

The Roundtable: Indians-Yankees Predictions

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Wednesday, October 03 2007 7:00 PM -

Well, here we go Tribe fans. It all starts today. Indians/Yankees. American League Division Series. In anticipation of the start of the series, we went to our staff of writers for their thoughts and predictions on how they felt things would shake down in this series. Would the Yankees big bats and experience be too much? Or will the Indians prevail behind the big duo of C.C. and Fausto? The writers of TheClevelandFan opine ...



Indians versus Yankees. Playoffs. It doesn't really get much better than this.

The Indians and Yankees get started with Game One of the American League Division Series (ALDS) today at 6:37 p.m., and it is a series that figures to be a war between two teams that are pretty even across the board.

With the Yankees, you have a veteran team with many games of postseason experience on their side, a \$200 million payroll, all-stars up and down the roster, and an offense that is practically unstoppable. With the Indians, you have a young team lacking really any postseason experience at all, a miniscule \$60 million payroll, a few all-stars scattered about the roster, an inconsistent offense but a starting pitching staff and backend of the bullpen that is arguably the best in baseball.

Will the experience of the veteran Yankees be the difference, or will the youthful Indians "not knowing any better" trump their lack of postseason experience? Can Fausto Carmona, a player who in the past has been known to get too amped up and over anxious in big situations, come up big in Game Two? Is C.C. Sabathia really a different pitcher today than the last time he faced the Yankees three years ago? Will Eric Wedge's lack of postseason managerial experience compared to the battle-tested Joe Torre be a factor? Will the Indians penchant for striking out be exposed by the Yankees?

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We'll find out the answers to all these questions and more over the course of the next five to seven days. For now, we polled TheClevelandFan.com writers for their predictions on the series as well as their final thoughts.

Tony Lastoria: As the Indians embark on their first postseason run in six years, their success and failure may ultimately come down to where they stand going into Game Four. Assuming that neither the Indians or Yankees sweep the other, a potential Game Four with Paul Byrd on the mound facing a left-handed laden Yankee lineup that has knocked him around in the past and benefits from a short porch in right field in Yankee stadium, could be a recipe for disaster for the Indians.

The Indians have already announced Byrd as the starter for this game, but if the Indians come into this game facing elimination down 2-1 in the series, it would be inexcusable to not start C.C. Sabathia on short rest in a must-win game and then go with Fausto Carmona in Game Five on normal rest. Heck, even if up 2-1 going into the game, I would start the left-handed Aaron Laffey as the Yankees have some trouble against left-handed starters and pitchers they have never faced before.

If the Indians do what they have in the past and just stay the course and throw Byrd in Game Four down 2-1 in the series, we will lose. I hope for better, but the Indians offense struggles in this short series and the decision to start Byrd in Game Four ends what is a quick postseason for the Indians. Yankees in four. (I hope I am wrong)

Rich Swerbinsky: Pitching, pitching, pitching. The Indians undoing in past years, they head into this years playoffs with two of the game's most elite starting pitchers in C.C. Sabathia and Fausto Carmona. Both guys are viable Cy Young candidates, and are throwing incredibly well as we get set for October baseball.

The back end of the bullpen does make me a little nervous. Borowski has been walking the tightrope all season, and Raffie Perez stumbled to the finish line. But in the end, I feel the Indians have a big edge in the starting pitching department.

My prediction? The Indians split the pair at the Jake this Thursday and Friday. Jake Westbrook beats Mike Mussina in Game Three. The Yankees fight back in Game Four to pull the series even. And then C.C. Sabathia throws a gem in Game Five at Jacobs Field next Wednesday to advance the Indians to the ALCS for the first time since 1997.

Paul Cousineau: As we draw near to the ALDS, it becomes very apparent that the combatants are teams built very differently looking to travel different avenues to the same destination. Led by the extraordinary A-Rod, but truly not boasting that much else, the Yankees rely on bludgeoning their opponents into submission and hoping that, when the dust clears, their inconsistent pitching staff has limited their opponents to fewer runs than they've amassed. On the flip side, the Indians depend upon their Pair of Aces and the troika of The Scarecrow, Senor Slo-Mo, and JoeBo to keep the opposition at bay while the Indians offense does what it does - steadily, if unspectacularly, keep the Indians in the game as they grind out runs with the idea that the strength of the team (the pitching) will limit their opposition to fewer runs than the Tribe

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can scratch out.

To me, the series boils down to one thing - the ability of the Indians starting pitchers to effectively shut down the best offense in baseball, and particularly how they approach Rodriguez. The Indians will get their hits against a shaky New York staff, but they're built more to pad a lead than they are to win a shootout. If the Yankees keep the scoreboard operator busy, they have the upper hand; but if the aCCe and the Faustastic One can dominate the Yankees the way they've dominated the AL over the past month, the Indians will ride them to victory. Pick : Indians in 4.

Erik Cassano: To me, it's all about the Tribe's bullpen. I am confident the starting pitching can keep them in games, but what is going to happen when the starters leave?

All season long, the starters have masked whatever depth the Indians' bullpen lacks by consistently reaching the sixth and seventh innings. Against the Yankees, who can max out pitch counts at the same time they're inflicting home run whiplash, Eric Wedge can't count on his starters getting to the later innings in every game. That means untested/mediocre middle relievers like Jensen Lewis and Aaron Fultz could factor into games far more than any of us want to admit.

