

Series Preview: Indians at Devil Rays

Written by {ga=pup}

Thursday, August 16 2007 7:00 PM -

I don't know about you, but this coming series with the D-Rays gives me nightmares of the end of the '05 season when they tore through us like a hot knife through butter, helping end our post-season hopes and dreams. Cris Sykes takes a closer look at the three game set down in Tampa, and also goes on a mini-Wedge rant in his latest column for us here at TCF.



While the previews normally begin with a brief recap of the teams, or some clever (or at least my best attempt at clever) anecdotes, I am going to go a little off the board today. Instead, I am going to go on a little run of rants. I hope nobody minds.

Eric Wedge is a babysitter. I am quite sure that is what it even says in his job description. When the kids behave well for him and the Indians win, he gets credit for pretty much doing nothing. They are good kids, simple as that. When those same kids act like "Mini-Mansons", it is the fault of everyone else. My question is...how do I get a job like that?

Joe Borowski is the Indians closer. His job is to enter games the Indians have the lead and hold that lead for one inning. He is pretty good at that. ANY OTHER situation, he stinks. You have two choices at this point, never bring him in for a non-save situation, or don't be surprised when he blows up in a non-save situation. I am not giving Borowski a break for this. He should be able to get three outs, no matter what the situation. I am saying, there is a thing called a trend and you should follow those trends, especially at this time of year when everything is magnified. If you don't follow the trend, don't whine about it later.

Hey Garko, your foot is supposed to be on the bag when you catch the ball. Just sayin'.

Cliff Lee? Aaron Laffey? Jeremy Sowers? Does it really matter? Does anyone expect this organization to make the correct selection?

Victor Martinez looks awfully tired at the plate. Any chance we see him play first base or DH all weekend with Pronk resting his leg? Probably not. Wedgie has faith in his guys to avoid the rigors of squatting 10 gazillion times over the course of a season. If he can't handle it, maybe he should have gotten better at third base, right Eric?

Jhonny, maybe it is the misplaced "H" in your name that causes you to be "slow". Go to a courthouse and have it changed. Please. At least save yourself the dignity of not looking as dumb as someone who could be picked off first base with the bases loaded and nobody out.

Did I mention Wedge offers nothing but an excuse for the players to be unsuccessful?

Rant complete.

Friday, August 17th, 7:10 PM

Paul Byrd (10-5, 4.53 Earned Run Average) vs. Edwin Jackson (3-11, 5.84 ERA)

Some players just cannot handle being complimented, I guess. I spent most of the season on the fence with Paul Byrd. I was liking the results, but hating the manner he went about getting them. I finally jumped off

the fence last week and decided there was no reason to continue worrying about the way he was getting the job done.

Then the Yankees came to town.

I no longer support Paul Byrd unconditionally and worry about his ability to be effective allowing 134 hits a game. Allowing seven runs in two innings is no way to follow a complete game shutout, Nook.

Paul Byrd is a different pitcher away from Jacobs Field. Hitters at Jacobs Field mash Byrd to a .343 average and have an on base plus slugging average of .910. Away from "The Jake", those numbers fall to .255 and .660. I nominate Paul Byrd for the only on the road spot in the rotation!

Byrd has only allowed more than three runs in two of ten road starts. That is good for him. The bad part is one of them came at Tropicana Field House, home of the Tampa Bay Devil Rays. That just happens to be where his start is this weekend. Byrd took the loss in his only appearance against Tampa this year, when he allowed six runs (four earned) in six innings of batting practice. That was one of seven starts this year that Byrd has allowed double digit hits. On the bright side, he didn't walk anyone, lol.

Paul Byrd is one and two in his career versus Tampa Bay. In six starts, Byrd has averaged six innings per start. In those 36 innings, Byrd has allowed 51 hits and 23 earned runs for a 5.75 ERA.

Edwin Jackson gets the call from Tampa in game one of the series. The overall numbers for Jackson are quite ugly. He has been much better than his overall numbers in seven of his last 10 starts. When he is bad, he is still really bad, but when he has been good, he has been really good.

In the three debacles in his last 10, he has allowed 17 runs in 14 1/3 innings. Over the other seven starts, he has allowed seven earned runs, covering 43 2/3 innings. He appears to have a little trouble getting over the hump of making a fourth consecutive start. That is good news for the Indians, because his last three have been as good as he has ever been in the Majors. In his last start, he threw a complete game shutout against the Texas Rangers.

Jackson is making his third start against the Wahoos in 2007. He has been stuck with a no decision in each of the previous two starts, but only allowed four earned runs total and pitching six innings in each start.

