

Disaster In The Bronx

Written by {ga=paulcousineau}
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Coming off three straight series wins to start the season, and heading into New York to face a Yankee team whose starting rotation was in disarray, the Indians had a chance to make a statement to the rest of the AL this week. Instead, they exposed themselves as still being very challenged in many of the areas that made this a 78-84 team last season. Paul Cousineau opines on the disaster in the Bronx.



Heading into the Bronx this week, the Indians were coming off series victories against the White Sox (twice) and the Angels - two teams that have legitimate chances at an AL title. The starting pitching was leading the charge, the bullpen (though shaky at times) held on for five saves in six victories, and the offense produced enough runs to keep the Indians in the win column more often than not.

The Indians came into Yankee Stadium scheduled to face Chase Wright (a pitcher with 14 career IP at AA, 0 career IP at AAA), Kei Igawa (a Japanese import who looked dreadful in his 2 previous starts) and Darrell Rasner (a player actually released by the Nationals).

It seemed too easy.

The Tribe was catching the Yankees when they were short-handed and would be able to batter these poor youngsters around. Sure, the Yankees' stacked offense would score runs, they always do. But Westbrook v. Wright? Sowers v. Igawa? By the time it came for Carmona to take the hill for the third game, the Yankees' bullpen would be so decimated that Yankees' pitching coach Ron Guidry would have to eat innings before their Red Sox series.

Then, as a wise man once said, something happened on the way to heaven.

Or, everything happened.

Apparently, the Indians' belief in Murphy's Law is stronger than we all thought. If it wasn't the starting pitching (Westbrook and Sowers combined to give up 14 runs in 4 1/3 innings), it was the defense (three errors in Game 1 by Marte & Barfield, who both looked completely overwhelmed by their environment and actually sat out the next two). If it wasn't the situational hitting (how do 53 men left on base by the lineup in the three games strike you, with the biggest culprits being Blake with nine or Peralta with ten), it was the closer (Borowski gave up 6 runs after getting 2 outs in the 9th with nobody on).

And, obviously, we all overlooked that two of the Yankees starters were soft-tossing LHP the

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Indians had never seen before. Seriously, if I were playing the Tribe in a one-game playoff, I would call up some Single-A pitcher who was left-handed and didn't throw over 83 MPH. Kid might pitch himself a perfect game.

Say what you will about Borowski's game-winning HR to Mr. April. Say that they should have walked A-Rod, which only would have loaded the bases for HGHiambi. The truth is, the Yankees did in the 9th inning what they did all series - they worked the count, they posted quality AB's, they kept the inning alive with singles and walks, they batted like the professional hitters they are. Borowski was one strike away twice from ending the game. But close only counts in horseshoes and hand ... ah, forget it.

The Indians blew a prime opportunity to announce their arrival as AL heavyweights, instead looking like overmatched, overwhelmed featherweights. Never has there been a series in recent memory that was so utterly disappointing, so unhealthy for the lining of my stomach, and so heartbreaking as the last three days have been.

No good feelings remain from this series - not the performances of Carmona, Cabrera, or Mastny. Perhaps the Indians decide to show up for some ball games after this debacle. But right now, it's hard to imagine.

Realizing that this is the fourth series of the season and the idea of a baseball season is never to get too high or too low (it's a marathon, kids, not a sprint), the fact remains that the incapability of this team to put together a complete game that haunted them all of last season persists is positively horrifying.

It has me wishing I were simply waking up from a bad dream. In reality, the Indians head to Tampa, tails firmly planted between their legs, trying to recapture some semblance of success that eluded them so completely in New York.

The Yankees' series is in the rearview mirror, but the wounds are too fresh ... and oh so deep.