Nothing is as deflating as having your starter battling to keep your team in the game, then turning it over to the front end of the bullpen, which promptly lets the game get out of hand before the late-inning firemen have a chance to close it out.

If C.C. Sabathia and Fausto Carmona can hand the baton directly to the Raffies and Joe Borowski, I remain confident the Indians can win the necessary three games to advance. If the Yankees can force Wedge to go to the 'pen in the fifth and sixth innings, that's called "exploiting a weakness," and the Yankees will have the upper hand.

But I, for now, will remain optimistic and pick the Indians in five.

Cris Sykes: Unfortunately, I cannot see the youthful Indians being able to handle the pressure or the talent that will be in the opposite dugout come Thursday. Our best hope and ace of our staff, C.C. Sabathia has won exactly one time in his eight career starts versus the Yankees and posts an earned run average over seven. Our number two starter has already logged more innings than in any other point in his career and has a habit of getting over-hyped in big situations. For game three, Jake Westbrook will get the call in a stadium where he has dropped four of five decisions, also with an ERA over seven. If game four is needed, we will trot out Paul Byrd, who has never won at Yankee Stadium.

Pitching wins in the playoffs and while the Yankees rotation does not look as good as ours, they have all played in this atmosphere before, and that experience is priceless. Another unfulfilled season for the city of Cleveland, as the Yankees win the series in four games, led by just enough pitching and the beginning of an October to Remember for Alex Rodriguez, who goes on to be the MVP of the American League playoffs.

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The Tribe's best hope is that the offense goes crazy in the series. They will need huge efforts from the entire lineup, most notably Travis Hafner. He will have to respond to the situations at hand and make up for his lackluster regular season. Grady Sizemore and Asdrubal Cabrera will have to produce from the top two spots in the order. The Indians should be able to score enough runs to stay in the series, just not enough to win the series. Maybe next year?

Hiko: I have tickets to Game 5 (if necessary) against the Yankees. So, obviously, the series will be decided in four or less. Indians in four. Previous record means nothing come postseason, and the Tribe's pitching is markedly better.

Jarad Regano: Playoff baseball is back. And while this three day break is boring, it is giving me an appreciation of how much I missed this the last six years. I see this series as a toss up, and am confident all of the writers on this forum will side with the Tribe- putting their hearts first as always.

While picking a winner is 50/50, I will say that Game #1 may be more important to the Indians than any other team in the postseason. The feared Yankee lineup will be out there every game. The best pitcher in baseball will pitch only once, possibly twice. It is important for the Tribe to start this thing up 1-0, both to exorcise the regular season demons and to take advantage of our starting pitching strength. I say C.C. does it, and I too am going with my heart that he'll do it again in Game #5. Tribe in 5.

Todd Dery: To compare the everyday lineups will make you puke. One team has a \$200 million dollar payroll, the other "just north of \$60 million." The experience factor goes to the Yankees. The hottest team in baseball? Also the Yankees. Who does MLB want to go further in the playoffs to save their sagging ratings? The Yankees. Looking at the Vegas odds for all Game One action in the LDS's, only one road team is favored. The Yankees.

With that said, this Indians team is as together and as focused as any Tribe team we have seen in the Jacobs Field Era. The inexperience may help the young Indians positions players as they may be just loose enough to be unfazed. Most importantly, October baseball is won and lost with pitching, as we all know from watching the Tribe teams of the 90's fall short. Give me C.C. and Fausto all day over Wang and Pettitte. There's your difference. Tribe in five.

Dennis Nosco: This couldn't be any worse or any better a matchup for the Indians. However, they have the Yankees right where they want them: overconfident. The Indians also have a number of guys (Cabrera, Perez, Lewis, Gutierrez) who the Yankees don't know much about which is a huge advantage.

The matchup that I worry about most is Borowski vs anyone in the 9th. We have no idea how he will fare as a closer when the chips are down. The Indians have to avoid the big inning early and late from Yankees hitters. What makes me nervous is the lack of playoff experience on this team, especially among the "veterans";

Game 1: Sabathia bests Wang 3-2. Yankees get runners on first and second in 9th vs Borowski but can't score. Game 2: Carmona beats Pettitte 6-1. Grady scores two runs. Perez pitches a

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scoreless 9th. Game 3: Westbrook beats TBD 10-9. Lewis and Borowski give up 5 runs to make it close but the Indians prevail.

One final thought: If anyone is so into this that they are totally crushed if we lose in ANY round then they need to take a "compete for a long time pill" and stop taking their "we have to win right now or I am going to explode" medication.

Brian McPeck: The Yankees are old, thin in the starting pitching ranks and have a closer on his last legs. That said, they are also experienced, very patient at the dish and extremely dangerous in a short playoff series. They can maul ineffective pitching and they can make very good pitchers work hard to get through six or seven innings.

There is very little margin for error in a five game series. This Indians team grinded out 96 wins in the regular season but is painfully short on playoff experience. If they can get the same quality of starts from C.C. Sabathia and Fausto Carmona that those two pitchers gave them all year, they can overcome the experience difference and win this series in four games. My heart tells me that can and will happen. But my head keeps sending me visions of Paul Byrd pitching to Yankee lefties in the Bronx and Joe Borowski protecting 1-run leads in the 9th inning of close games.

The heart says Indians in four with Travis Hafner in the hero role. The head says Yankees win the series in five with Borowski wearing goat horns.