

Morning Rundown: Minnesota Meltdown for Closer Chris Perez

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

Friday, September 27 2013 6:53 AM -



Hehehehehhh.... Nervous laughter creeping in. It was a ticking time-bomb of nervousness last night. The senses were heightened though because it went from completely not a game, to a really scary moment, especially since the Twins had the ability to walk off.

That shouldn't have happened, but it did. So it happened and you'll have to live with it. The only important thing is the Indians won. Well, not really, because there is a lot of importance of what happened, because it impacts this team going down the stretch.

INDIANS - 6 | TWINS - 5

W: Bryan Shaw (7-3)

L: Andrew Albers (2-5)

S: Joe Smith (3)

[\[BOXSCORE\]](#)

I had some people, telling me to defend **Chris Perez** after "that one." As if I'm his defense lawyer and he just committed a grade-one felony. Look, I don't revel in defending him. And I don't do it because I'm a Chris Perez apologist or because I enjoy it, or because I want to. I've defended him when it has been necessary and right to defend him, and I've bashed him and criticized him when I've felt it necessary to do so.

There's no defending a horrible outing either. A complete meltdown if you will. What happened Tuesday? That wasn't even close to a meltdown. That was a blown save, and that was bad. It wasn't boo-worthy, despite what you may think. And neither was last night, because we've been over what is boo-worthy in my book.

But that was, plug your nose, stick my head in a bag, run away as fast as possible, turn around and think of fresh smelling baked apple pie disgusting. Ugly, smelly awful bad. There is no way around it. Perez is still not talking to the media, going through with the stance he took way back earlier in the season following his return from injury and his dog's weed violation. No one cared when he was doing his job.

The pitch-forks were out in full-force on Tuesday, but Perez survived a live torching and sacrifice because of Jason Giambi's heroics. Some forgot, some chose not to go through with their execution. It wasn't the last thing on their minds. But even though the Indians won, the last thing on everyone's mind after that game was what Chris Perez did to end it in the ninth inning.

"The good news is we won, and that's what we set out to do," Francona said. "That got a little closer than we wanted, but we won. Any time you hear music playing, especially this time of year, [it's good]. But that was a little nerve-wracking."

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Francona said that Perez is not hurt, his shoulder is fine, and that he's simply making mistakes with his location. It was supposed to be an outing for him to get work in and correct that issue, because nothing is better than live game action to fix your flaws. But unfortunately, it wasn't working.

Here's where it is going to look like I'm defending the guy. And I'm not. Let me stay this right off the bat. He's not pitching very well. It isn't going right, and unfortunately for the Indians, it doesn't look like they can trust him at this point in time. That being said, despite what you want to think and say, Chris Perez is not a terrible pitcher, so save your irrationality for another time. If you watch baseball, you would know that. If you don't, like some of the people coming out of the wood-work are right now, you're going to jump to that conclusion.

Chris Perez did not suddenly become a terrible pitcher. He's still throwing his normal velocity, he's still go his same stuff. Just a few months ago, he was untouchable. That ability didn't go anywhere. He's simply going through a period that any pitcher can go through. He can't find his location. And he's throwing some really good looking pitches right over the plate.

Not to mention, the hit Ryan Doumit had. Uh.... You tell me how that was even remotely a good pitch to swing at. Yet he Vlad Guerreroed it into right field. This isn't a "Perez is Horrible" situation.

However, he can't be trusted at this point in time, not in a game-saving situation. So Tito has a little bit of an issue on his hands, one that he certainly wasn't going to address right after the game.

"You never make decisions five minutes after a game," Francona said. "He popped his head in here after the game and was actually really good about it. He was like, 'Hey, I don't want to cost us games, because I'm not locating.' We'll figure it out."

That quote brings up two things. He has to consider making a change because of the way his closer is pitching right now. Because it sounds like his closer is aware he could go out there and do what he did with some regularity, we've seen it two games in a row now.

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And the other is, certainly doesn't sound like the "selfish douche" people called him earlier in the year when they blamed him for not taking himself out of a situation. Tito sounds like someone who is now willing to make that change himself because he realizes his closer is struggling. He wasn't going to say it right after the game, but don't be surprised if he makes that decision before today's.

