

Wild Cards and Wallhangings

Written by {ga=jonathanknight}

Thursday, October 03 2013 8:36 PM - Last Updated Thursday, October 03 2013 8:41 PM



You know they're going to. They can't help themselves.

Next April, just before the Indians take the field for their home opener against the Minnesota Twins on what's sure to be an overcast, cold Friday afternoon, there will be a little presentation.

Somebody'll make a speech, a stirring little vignette will be blasted up on the scoreboard, and a couple of marketing interns will pull a rope that lifts a garbage bag off a new metal placard hanging from the upper deck in right field beside the 10 that are already there.

It'll probably be blue with nice big white letters. And those letters will spell out something that will make us all wince:

"2013 Wild Card."

Everyone will applaud, and, in one sense, rightly so.

The 2013 Indians were a six-month trip to Cedar Point that provided more fun than any Cleveland sports team in recent memory. In terms of total victories, they achieved more than many other more talented editions of the team.

For that, they deserve to be remembered, and within reason, celebrated.

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But has it really come to this?

Are we really to the point in the general watering down of our societal expectations that earning a wild-card berth will earn the same physical recognition within the ballpark as a world championship?

That's a rhetorical question because we know the answer. Whatever your opinion of it, the 2013 Indians' four-hour playoff experience will become enshrined as part of the Progressive Field décor.

Anyone left who witnessed the '48 World Series or has done enough reading to appreciate the majesty of the Indians' 1920 title will be – and should be – outraged. It's like equating being elected to city council with storming the beach at Normandy.

You could make the same argument for the four division-title flags that currently adorn the upper deck in right. But making statuary out of a wild-card berth is something else again.

2013 was fantastically fun and should be remembered. And if you're the type of person who likes to have souvenirs to remember good times, you probably want something in the ballpark that you can look at five or 10 years from now and think back to the crazytown summer of '13.

But if the metal placard is a bad idea, then what's the best way to do it?

How can you create something to commemorate bringing in Terry Francona as manager, not only reintroducing a beloved franchise bloodline, but also bringing a fantastic story to a team and a city that desperately needed one?

How should you immortalize 11 walk-off victories, many of them in pure goofball fashion like a game-winning hit that doesn't leave the infield?

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What's the best way to take a snapshot of a team that improved its record by a whopping 24 games - the biggest turnaround in franchise history?

A team that went 10-2 in extra innings?

A team that lost eight straight games at the exact moment we expected them to fall apart...and didn't fall apart?

A team that went 21-6 in September after going 5-24 the previous August?

How should you erect a monument to a team that couldn't beat Detroit if its life depended on it and went 36-52 against teams that finished at or above .500...but went a ludicrous 56-18 against teams with losing records?

How can you create a permanent memory of a season in which the Indians posted 15 shutouts?

A season in which Justin Masterson won three 1-0 games? And then sparked another victory by bringing a live chicken to work?

A season that saw a stretch of four last at-bat victories in six days in late July?

A season that saw Scott Kazmir emerge from the independent league to win 10 games? And Ryan Raburn improve his batting average by 100 points and hit 16 times more home runs than he did in 2012?

What's the best way to memorialize Jason Giambi's Kirk Gibson moment – when a 42-year-old

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.186 hitter saved the season and forever etched his name in franchise lore?

How can you encapsulate a team that started off a ridiculous Friday night in Chicago by giving up five runs in the first inning, then turned it into a 19-10 victory? Then scored four runs in the ninth inning of the nightcap to complete the sweep in the longest doubleheader in major-league history?

What's the best way to capture minor-league lifer Matt Carson hitting .636 over the final three weeks and delivering a game-winning, walk-off hit in a critical game?

Or Mike Aviles hitting a 10th-inning grand slam to blow up a scoreless game in Detroit?

How can you create something that explains how the Indians lost their ace pitcher to injury on Labor Day – and got better?

How Ubaldo Jimenez went from one being the centerpiece of one of the most disappointing trades in franchise history to making arguably the greatest individual turnaround in franchise history?

What would encapsulate nobody hitting 25 homers, nobody knocking in 90 runs, nobody hitting .300, and yet the team winding up fourth in the AL in scoring?

What's the best way to show future generations how the Indians swept seven four-game series, the most by any major-league team in 70 years? Or how they became just the seventh team to finish the season on a 10-game winning streak?

What's the best tribute for a Monday matinee in which the Indians rallied from behind in both the ninth and tenth innings to beat Seattle on a Yan Gomes homer?

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Or a 3 a.m. Drew Stubbs moon shot that beat the Angels out west?

Or a Michael Bourn blast down the foul line on the second pitch of the game that was all the Indians needed for a 1-0 victory over Texas?

What can we point to in order to explain to our kids how this team that hadn't posted a winning record against the White Sox in six years managed to beat them 14 straight times and in 17 out of 19 meetings?

2013 Wild Card.

Hmm.

Technically, the definition of a wild card is "a person or thing that is generally unpredictable and their often reckless and wacky behavior can either benefit or hurt depending on the situation."

Jesus. That sounds about right.

There's really no better way to sum up one of this franchise's most surprising, most satisfying seasons.

Not so much as a label for the playoff spot they earned, but rather as a description of the magical, maddening season itself.

2013 Wild Card.

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Hang it up there.

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