

Earlier this week, Indians fans braced themselves for a three game series against the defending AL Champion Detroit Tigers. We braced ourselves for a series in which the Tigers would close the gap on Cleveland, turning the remaining week and a half of the season into a gut-churning horse race with the offseason awaiting the loser. The Indians came. They saw. They kicked their @#%. In his latest, Papa Cass says this team has the look of a champion. And at the right time.



It's only September, and there is plenty of time for Cleveland fans to wring their hands over whether the Indians will choke when it really matters, or when it really, *really* matters.

But right now, when it matters, the Indians looked like a team ready for the challenge of the postseason.

The Tigers came into Cleveland with everything on the line. They needed to sweep, or at the very least take two of three, to keep their fast-dwindling playoff hopes alive. They were coming off a sweep of the Twins, and were playing their best ball in quite some time.

The Indians, meanwhile, had a reasonably comfortable lead in the division. A previous edition of the Indians, circa 2005, might have come down with a case of wanting-it-less-than-the-other-team-itis.

The Tigers and Indians haven't been able to shake each other all year. We braced ourselves for a series in which the Tigers would close the gap on Cleveland, turning the remaining week and a half of the season into a gut-churning horse race with the offseason awaiting the loser.

But with the season at a crossroads, with the Tigers throwing everything on the field in an effort to keep October from disappearing over the horizon, the Indians

didn't just triumph. They wrapped, boxed, stamped and mailed the Tigers to the golf course, where they will now almost certainly start their offseason a week from Monday.

The Indians, the little-engine-that-could with the overmatched payroll, swept their chief division rival and turned their first division title in six years into a matter of mathematics. The magic number stands at three, the division lead at seven and a half games. The Indians have 10 games remaining, the Tigers nine.

That's dominance, any way you slice it.

Over the course of three days, the Indians managed to win games in which they faced a long-time tormentor (Kenny Rogers), one of the best young pitchers in the game (Justin Verlander), and avoided a letdown against Nate Robertson. In all three games, they trailed at some point, then rallied to win.

Monday's game will probably go into the history books as the backbreaker.

Detroit's bullpen imploded, allowing a game-tying homer to

Jhonny

Peralta

and a game-winner in extra innings to Casey Blake. But that game would have meant far less if the Tigers had won the next two.

But Tuesday and Wednesday, the Indians exhibited an intestinal fortitude not present even a month ago. They fell behind 4-1 to Verlander on Tuesday, but bludgeoned him out of the game with four home runs, winning 7-4.

The Indians have beaten Verlander and Johan Santana a combined eight times this year. Think about that when you think about the Tribe's current position.

Wednesday, C.C. Sabathia put his team in a 2-0 hole that screamed &quot;letdown,&quot; but another Blake homer ignited the offense and the Indians chipped away at Robertson, winning 4-2, finishing off the sweep and making it safe to order the champagne, plastic sheeting and commemorative caps and t-shirts.

The Indians are going to be the 2007 American League Central Division Champions. And they can take all the credit for themselves. Detroit fans might think the Tigers choked, but they didn't. The Indians, right now, are just plain

better. And they showed it this week, in no uncertain terms.