

Series Preview: Indians at Nationals

Written by {ga=pup}

Thursday, June 21 2007 7:00 PM -

We have finally made our way to the end of interleague play, and not a moment too soon. The Indians will take a short road trip down to The Nation's Capital to face a fiesty group of Washington Nationals this weekend. Cris Sykes breaks down the pitching match ups, tells you who to look out for in the Nationals lineup and identifies key members of their bullpen. There are some faces that will seem awfully familiar to Indians fans, so tune in this weekend!



Finally, we are at the end of interleague play. No more watching Cliff Lee stare at three pitches. No more wondering how Eric Wedge will get all of his designated hitters into the game.

Most importantly, there will be no more chances for C.C. Sabathia to embarrass Mike Rouse at the plate.

The Indians final interleague series will be in the Nation's Capital, as the Washington Nationals will play host. The Nationals came into the season with prognosticators calling for them to be on of the worst teams in the history of Major League Baseball. There was even talk of some scouts in Spring Training having a pool to guess the number of losses Washington would end up with, and the lowest number allowed was 110.

The Washington Nationals have been bad, just not that bad. There are currently four teams worse (Texas, Kansas City, Chicago-AL and San Fransisco), as well

as four teams that are right around them in the win column (Tampa Bay, Baltimore, Houston and Pittsburgh).

The Indians will enter the series winners of eight of their fifteen interleague games. Washington has gone seven and eight.

Friday, June 22nd, 7:05 PM

Fausto Carmona (8-2 3.12 Earned run average) vs. Micah Bowie (4-2, 3.78 ERA)

The Indians used Thursday's off day to juggle their rotation slightly, moving Fausto Carmona in front of Paul Byrd. The Indians believe they need to keep Carmona on regular rest will be the most beneficial to the team. I just think he is the better pitcher, so get him as many starts as possible.

I am almost out of ways to describe how good Carmona has been, so all I will do is list his innings pitched and runs allowed for his last 10 starts:

6/17 - 7 IP 2 ER

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6/12 - 7 IP 3 ER

6/7 - 7 IP 1 ER

6/1 - 6 IP, 5 ER

5/27 - 7 IP, 3 ER

5/22 - 6 IP, 3 ER

5/17 - 9 IP, 0 ER

5/12 - 7 IP, 3 ER

5/7 - 7 IP, 0 ER

4/29 - 8.1 IP, 1 ER

To recap, that is 10 starts, at least seven innings in eight of them and more than three earned runs in one, which is nice. Fausto, you might not want to make any plans for July 9-11.

Opposing Carmona will be Micah Bowie. The left-hander started the season working out of the Nationals bullpen, but their rotation has been decimated by injuries causing them to instill Bowie into a starters role.

As a starter, Bowie has been excellent for Washington possibly making them consider him as a member of their rotation long term. He was made six starts, won all four of his decisions, and carries a 3.81 ERA in those starts.

Washington has won all six of Bowie's starts.

The down side to Bowie in the rotation is the effect on the rest of the weekend, as he has yet pitch into the seventh inning, causing the Nationals to go to their bullpen early and often in his starts to get through that game, leaving them shorthanded.

Saturday, June 23rd, 7:05 PM

Paul Byrd (6-3, 4.81 ERA) vs. Matt Chico (3-5, 5.35 ERA)

I demand that whoever stole the Paul Byrd we saw in April

return him to the Indians and take this version out to the pasture. I could handle this Byrd go the way of the Dodo bird, without ever missing him.

It is nice that Paul Byrd doesn't walk anyone. What is the point though, if you still give up more base runners via the base hit than most do with hits and walks combined?

So far in the month of June, Paul Byrd has allowed more than a run per inning and more the two base runners per inning. Obviously, if that trend continues, the Indians will have to begin looking at alternatives to the man with the funky wind-up.

Matt Chico was putting together a nice little stretch in June, until he ran into the Detroit Tigers. After limiting opponents to seven runs in 19 innings over his first three starts, Chico was mauled by the Tigers for eight runs in four innings.

The Nationals have won six of Chico's last eight starts. Unfortunately for Chico, he was the winning pitcher only once in those starts. I guess there is something to be said for keeping your team in a game.

Sunday, June 24th, 1:35 PM

Jake Westbrook (1-2, 7.90 ERA) vs. Jason Simontacchi (4-5, 6.31 ERA)

Jake Westbrook will make his return to the Cleveland rotation on Sunday. Jake will be making his first start since leaving his May 2nd start with a pulled oblique muscle and spending the next seven weeks on the disabled list.

The injury could not have come at a worse time for Westbrook, who was coming off his best two starts of the year.

Westbrook has not been especially sharp during his minor league rehab tour through Lake County,

Buffalo and Akron. As far as rehab assignments go, you are really just looking to be able to stretch the pitcher out and work up his pitch count.

Getting some minor leaguers out would be nice, but not all that important.

The brightest side of Jake Westbrook being activated is it opened the door for the Indians to cut bait on Roberto Hernandez and give Jason Stanford a shot at sticking around with the Tribe.

Jason Simontacchi gets the start on Sunday for Washington. He is another National starter having very bad nightmares about the Detroit Tigers.

Detroit pounded him for 10 runs in three innings during his last start.

Simontacchi actually has a reverse right/left split,

but he does not get either of them out all that successfully. Right-handed hitters are batting .356, with an on base plus slugging of over .900.

He has "limited" the left-handed hitters to .286/.836.

Better news for the Tribe? Simontacchi has been totally bombed in his home starts. He is one and four with an ERA over nine in five home starts.

In 25 innings, he has surrendered 42 hits and 26 runs at RFK Stadium.

National Offense

Oxymoron.

The Washington Nationals offense has not been very good in 2007. They have the Major Leagues third worst team batting average, they have scored the second fewest runs, and they have hit the fewest home runs.

There are a couple of bright spots, though. The first would be Ryan Zimmerman, the second year third baseman.

Zimmerman has struggle with his batting average this year without having any lineup protection, but still leads the Nats in home runs, runs scored and runs driven in.

The Nationals top batting average belongs to old Indians nemesis Dmitri Young, who is hitting .336 in 66 games this year. Young is on a little five game

hitting streak, going seven for twenty-one.

The Nationals have a couple more familiar faces to Tribe fans. The first would be Ronnie Belliard, who manned second base for the Tribe in recent years.

Belliard has found a nice groove in Washington, and is hitting .287 in 181 at bats.

The Nationals have another old AL Central counterpart in shortstop Cristian Guzman.

Though limited by injuries, Guzman has played well for them when he is in the lineup, hitting .327.

For a team with so little power, the Nationals do very little in manufacturing runs. Nobody has more than six stolen bases.

Only three NL teams have had less sacrifice hits.

National Bullpen

Chad Cordero is the Nationals closer. When a team has as few leads as this team, you need a closer who converts as many chances as possible.

That is not Chad Cordero this year, who is just 11-16.

Let's call him the anti-Borowski because he has a very fine ERA, but just doesn't get the job finished often enough.

The Nationals do have some guys in their bullpen who have done a good job keeping them in games.

Jesus Colome and Saul Rivera have limited to the opposition to ERAs of 2.86 and 3.73 respectively.

Another former Indian, Jon Rauch, has taken on the responsibility of being the Nationals primary set-up man and occasional closer. He has not been as effective as the rest of the pen, so it should only be a matter of time before he goes back into their rotation or becomes their long man out of the pen.

The Nationals do have a flair for the comeback, as 11 of their 30 wins have gone to pitchers who have not started a game.

Up Next: Oakland comes to Jacobs Field