

Conventional wisdom said that the Indians would need stellar performances from C.C. and Fausto in order to defeat the Boston Red Sox and advance to the World Series. But thanks to a dominant performance from the bullpen, and some clutch hitting in the wee hours of the morning, the Indians find themselves heading back to Cleveland with the series tied at one game apiece. The Rhino looks back on the start to the ALCS in his latest.



The only people in the world who could possibly be more astonished with the outcome of last night's game than Tribe fans are the Boston Red Sox.

After all, everybody said that if the Indians didn't get solid performances from C.C. and Fausto, they'd find themselves quickly on the way to elimination. The Sox clobbered Sabathia and the Indians on Friday night in such a convincing fashion that the Boston Globe's Dan Shaughnessy was [proclaiming](#) not only the "inevitability" of the Red Sox march to the World Series, but their status as "America's Team."

As the Red Sox watched Fausto Carmona walk off the mound after facing a single batter in the fifth inning last night, they must have felt that Shaughnessy had it about right. Sure, they didn't have the lead, and the Tribe had already gotten to Schilling, but with Carmona gone after four innings, Boston batters no doubt smelled blood in the water. As it turned out, they didn't have to wait long to feed, as Carmona's replacement, the usually terrific Rafael Perez, became a launching pad.

After back-to-back homers by Manny and Mike Lowell gave the Sox the lead, Perez was finished, and the Tribe turned things over to Jensen Lewis, a pitcher who had given up three hits and two runs in 2/3rds of an inning in relief of Sabathia just the night before. By now, the Sox had to feel that they'd already seen this movie, and were ready to post another half dozen runs or so and be done with the Indians for the night, and maybe for the series.

I guess nobody told Lewis the script, however, because instead of rolling over for Boston, he steamrolled them. Lewis got Jason Varitek to hit into an inning-ending double play to put a stop to the Red Sox rally in the 5th, and then retired five straight batters before yielding to Rafael Betancourt with two out in the 7th. Lewis was followed by Betancourt, who picked up where Lewis left off. The only blot on Betancourt's evening was what turned out to be a harmless single by Dustin Pedroia with two down in the ninth.

The Indians appeared to be on their way to wasting these terrific performances by the bullpen. Although the Tribe did manage to get a run across to tie the game in the 6th, they couldn't come through on a chance to take the lead in the 9th, when Ryan Garko grounded out to Mike Lowell with runners on first and second.

If you're like me, you started to feel that familiar sense of doom in the 10th inning, when Wedge decided to replace Betancourt with -- God help us -- Tom Mastny. While a guy with an ERA of nearly 5.00 doesn't inspire a lot of confidence against a lineup like Boston's, all Mastny did was retire Ortiz, Martinez and Lowell in order in the bottom of the 10th.

Then, finally, the long absent Indians' bats erupted, with the spark being provided by Trot Nixon, whose sole contribution up to this point in the season has been to make the pie in the face an Indians' tradition. He made a slightly larger contribution than that last night, when he singled to drive home Grady Sizemore with what turned out to be the winning run, and sparked a seven run rally that provided the Tribe with enough of a cushion that I wasn't even worried when Joe Borowski entered the game in the bottom of the 11th.

Okay, that's a lie. I was still worried to see Borowski walk out to the mound in the 11th, but after more than five hours of baseball, I was a lot more sleepy than worried. So I was just praying that JoBo would let all of us go to bed. Inevitably, he gave up a hit to the first man he faced, and let the Red Sox get a runner in scoring position, but then Julio Lugo grounded into a double play, and it was lights out for Boston, and lights out for me.

So, after two games in which their two aces didn't get past the fifth inning, and after which their stud middle reliever sports an ERA for the series of 54, the Indians find themselves exactly where they want to be. As for the Boston Red Sox, whose inevitable march to the World Series seemed so certain just a night ago, well, they can still come to Cleveland and close things out with a sweep. The

Game On

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only trouble is, so can the Indians.

Game on, America's Team, game on. Welcome to Cleveland and Jacobs Field, home of Ray Chapman's ghost and 10 billion Canadian Soldiers. Enjoy your stay.