

Series Preview: A's at Indians

Written by {ga=pup}

Sunday, June 24 2007 7:00 PM -

With interleague play now in the rear view mirror, the Indians welcome the Oakland Athletics to town tonight for the first of a four game set. This is a huge series for both teams. The A's are coming off a sweep at the hands of the Mets, and have fallen nine back of the red hot Angels. The Tribe was nearly swept by the Nationals, and have slipped two games behind the Tigers. This series features some serious starting pitching, and Cris Sykes previews it for us this afternoon.



Now that we have finished off this interleague debacle, we can move forward with the “non-gimmick” portion of the season. The Tribe welcomes the Oakland Athletics to Jacobs Field for a four game series beginning tonight.

The marquee match-up in this series is not the Indians pitching versus the A's hitting. It is not the A's pitching against the Indians hitting either. The marquee is the battle between the kings of the “I can do it cheaper than everyone else” general managers.

Runs are going to be quite difficult to come by for the next few days. This series will see five of the top thirteen starting pitchers in Earned Run Average from the American League take the mound. That does not even include Oakland's Lenny DiNardo (who does not yet have enough innings to qualify) and his 2.35 ERA.

This will be the second series of the season between these teams and the Indians will be looking to avenge losing two out of three in Oakland in early May. The rubber match of that series saw former Indian, and now former Athletic, Milton Bradley hit a three-run walk-off home run against Indian close Joe Borowski. The A's have since released Bradley, so he will not have to face any retaliation for his showmanship during the home run.

Monday, June 25th, 7:05 PM

C.C. Sabathia (10-2, 3.34 Earned Run Average) vs. Chad Gaudin (6-2, 3.05 ERA)

The Indians will send the ace of their pitching staff to the mound to start this series. Sabathia, an Oakland area native, will have to pitch better than he did in game one of the previous series. In that game, Sabathia allowed a season high six earned runs in six and two-thirds innings. The result was Sabathia's first loss of the 2007.

That result is not rare when C.C. takes the mound against the A's. Over the last three years, Sabathia has yet to record a win against Oakland in five starts. He has yielded 19 earned runs in 25 innings pitched and taken three losses in the five starts. A key component to Sabathia's struggles against Oakland appears to be a lack of control. Sabathia has walked 20 and struck out 20. The A's are the only team Sabathia has faced more than twice in that span that he does not have more strike outs than walks against.

Squaring off against Sabathia will be Chad Gaudin. Gaudin received a no decision in the earlier series, starting the game Borowski gave up the bomb to Milton Bradley. The Tribe got to him for five runs (four earned) in four and two-thirds innings.

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Gaudin ranks seventh in the American League in ERA, but that number has increased in each of his last four starts. Since dropping it to 2.32 in late May, Gaudin saw it increase slightly over two starts before jumping almost three quarters of a run in his last two.

Gaudin has a couple of things to keep an eye on. First would be his inability to get left-handed hitters out. Lefties are hitting over three hundred and slugging over eight hundred against him. The second is Gaudin walks a lot of people. He ranks fifth in the AL in walks allowed and has walked at least one batter in every start since his first one of the season.

Tuesday, June 26th, 7:05 PM

Cliff Lee (4-4, 5.46 ERA) vs. (Dan Heran 9-2, 1.78 ERA)

Cliff Lee will start game number two against Oakland. Lee has begun to return to the form that allowed the Indians to count on him as a top of the rotation starter coming into 2007. Over his last three starts, Lee has only allowed seven earned runs in 18 innings. Compared to his previous three starts when he allowed 16 earned runs in 13 2/3 innings, that is top of the rotation stuff.

Lee made the start, and was in line for a victory in the ill-fated Milton Bradley game that I can't get away from in the preview. It was his third start for the Indians this year after missing the first month on the disabled list.

Cliff has one of those backward platoon splits, allowing lefties to hit .327 and carry an [OPS](#) of 1.033.

Lee does not get the best of match-ups, as he will have to match pitches with the one of the best pitchers in baseball, Dan Haren. There is not a stat the Haren's name does not appear near the top of for league leaders. He is first in ERA, second in WHIP, third in innings pitched, and seventh in strikeouts.

Twice this year Haren has allowed more than two runs in a game. The first time he came back in his next start with seven shutout innings. The second time will be Tuesday.

In past years, the Indians seemed to have Haren's number. Last year, the Indians faced Haren twice and scored 12 runs in 10 1/3 innings. Haren does not appear to be the same pitcher this year, and the Indians offense has not exactly been clicking of late, so to repeat last year's numbers will be a long shot on Tuesday.

