

## Sabathia Disappoints, But Indians Still In Control

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Friday, October 19 2007 7:00 PM -

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Step away from the ledge Cleveland fans. It is not time to jump...yet. Contrary to what many in the national media are saying and what some of the locals are saying on talk shows and message boards, the Indians are still in control of this series. One would think the Indians were down 3-2 in the series and were heading back to Boston for Game Six on life support. In his latest, Tony gets us ready for game six with a little perspective on where the Indians stand as we ready for game six.



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While things look more concerning after the Game Five loss, remember Tribe fans, we have been here before.

Indians fans should recall that back in 1995 we went on the road for Game Six to play Seattle and beat Randy Johnson who was the best pitcher in baseball at the time. Indians fans should also recall that in 1997 we also went on the road to Baltimore for Game Six and won by beating Mike Mussina.

At the time, Mussina was at his career best and was practically unbeatable, and while he shut us down the entire game we found a way to win it late.

This came after Scott Kamienicki (!! ) beat us in Cleveland in Game Five to force that Game Six in Baltimore.

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The point here is no matter how bad it looks after the loss in Game Five to the Red Sox, we are still in the driver's seat. Boston still needs to run the table - and there is no doubt they can do it - but the pitching matchups still favor the Indians for the remainder of this series.

Probably most important is Josh Beckett will not start another game, which is a good thing for Indians hitters.

Even though the remainder of the series may be a flip of the coin, you still have to like the fact the Indians have two chances for it to come up heads, whereas the Red Sox need it to come up tails both times.

As Game Six looms tonight, it is tough to get a true feel of what will happen in this game. If you are objective about it, you would have to say neither team has any real advantage or disadvantage going into it.

The two starters are a complete toss-up as you do not know what to expect, and both lineups have been hot and cold throughout the first five games.

The Indians go into this game facing celebrated big game pitcher Curt Schilling, but he is clearly in the twilight of his career. Whether Schilling can find the fountain of youth and resurrect days of past glory and have yet another clutch postseason performance, or if father time truly has caught up with him and the Indians are able to do enough to beat him like they did in Game Two remains to be seen.

Then there is Fausto Carmona, who this year has arguably been the best pitcher in baseball not named Josh Beckett. He came up big against the Yankees in Game Two of the Division Series, but was wild and struggled in Game Two of the ALCS against the Red Sox.

Carmona could very well go out and put up another breakthrough performance on the big stage and begin to cement himself as the next big game pitcher, or he could fall the way of C.C. Sabathia and prove to be a great regular season pitcher only to flat out choke when the bright lights turn on in the postseason.

Speaking of Sabathia, boy has he had a clunker of a postseason. He has been a complete tank job, and in four career playoff starts (including one start in 2001 which helps these stats) Sabathia is now 2-2 with a 7.17 ERA and owns a horrendous 2.11 WHIP (27 hits and 18 walks in 21.1 inning pitched).

Some may say Sabathia is just a bad matchup with the Red Sox, but I do not subscribe to that theory. Look, third and fourth starters typically can be a bad matchup with some teams. It is expected.

But, an ace is expected to be a good matchup against anyone.

A stopper.

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Sure, they all have a team or two they have some trouble with, but not to the degree Sabathia has had with Boston this series.

Over the course of the season, against left-handed pitching the Red Sox were 25-23 (.521) with a .285 team batting average and .800 team OPS. On the flip side, against right-handed pitching the Red Sox were 71-43 (.623) with a .277 team batting average and .808 team OPS.

Really, there is not much difference there when the Red Sox face a right-hander or a left-hander, so I do not see how a left-hander is a bad matchup with the Red Sox.

One may say that on an individual basis Sabathia has been owned by many of the Red Sox hitters, but this is not true as he has faired well against most of the Red Sox hitters in the past. Only Manny Ramirez has flat out owned Sabathia, as for his career he is hitting .571 (12-21) with 5 HR, 7 RBI and a 1.894 OPS off Sabathia.

There is no doubt that is an awful matchup.

However, when you take Manny out and look at the rest of the Red Sox hitters, the other eight guys in the lineup and on the bench collectively have a career .237 batting average (27-114), .287 on-base percentage, .708 OPS, five home runs and 16 RBI.

Does one player in Manny make it that bad of a matchup?

Some will say that Sabathia battled the Red Sox in Game Five and held them to only two runs in six innings, but I see it completely different. Sabathia was very fortunate to only have given up two runs in six innings, and it really was nothing he did that prevented the dam from busting open, he just caught a ton of breaks. He easily could have given up another three to four runs in those first six innings if not for being saved by Gutierrez's rocket arm, a horrible non-home run call, Coco Crisp's inability to bunt, and Mike Lowell's laser to left field dropping an inch foul.

And, man, 14 base-runners in six innings?

Yuck.

Bottom line, Sabathia has laid an egg this postseason. While Josh Beckett has come up very big in every situation this postseason for the Red Sox, Sabathia has come up very small for the Indians. These are not the kind of starts and performances you want on your resume as you get set to test the free agent market a year from now, especially when you will demand \$16-20 million a season.

But, what is done is done. It is in the past, and tonight we concentrate on Game Six in Boston.

Hopefully Sabathia gets a chance to redeem himself this postseason, and to do that it would have to be in the World Series.

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And, even with the tank job by Sabathia in this series, I still like the Indians chances to win it.

Still, you can't blame the fans if they are starting to get nervous and the line is starting to grow behind that ledge. It is what makes us Cleveland fans. This town gets so high after a big win, and yet so low after a tough loss. Ther  
e is rarely any in between.

This town wants to win so much, that when we win we go bananas, and when we lose it is devastating because we start to look around for the other shoe to drop that finishes off yet another playoff choke job.

It is amazing how the placement of wins can affect the psyche of the fans during the postseason. Had the Indians lost Game Four, but come back and won Game Five, everyone would be on a high with a 3-2 lead going into tonight's game. But, because we won Game Four and failed to close it out at home in Game Five, the mood changed drastically even though we still have that same 3-2 advantage.

Thankfully, the Indians are not like us fans. Like their manager, the Indians play on an even keel and have shown time after time this season they can bounce back from a tough loss and come back strong the next night with a good team effort.

They have done it all year, and we need them to do it one more time this series.

So far, this series has played out [like most of us thought it would](#) . I predicted the Indians to win in seven and still do, and for the most part the national viewpoint was the series would go six or seven games ad split between the Indians and Red Sox winning.

That said, deep down, we are all hoping the Indians can close this out in six.

The feeling of concern going into tonight's game will turn into full blown anxiety and panic if a seventh game is needed.

To add to the nightmare, Beckett could be used in relief for four to five innings in Game Seven like he did for the Marlins in 2003, and like Pedro did to us in Game Five of the 1999 ALDS.

So, let's win this in six. Otherwise, if this series goes seven games, win or lose I am going to need a heart transplant.