

Series Preview: Indians at Red Sox

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Fresh off the heels of the Indians most important series sweep in a real long time, the road only gets tougher for the Tribe as they invade Fenway Park on Monday to kick off a series between the best two teams in the American League. The Red Sox, a Major League best 34-15, will be coming home after a three game sweep of the Texas Rangers. And they will send Curt Schilling, Daisuke Matsuzaka, and Josh Beckett to the hill in the three game set. Cris Sykes previews the series for us.



“I gotta do something here, I still can believe it. I gotta give you your dream shot! I'm gonna send you up against the best. You two characters are going to Fenway.”

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Boston will enter the series with the highest scoring offense in the Major Leagues. That is to be expected from a team with Manny Ramirez and David Ortiz hitting in the middle of its lineup. The scary part is that neither “Man-Ram” nor “Big Papi” is really swinging the bats like they have in the past. Kevin Youkilis, Mike Lowell and their two-headed second base platoon of Alex Cora

and Dustin Pedroia, through their first 49 games of the season, have carried the offense. Youkilis is currently third in the AL with his .353 batting average. Mike Lowell and David Ortiz are tied for the team lead with their nine home runs and 38 runs batted in.

The Red Sox pitching isn't too bad either, ranking third in the AL with a 3.67 earned run average. As a team, the Red Sox have only given up 38 home runs on the season, good for second lowest in the AL, playing half their games in cozy Fenway Park.

Monday, May 28th, 7:05 PM

Cliff Lee (2-1, 5.93) vs. Curt Schilling (4-2, 3.94)

The quote from the top of this preview fits the characterization of the first two games of this series quite well. The Indians will be sending two good pitchers to the mound, but both will be heavily outclassed from a "stuff" perspective.

In the opener, Cliff Lee will be looking to bounce back from his first loss of the season. Lee made a couple of mental mistakes in the first inning and never recovered, giving up eight runs in four and one third innings. Manager Eric Wedge did not appreciate Lee's effort and let him have it in his post game press conference, so we will see how Lee comes back from being sent to his room.

Lee has made five starts against Boston in his career. He recorded victories twice, and took one loss. In those five starts, Lee has a 3.45 ERA and has struck out more than one hitter per inning pitched. One of those starts came last year and Lee held the Red Sox to one run in his six innings of work.

The Red Sox will be sending Mr. Blogger himself, Curt Schilling, to the mound to oppose Lee. So far, this has not been the Schilling of old. He is allowing more than one hit per inning, while striking out fewer guys than Joe Blanton and Gil Meche. Over his last four starts, Schilling has allowed 14 earned runs in 24 innings, recording three no decisions and a loss.

Schilling made one start against the Indians in 2006, garnering a no decision. The Tribe got to him for five earned runs in six and two thirds innings of work. For his career, Schilling has only beaten the Indians once in his four starts. In very limited action, the top four in the Indians lineup have had good success against Schilling. Grady Sizemore, Casey Blake, Travis Hafner and Victor Martinez will come into action 11-21 against Schilling.

If you have never checked it out, Schilling gives a pretty decent recap of each of his starts on his blog, so if you want to see what he thinks of the Tribe game, check it out: [38 Pitches](#)

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Tuesday, May 29th, 7:05 PM

Jeremy Sowers (1-4, 6.29) vs. Josh Beckett (7-0, 2.66)

Game two of the series could be a study in the multiple ways to get a hitter out. Jeremy Sowers will bring as much of a finesse repertoire to the mound as any young starter in the game. Josh Beckett will bring a lot of heat and power curveballs with him.

Sowers got the monkey off his back in his last start, allowing one earned run over seven innings of work. Keeping the Indians from being swept by the Royals, Sowers got his first win of the year.

Sowers did make one start against Boston in 2006, getting a no decision despite allowing only two earned runs in five innings of work. Sowers did manage to set his career high in strikeouts,

with five, during those five innings of work.

Facing off against Sowers will be Josh Beckett. Beckett will bring the only unblemished record amongst starting pitchers in the AL that have more than three decisions to the bump. Beckett has won all seven of his decisions while averaging nearly a strikeout per inning.

Beckett got out to a very strong start in 2006 and brought an earned run average very similar to his current one into Jacobs Field. It left not so low. The Indians added two full runs to his ERA as they blitzed him for eight earned runs in just three and two thirds innings. Beckett did make some adjustments when the Indians came to Fenway later in the year though. As a result, he was able to limit them to only seven earned runs in six innings. Note to Josh, the Tribe likes fastballs. Hopefully Josh can't read that!

Wednesday, May 30th, 7:05 PM

Paul Byrd (5-1, 3.81) vs. Daisuke Matsuzaka (7-2, 4.43)

Since he has copied the windup of Ebby Calvin “Nuke” Laloosh, hopefully he is heading Crash Davis’ advice and not messing with a streak, sorry Mrs. Byrd. Paul Byrd has won his last four decisions and has not taken a loss in over five weeks.

I feel like most opposing hitters probably do during their walk back to the dugout; how is this sporkin’ guy getting people out? Is the new splitter really this good? Does the windup really cause that big of a distraction? Does just never walking a batter (zero walks in his last 34 innings) make this much of a difference? Or is he wearing a garter?

Byrd will be making his seventh appearance against Boston with a three and two mark, allowing four and a half runs per nine

innings. Byrd made two of his starts against Boston in 2006. In the first start, he picked up a win by allowing two earned runs in five innings. In the second start, he was bailed out by the offense when he got a no decision after giving up three home runs and six earned runs in four innings.

Wednesday will be the first opportunity for the Indians to see Daisuke Matsuzaka.

“Dice-K” is tied with Beckett for the team lead in wins, with seven, and has only lost twice so far. Matsuzaka started the season pitching really well, only allowing six earned runs over his first 20 innings. For the good work, the Red Sox rewarded him with one win and two losses. Since then, Daisuke has allowed 27 earned runs in 47 innings, but won all six of his decisions covering seven starts.

Since we have never faced him, I sought out

some information on what to expect, other than the already infamous “Gyro-ball”(would it make a mockery of the game to have his glove checked for cucumber sauce?). I found this scouting report (courtesy of Prospect Insider), and instead of recapping it, here is the link: [Scouting Report: Daisuke Matsuzaka - RHP](#) . It is not brief, but if you are really interested, it is worth it .

Red Sox Bullpen

For all the accolades given to the Sox rotation and lineup, the bullpen is probably their best group. The core group, Jonathan Papelbon, Hideki Okajima, Brandon Donnely and JC Romero, have been terrific all year.

Papelbon is their closer and he is as nasty as it gets. He has allowed a run in exactly two of 18 appearances so far. He is 12-13 in save opportunities and has struck out 26 batters in his 18 innings. They try to protect him, so he very rarely enters a game without a save on the line. Let's hope he gets a few days off this week.

Hideki Okajima has been about as pleasant of a surprise as one could ever hope for. Left-handed batters are slugging .097 against the lefty specialist. He has converted all three save opportunities and he has only allowed three earned runs in 24 2/3 innings.

Up Next: Detroit Tigers, May 31st-June 3 @ Jacobs Field