



Baseball is an amazing game. After 161 games, the Indians, Rays and Rangers are separated by just one game in the standings. A long season that started way back in April comes down to a single game for these three teams, with a playoff berth on the line. The “every game is important” mantra was one that Indians fans learned well in 2007, when one more Tribe victory would’ve given the Indians home field advantage in the ALCS against the Boston Red Sox. We all know how that turned out. Here we are again six years later, and one game could make the difference between a postseason run and hitting the golf course in the first week of October. The Indians have won 91 games already, not bad for a team that Vegas put the over/under at 76 ½ coming into the 2013 season. They’ve won 23 more games than they did in 2012. They’ve won 20 games in September, including 14 of their past 16. And yet, it could all be for naught if the Indians lose today and Tampa Bay and Texas both win. That would trigger a complicated scenario in which the Indians would host Tampa Bay on Monday, with the loser of that game traveling to Texas, and the winner of those two games making the playoffs as the two AL Wild Card representatives. [All of the potential scenarios are laid out here, including who plays where and when regardless of who wins tomorrow.](#)

Worst case scenario, the Indians have two cracks at a tiebreaker game, both of which would be played at the corner of Carnegie and Ontario. But the whole thing will be academic if the Indians take care of business in Minneapolis tomorrow afternoon. So really, it’s simple; win tomorrow, host the AL Wild Card game. Win that, and it’s on to Boston. It’s both exciting and stressful, and twitter follower

[@themadlib](#) used the very appropriate term awesome/awful to describe the adrenaline rush associated with watching the Indians down the stretch. Living and dying with every pitch is a great feeling, one that hasn’t been associated with Indians baseball since that fateful Game Seven in Fenway Park back in 2007. My stomach has been churning and sleep has been hard to come by the past few nights, but I’ll gladly take this over another September spent playing out the string in a series of meaningless games while other teams plan for the playoffs.

Naturally, not everything is all sunshine and roses. Unless you're new to Indians fandom, you are aware that Chris Perez has not been without some struggles in both his personal and professional life this season. He was actually having a decent season heading into September (massive breakdowns against the Red Sox and Tigers notwithstanding), but the wheels have really come off the cart in the last month. In 10 appearances here in the final month of the regular season, Perez has thrown 9 1/3 innings, allowing 10 ER on 18 hits, striking out 13 and walking 5. Amazingly, the Indians are 9-1 in those 10 appearances, and Perez does have four saves. Opposing batters are hitting (hide the women and children) .419/.490/.814 (1.304 OPS!), and over half of the balls put in play off of Pure Rage have turned into base hits. Yikes. The only good thing that's come out of Perez this month was that his blown save against the White Sox set the stage for [one of my favorite walk-off HR's that I've seen as an Indians fan, called here perfectly by Tom Hamilton.](#)

And if you don't think that I bought this ["Mardi Gras in September" t-shirt that the good folks at Homage.com came out with immediately after the game](#)

...well, we just don't know each other that well.

So after giving up 6 earned runs over his final two appearances of the regular season, blowing one save and nearly losing a 5-run lead in the other contest, Tito Francona announced on Friday that Perez is no longer his closer. That of course begs the question as to who exactly will fill that role for the rest of the regular season and (hopefully) beyond. The most obvious candidate is righty Joe Smith, who has been the Indians primary set up man with Vinnie Pestano's struggles in 2013. Smith has a 6-2 record with a 2.32 ERA, striking out 53 and walking 23 in 62 innings of work this season. Unlike Perez, Smith has improved as the season has progressed. Since August 1, Smith has thrown 23 2/3 innings, allowing just 2 ER (0.76 ERA) with 23 K and 8 BB. Opposing hitters have posted just a .590 OPS against Smith in that timeframe, and he's given up just 1 HR. Perez has allowed three HR in his past two outings, more than Smith has given up in the past two *months*.



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