

Indians Opener More Than Just One Game

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Monday, April 03 2006 7:00 PM -



Well, how was that for openers?

As an Indians fan, I think it is safe to say we surely didn't sit around all winter and wait six months for THAT.

Thankfully, with baseball, the taste from a bad game can be wiped out the next night since there pretty much is a game every night. Unfortunately for us Indians fans, the bitter taste from the opener will have to stick around a little while longer since the Indians had an off-day Monday and do not play the White Sox again until Tuesday afternoon.

15 teams won their openers, and 15 teams lost. So, half the baseball fans across the country think their team is heading to the World Series, and half think it is time to pack it up and start getting ready for the 2007 season. As fans, we tend to put the first game and the first week of games under the microscope and over-react positive or negative to a lot of early results. Hey, it happens and is human nature, since a lot of fans spend the off-season talking about the successes and failures

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of the team to address certain needs. Once the team finally hits the field, we have a tendency to come to rash conclusions.

As the season plays out, the Indians should show that all the hype is for real and that they are indeed a true contender. All hope is not lost after one game. Just look at Oakland, who was the preseason trendy pick to win the World Series, who just got blasted by the Yankees in their opener. They still are a favorite, as are the Indians.

But, what the White Sox did all in one night is provide a lucid reminder that they are still the team to beat in the AL Central, and in baseball for that matter. For one night at least, the 2006 Chicago White Sox were the 2005 Chicago White Sox. They got exceptional relief pitching, holding the Indians to one run and only three hits the final five innings. They played good defense, and were lucky several times at the plate. They had quality at bats in key situations to move runners up, and they hit well with RISP.

Of course, it would not be fair to judge the Indians after one game, especially a rain-soaked game that was interrupted in the 4th inning with a 3-hour or so rain delay. The game looked to be a competitive one prior to the rain delay, but once play resumed the Indians resorted to their April play of yesteryear. They couldn't field, the bullpen stunk, the bats went silent, and the team looked overmatched.

Oh yes, those Aprils of the past. We have been inundated with constant reminders of this team's failures in April the last three years, and how they need to avoid such a start this year if they envision being in the playoffs come October.

To recap, in the last three seasons the Indians have gotten off to awful starts in April, going 7-20 in 2003, 9-13 in 2004 and 9-14 in 2005. In an odd twist, each of

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these awful April starts have piggybacked good Spring Training records the same season, as they went a league best 19-11 in 2003, 18-14 in 2004, and 16-13 in 2005. A lot of talk has been made of what possibly is the reason for the sluggish starts in April after such good Springs, but if this trend continues (oh, by the way, the Indians went 19-13 this past Spring) eventually the finger has to be pointed at the manager Eric Wedge.

But in the opener, everything that could go wrong just about did. Aside from a nice home run from free agent pickup Eduardo Perez, the night was mostly forgettable. In addition to the errors, bad pitching, and poor execution at the plate, Sabathia was injured and Fernando Cabrera threw the ultimate meatball to Jim Thome for a home run that landed somewhere in Canada. Not a great start to the season.

But, recently this is what we have come to expect when we play the White Sox. They simply dominated us last year, as the Indians went 5-14 against them, which included a horrible 1-9 record at home. Sure, a bundle of those wins were of the one-run variety, but a win is a win. If the Indians have any plans of usurping the White Sox from their throne atop the AL Central and baseball universe, the Indians need to find a way to beat them and not rely on help from other teams. They need to learn to take care of the neighborhood bully themselves.

When the schedule came out, starting with the White Sox on the road may have been the worst possible matchup to start the season. The Indians shouldn't run scared from the White Sox, and it would have been great to start the season with a sweep or even still end up taking two of three in the series to send a message. But, this is a 162-game marathon, and way too much will be made out of these first three games with the White Sox. Unfortunately, opening the season with the Sox makes it very hard not to come to a rush to judgment, regardless of the outcomes in these games be it positive or negative.

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Let's face it; the Indians have a lot to lose even this early in the season, while the White Sox do not. If the Indians get swept by the White Sox or lose two of three to them to start the season, the media and fans will already be all over the Indians, and the pressure vice may tighten on them for the rest of the month resulting in, VIOLA!, another crappy April.

And that's why the opener was more than just "one game."