Wednesday, June 27th, 7:05 PM

Fausto Carmona (8-3, 3.21 ERA) vs. Lenny Dinardo (2-4, 2.35 ERA)

The Tribe will be sending Fausto Carmona to the middle of Jacobs Field on Wednesday. Fausto, which is obviously the Spanish word for "One who

comes from nowhere to save a pitching staff" has been as good as anyone this side of Dan Haren.

Fausto started the one game in Oakland the Indians held on to win. In his second career start against the Athletics, Carmona worked seven strong innings, allowing three earned runs. The A's seem to bring out the worse in Cleveland starting pitchers control problems as Carmona walked a season high four in that start.

For those that have forgotten, at one point Carmona could not win a game in the Major Leagues. He did pitch well enough in September last year to possibly end that streak earlier, but had a lot of tough luck. One of those September starts came against the Oakland A's, when he limited them to one run in six innings of work. Of course last year, the Indians bullpen was made up of some

really bad pitchers and the non-winning streak continued.

Lenny DiNardo will take the bump against Fausto. DiNardo is another reclamation project, pulled off the waiver wire by Billy Beane in February from the Boston Red Sox.

Lenny will be making his sixth start for Oakland, after beginning the season in the bullpen and making 11 appearances. One of those appearances came against Cleveland when he allowed a run on two hits and a walk in the Tribe's six to three win. In his five starts, DiNardo has allowed only eight earned runs in 26 1/3 innings. He has been hurt by some bad Oakland defense though as he has also allowed seven unearned runs, which explains the one and three record despite the low earned run average.

Thursday June 28th, 12:05 PM

Paul Byrd (6-3, 4.74 ERA) vs. Joe Blanton (7-4, 3.19 ERA)

Paul “Dodo” Byrd will pitch the series finale for the Indians. After starting the season six and one for the Indians, Byrd has dropped his last two decisions and not won a game in the month of June. The American League has apparently caught up to the usage of that devastating split-fingered fastball Byrd developed for this season.

Byrd did rebound a little bit, in his last start against the Washington Nationals. Byrd

worked six and two thirds innings and allowed three earned runs on seven hits and a walk.

Byrd did not make a start against Oakland in the series at Oakland, but has enjoyed some success against the A's in his career. Over the last three seasons, Byrd has made six starts, winning twice and losing twice. His ERA versus Oakland is a half of a run per nine innings lower than his career mark.

Joe Blanton will indent the pitching mound at "The Jake" on Thursday afternoon. The six foot three, 250-pound workhorse will enter the game second in the AL with 113 innings pitched. Blanton is just ahead of Indians Carmona and Sabathia in the AL in ERA too.

Blanton has been as good in June as a starting pitcher can be, allowing only five runs in 39 1/3 innings. He has allowed zero runs twice, one run twice and was smacked around for a whole three runs in one start.

Blanton squared off with C.C. Sabathia in the first series between these two teams, in one of the larger (pun intended) pitching match-ups of 2007. Blanton held the Indians to two runs in seven innings to get the victory. He struck out and did not walk a batter in the start.

Oakland Offense

The A's offense is not a very impressive bunch. In fact, the only thing they do better than most AL teams is draw walks. They are second in the AL in that category, but no higher than eighth in any other meaningful category,

which is where they rank in home runs.

They do not hit for average (13th), steal bases (12th), or score runs (13th).

It is a good thing their pitching staff is so good, because this unit is terrible.

Nick Swisher is the only regular hitting above .273 and he is also third on the team in home runs, first in RBI and third in runs scored.

The only other power options for the A's are Jack Cust and Eric Chavez. Cust and

Chavez played a big role in the come from behind, ninth inning meltdown by Joe Borowski. Chavez worked Borowski into a deep count before getting a two-out hit setting the stage for the Cust home run to tie it, before Bradley hit the three run job to win it.

Oakland Bullpen

Oakland is currently without their top two bullpen arms, with Houston Street and Justin Duchscherer both on the disable list.

Former Indian Allan Embree has done an effective job in the closers role with both of them being out. Embree has converted eight of nine opportunities with a 2.62 ERA out of the pen.

A new face to the Athletic bullpen is one of the best starting pitchers in the AL from a “stuff” perspective, Rich Harden. It is really too bad that he has such a difficult time staying healthy, or else this A's rotation would be historic.

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