And I'm not so necessarily sold on Joe Smith closing things out either. Not totally because of Joe, he can do the job. But now you create an eighth inning hole that just has to make you cringe in having Tito stretch his bullpen plans out even more.

He certainly needs more than less-than five innings from Zach McAllister. That type of stuff can't be happening. Of course Tito is now in a spot where he probably would have let McAllister try and finish that inning and even pitch the sixth a few months ago. Now? The pressure is on. You can't even let them get close, because look what happened in the ninth. He's treating every out as if it is more important than the next one, so when a guy struggles the third time through the lineup, you can bet on him making that move.

I'm not saying put Justin Masterson in the closing role, but I wouldn't see a problem having Smith close and making Mastey your eighth inning guy every time out. You need to replace that inning somehow. Fact of the matter is, you need to replace that inning period, because Perez can't do it, and until his manager can trust him in that situation, and it appears now as if he can't, that's a huge dice to roll.

Bryan Shaw is looking pretty nails-like lately. But he's so valuable in the multiple innings he can give you, and rubber arm he seems to have. Pigeonholing him into the eighth inning doesn't seem the most effective move.

Whatever happens, it seems like a waste of time to discuss possibilities, because we may have our answer in a few short hours. In the meantime, put out your flaming pitch-forks and gain a little composure. This team has a playoff race to win.

Random Notes...

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Well, credit the offense for breaking through on Andrew Albers, who stymied them for a complete game last time out. The book was out on Albers a lot more and the Indians knew what he was about. However it didn't seem to me that he was the same pitcher. Yeah he only walked two, but he didn't seem to spot his strikes early on as he did the first time out. The Indians were aggressive and took a lot of sequences to the limit, so that got him driving up the pitches he threw and the work he had to go through just to get a guy out. Early on it made for some failed chances on the Indians part, but just as that goes, they finally found the right combo in the fourth inning.

Albers kind of imploded with his balk following Raburn's leadoff single. An error caused Asdrubal's bunt to turn into disaster for the Twins. The error not only let Cabrera reach first safely, but Raburn to score. And then Albers came unglued with Yan Gomes' 11th of the season. The Dr. of Clutchanomics came up in the sixth with two outs and does what he does best for the 4-0 lead.

The Tribe would add on runs in the seventh and eighth, which turned out to be important, Brantley was a the center of it with three hit and two RBI, creating some great production of the top of that lineup. Seems like a no-brainer to hit him there given that he keeps coming up with three-hit nights.

Gomes also had two more hits and another run scored other than the big two-run shot. How hard did he smoke that ball in the fourth? Yowzers.

Drew Stubbs had a great night, a hit and two walks, it didn't amount to anything, but it helped keep the pressure on.

Can't say enough about Shaw and what he has meant to this team. He is so valuable in that role he is in now because he's so durable. The guy is Rafael Perez 2.0 only from the right side. He can go out there day after day and pitch and he's effective. He gave the Indians five big outs when McAllister looked like he was stalling a bit.

[THE RACE FOR THE WILD CARD]

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Another day, another win, another team eliminated. The Royals were officially given the heave-ho, despite beating the hapless White Sox yesterday. There's simply no more time for them. We've now reached the point where the Indians just need to win out, because the teams continue to match each other blow-for-blow. The Rays still haven't lost and that was almost a disaster last night. Because just as Perez was having his meltdown, Jurickson Profar hit a walk-off home run for the Rangers over the Angels. They were in a much tighter game than the Indians all along, so that would have hurt.

Unless the Rangers suddenly lose the next two, this thing is probably going down to the final game of the season. The Rays are done with the Yankees and now go from a team that was in contention just a few days ago, to a team that isn't. It could be as dangerous as it is facing the Twins or Angels. The Rays are 10-6 against the Blue Jays this year. And the way they are playing, they probably will be 13-6 when all is said and done.

Kind of have to wonder how the Angels lost that game to Texas though. The Rangers committed four errors in one inning yesterday, a comedy of errors of sorts. Texas survived though by the skin of their teeth. Then again, the Indians ended up surviving by the skin of their enamel.

