber on four days rest? Can't be Kazmir because he's starting. Do you go with McAllister in that game? I'd have to see how tonight's game rolls.

But again, not time to start thinking about that. There's still four more games to be won.

Tito also [does not have any plans on changing his closer](#). **Chris Perez** is the guy. Like it or not, that's the decision and that's the way that this bullpen is set up. You can't go changing things right now, especially with a lack of obvious replacement.

"You can't just be reactionary as a manager or you have turmoil in that clubhouse," Francona said. "There's times when you feel like you need to make changes, but if you react to one game or an inning, you can upset a lot of what's so good in there."

People want Chris Perez gone right now. Hopefully those people are just saying that and realize that it won't actually happen. Because if you think it will, you are crazy. This guy has value to

this team. As for closing. Look, you may not agree with it, but he's the guy right now. You run the risk of messing with a lot of the flow of that pen. Perez had a bad night. Yeah, he's had a few, but he still gets the job done more often than not.

Michael Bourn tried to get himself into the game last night, [but Terry Francona wasn't having any of it](#), not with four more games to play.

"He's a tough little kid, man," said Francona, who stated that Bourn was available to pinch-run on Wednesday. "I just think that giving him a day to take a blow and let him get some treatment all day [will be good]. I know where we're at in the standings. I get all that. I just think we're best served by letting him get some treatment, so when he does play, he can be Bourny and not part of Bourny. But I do like his attitude. I love his attitude.

The Indians have fared well in Bourn's absences. So having him is not the end of the world, not something that will cripple the offense. The main reason is that you can just stick Michael Brantley up in there, or Drew Stubbs against left-handers sometimes, and the team can continue on. Sure, it's not the same Michael Bourn, but it isn't like you are just plugging a random replacement from the end of your bench like Ezequiel Carrera. Not to slight Zeke, but when you got that bonafied leadoff guy up there, things get easier.

I'd almost guarantee that he'll be in that lineup tonight. Especially with his sprained wrist being that serious.

Finally, I find the last piece on **Jason Giambi** really amusing. It mostly has to do with Giambi [saying that you are not facing "some pie thrower" late in the game](#) when you are pinch hitting. But there's also some incredible statistics there. Obviously, we know Big G became the oldest guy to hit a pinch hit walk-off home run when he did it earlier in the season.

Because he did it earlier in the season, he not only broke his own record, he did it against the same team, which marked the first time that has happened since 1968. That's just, crazy. It's something you maybe have never seen before. Unless you remember Detroit's Gates Brown and that year he hit two walk-off jams off the Red Sox.

-

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.

[Follow @TheTribeDaily](#)