Saturday, August 18th, 7:10 PM

Jake Westbrook (3-7, 5.01 ERA) vs. Jason Hammel (1-2, 6.63 ERA)

Shhhhhh. Don't tell anyone, but Jake Westbrook is beginning

to look like the pitcher Mark Shapiro anticipated when he handed him that contract extension.

Jake has only allowed seven runs in his last four starts, in 28 innings pitched. This stretch has lowered his season ERA over a full run. The Indians even hit enough for Jake to win two of those starts!

Westbrook has been very effective versus Tampa this year. In his two starts, Jake has completed seven innings in both games and held the Rays to four earned runs. He does not have a decision against them this year, but did strike out a season high seven batters in his June 29th start against Tampa.

In 11 career starts, Westbrook has won five times and dropped only two decisions against Tampa. Tropicana is one of Westbrook's favorite places to pitch. His 3.48 ERA in Tampa Bay is the lowest of any stadium in the American League.

Jason Hammel has spent most of the season pitching poorly out of the Devil Ray bullpen. To try to shake

things up, Tampa has decided to see if he can pitch as poorly out of the rotation. He has not disappointed.

In fact, he has been worse. His 6.11 ERA out of the bullpen in 10 appearances is almost a full run lower than his ERA (7.08) in five starts.

Hammel has made two appearances versus the Indians in his career. Once out the bullpen, where he was bad and one as a starter where he was...bad. He made a start at Jacobs Field in 2006, allowing six earned runs in five and one third innings. This year, he came out of the bullpen once against the Tribe and allowed three earned runs in one and two thirds innings.

So I guess the question for Saturday will be what happens when a struggling offense matches up with a bad pitcher? Hopefully the pitcher loses. Hopefully!

Sunday, August 19th, 1:40 PM

C.C. Sabathia (14-6, 3.48 ERA) vs. James Shields (9-8, 4.22 ERA)

First things first. Sunday is my 1st wedding anniversary. I just wanted to take this opportunity to thank my beautiful wife, Traci, for being so understanding as I pursue this hobby of writing about Cleveland sports. I promise, the nursery will be done soon!

As is the case in most Sabathia starts, we can feel fairly confident that we are going to get a quality start out of the big left-hander. Unfortunately, we have no clue if that effectiveness will ever result in another win for Carsten.

Sabathia has allowed eight earned runs in his

last five starts. Sabathia has won one game in his last five starts. Sabathia is probably not too happy with the guys the swing the bats. Maybe they should skip the DH on Sunday?

Sabathia won his 12th game of the year back on June 30, by allowing two earned runs in seven innings and beating these Davil Rays. That is the good part. The bad part is he has only won twice since. Two wins since June 30?

That was C.C.'s second start against Tampa in 2007. His first resulted in a no decision. In both starts, Sabathia worked seven innings, in both starts he allowed three runs with two of them being earned and in both starts he recorded eight strikeouts. There is something to be said

for consistency.

In his career, Sabathia has made 10 starts versus Tampa, five at home and five in Tampa. He has only suffered one defeat at the hands of the Devil Rays, while winning seven times. In 73 innings Sabathia has a 2.47 ERA, allowing 20 earned runs. He has struck out nearly one Devil Ray per inning in those 10 starts. At Tampa, he has won two out of three decisions, but his ERA takes a significant jump, as he allows almost two more full runs per nine innings there than he does overall against Tampa.

James Shields has begun to ride the elevator back down to Earth since his eye

opening start to the season. He won his first six decisions, though it took him 13 games to do it. Shields' ERA has taken a steady climb up since recording his sixth win, from 3.04 to its current level of 4.22.

He has somewhat returned to his early season form in his last couple of starts, as he held the Tigers and Red Sox to one run each while pitching six and seven innings respectively.

Shields lost his only decision to the Tribe and also has a no decision against Cleveland this year. In his first start, he held the Indians to two runs in eight innings, but Cleveland put up four runs in the ninth

to steal the victory away from Shields. Shields only allowed two hits that day. And fortunately for the Indians they were in a row, a single by Casey Blake and a two run home run by Jhonny Peralta. This should surprise nobody, but Shields also set a career high with 12 strikeouts that afternoon.

Shields followed that performance up with another quality one against the Indians. He pitched six and one third innings and allowed three runs, but only two of them were earned. He was once again victimized by a Jhonny Peralta home run and came awfully close to matching that career high in strikeouts as he punched out 10 Indians.

Scoreboard Watching

Detroit @ New York (4 games)

Seattle vs. Chicago (3 games)

Toronto vs. Baltimore (3 games)

Up Next: @ Detroit