[RANDOM RUNDOWN]

Michael Bourn missed [a second straight game last night](#) with that sprained/jammed wrist he suffered on Tuesday. His status for tonight's game remains unclear. He hasn't participated in drills or anything, which tells me that perhaps it just hurts too much for him to even throw or hit. He's available to run, but that's it, so he's not exactly unavailable. They just haven't tested him in doing the things he needs to do with regularity. Today may be that day though.

"Depending on how he shows up [Friday]," Francona said, "we'll see how aggressive we can get with him. It could range anywhere from playing the game to 'we'll see.'"

Tito isn't exactly sweating it either because Brantley is doing a fine job in the leadoff spot in the meantime, because he's the team's hottest hitter, and he can simply play Raburn in right and Stubbs in center. His bench is deep enough to do it. And if he needs it, he still has Mayor Carson as a defensive replacement.

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Speaking of red-hot **Michael Brantely**, he's helping guide Chiz in the Hall to a possible victory in the Tribe Daily Fantasy Baseball Invitational. While most of the offensive categories are locked up, Brantley's hits keep helping in my battle against Not That Carlos Santana. Every day there is a new leader it seems like. Anywayyyy, Brantley is continuing to build off those numbers we jumped out with yesterday, another game in a row that he's knocked in a run, another game in a row that he has knocked out three hits. Four straight, 10 RBI in his last 10 games.

Turns out he has been using an abandoned Carlos Santana bat. Here we go, the obligatory "he's using a different bat story" that always comes out when a guy gets hot suddenly. This one has a bit of a twist of course, but Brantley has also been hot before. The Doc isn't about to credit the bat though. He's just hitting a groove offensively.

"The balls that I'm hitting hard are finding holes," Brantley said of his hot streak. "And the balls I'm hitting OK are still finding a hole. It's just good placement, along with good hitting. Any time that happens, it's going to be successful for anybody."

To us, it is a no-brainer that **Terry Francona** is the Manager of the Year because this team was bad last year. Like, really bad. And now they're good. So obviously, as it usually goes with the Manager of the Year votes, you give it to the guy who is captaining a ship that has turned around from the previous year.

I think some of us forget though that the Boston Red Sox were bad last year. Like, really bad too. Part of that. Okay, most of that, was due to the fact that Bobby Valentine was there. Which stands for even more reason as to why it is obvious to [people in Boston think John Farrell is a no-brainer pick](#). And when you wanna use that "turnaround factor" the Red Sox were last in a brutal division and now are one of the best teams in the American League, in that same brutal division.

But there in lies that it is actually more of a reason to not vote for John Farrell, because the guy before the guy he replaced, did just as good of a job as he did with a lot of the same characters. And as Castrovince points out in the piece, while he did reconstruct that culture in Boston that they're so used to, he didn't exactly do "more with less" in regards to talent. From getting guys in the offseason like Victorino and Napoli and getting huge bounce back years in the pitching staff, there's no wonder that Boston is on top. The talent that was then Tito left never went

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away, and they even added more.

Francona even says in the Castrovince piece that he gets too much credit, but I don't think you can give him enough credit. Yeah money ultimately helped nab guys like Bourn and Swisher, but as AC points out, Francona was instrumental in getting those guys and other free agents because of the clout he brought. He was out there campaigning? Remember how excited we were in the offseason when he was out there shaking hands and kissing babies? Just as quickly as he placed a smooth on the unborn Baby Swish, the team signed him to a contract.

The way this team is playing? Last year if they went through the stretch they went through this August where it looked like doom, they would have collapsed. They DID collapse last year. This year, the team did no such thing, and actually turned it completely around and are on the brink of injecting themselves into the postseason.

And to again piggy-back off all the points AC is making. The bench. The bench and that bullpen. The way the guy has played his players. That's where a manager's value comes in. The buttons he pushes and the attitude he brings. Those are the two biggest things a manager has to do and be responsible for, and he does them both extraordinarily well. The media loves the bigger story though, and Boston is a bigger draw, so more will pay attention to that up there, and the public break up with Bobby Valentine is still fresh in everyone's memories. No one remembers that Manny Acta managed this team last year, and no one cares. Farrell will probably win it, but we all know Tito deserves it just as much.

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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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