

## Walk This Way

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

Saturday, September 18 2010 12:00 PM - Last Updated Saturday, September 18 2010 9:21 AM

---



Manny Acta has wanted his pitchers do to one thing and one thing only since he's arrived in Cleveland.

Throw strikes.

Along with first year pitching coach Tim Belcher, Acta has preached limiting walks in order for a pitching staff to be successful. That alone is common sense, but it isn't as simple as Acta or Belcher saying, "Yeah let's not walk anyone."

Recently Acta [talked about walks](#) and throwing strikes and he said just that. They can sit there and tell the pitchers to throw strikes all they want, unless the pitchers do it, it means nothing.

This isn't an episode of the Simpsons. You can't tell Daryl Strawberry to hit a home run and expect it to happen.

## Walk This Way

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

Saturday, September 18 2010 12:00 PM - Last Updated Saturday, September 18 2010 9:21 AM

---

One thing that Acta said that intrigued me was the notion that most of his staff is young and that they have to learn to throw strikes, consistently.

For some, that is a process that comes eventually as a pitcher matures. Usually those types of pitchers have unbelievable stuff, but they soon learn that they can't live off 97 MPH fastballs and sharp sliders forever. Ask CC Sabathia if he would be where he is at if he didn't "mature."

For others, control has to be the name of the game because that is how they need to survive. Greg Maddux wouldn't be headed to the Hall of Fame if he didn't have the pinpoint accuracy.

For most though, control needs to be learned sooner or later or they may not have their opportunity extended. Anyone remember that former Oriole Daniel Cabrera? He could strike out anyone on a given night but his lack of control led to him ultimately ending up...I think with the Angels somewhere? The point is he couldn't cut it.

Acta pointed out that the Twins have three starters that rank in the top ten among lowest BB/9 (walks per nine innings) but none of those guys are in their first or second years pitching in the major leagues.

In a way it is hard to argue with Acta that in order to be successful you need a few of these pitchers. Yet Tampa Bay and Texas are the only other current playoff teams with a pitcher in that top ten and Cliff Lee wasn't even a Ranger when Texas built that big lead.

Flip the card over and you have four pitchers on playoff teams that rank top ten in the American League in walks. The non-issue there is that two of them are CC Sabathia and David Price, both of whom have a WHIP of 1.21 or lower and a K/9 of 7.42 or higher. Price actually ranks in the AL's top ten of strikeouts per nine innings.

So where is the middle ground with all the walk statistics and where do you stop and say, "Where do OUR pitchers need to be?"

## Walk This Way

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

Saturday, September 18 2010 12:00 PM - Last Updated Saturday, September 18 2010 9:21 AM

---

Well let's first off start with our pitchers and look at where they stand in this statistic that Acta brought up, [walks per nine innings](#) .

The current leader among Indians starters is Josh Tomlin, who has only pitched in nine games, but has maintained a BB/9 of 2.3, which falls right in line as one of the tops in the AL if you were to stretch it out over a full season.

This is startling because Tomlin is followed by fellow rookie Jeanmar Gomez. Granted nine games won't tell you everything, but two rookies pitching in more than a few games have better walk percentages than the team's best pitcher?

Not shockingly, Justin Masterson and Mitch Talbot fall towards the back, with Masterson at 3.8 and Talbot at 4.0. For the sake of judgment, let's take four of the better pitchers in the AL this year, Sabathia and Price, as well as Carl Pavano and Jered Weaver, and put up some of their basic pitching numbers.

*Carl Pavano: 112 K, 36 BB, 3.60 ERA, 1.16 WHIP, 4.80 K/9, 3.11 K/BB, 1.5 BB/9*

*Jered Weaver: 218 K, 51 BB, 2.96 ERA, 1.05 WHIP, 9.62 K/9, 4.28 K/BB, 2.3 BB/9*

*CC Sabathia: 179 K, 69 BB, 3.03 ERA, 1.18 WHIP, 7.42 K/9, 2.63 K/BB, 2.8 BB/9*

*David Price: 167 K, 73 BB, 2.75 ERA, 1.21 WHIP, 8.05 K/9, 2.29 K/BB, 3.6 BB/9*

Some of the best pitchers, like David Price, are surviving with over three and a half walks per nine innings. By most people's logic, you are going to be in some trouble if you are walking more than three hitters per game. But don't get caught up in the statistic. Half of the top ten in that walks per nine inning statistic have ERAs over 4.00.

## Walk This Way

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

Saturday, September 18 2010 12:00 PM - Last Updated Saturday, September 18 2010 9:21 AM

---

Now the Indians have no room to talk considering they've got one starter with an ERA under 4.00 in Carmona, but the importance isn't so much the walks, but what you do when you give those walks up.

Do you buckle down and get a double play, like Carmona is apt to do as the major league leader with 30?

Part of the reason Talbot and Masterson have been able to survive with their high walk rates is their high ground ball tendencies. Masterson has 19 double plays, while Talbot has 18, easily higher totals in the AL. Add in Masterson's strikeout ability, he's skinned by as best as you can with his ERA and number of quality starts.

If you don't buckle down, do you let things buckle on you, kind of like Javier Vazquez and some other select pitchers?

*Javier Vazquez: 3.7 BB/9, 1.35 WHIP, 29 HR, 5.09 ERA*

*Matt Garza: 2.8 BB/9, 1.23 WHIP, 27 HR, 3.88 ERA*

*Kevin Millwood: 3.0 BB/9, 1.55 WHIP, 27 HR, 5.30 ERA*

*Ervin Santana: 3.0 BB/9, 1.30 WHIP, 25 HR, 3.93 ERA*

You can see right there the disaster for someone who gives up a lot of home runs and a lot of walks. Garza has been able to keep things somewhat in check because while he gives up a lot of home runs and he is higher up in walks, his WHIP is a little lower.

Back to the Indians now, with the assumption that pitchers like Tomlin, Gomez, Masterson, and

## Walk This Way

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

Saturday, September 18 2010 12:00 PM - Last Updated Saturday, September 18 2010 9:21 AM

---

Talbot are going to be in the mix here moving forward.

Using Vazquez's 1.8 HR/9 as a measuring stick, you can feel really good about Talbot, Masterson, and Carmona. They've all got a HR/9 number of 0.7, which in other words means they aren't likely to get tagged more than once, if it all, in a game.

Because Talbot and Masterson walk a few more hitters than the others, they've got smaller room for error, so the fact that they are less likely to give up the long ball is very encouraging.

Here's why you don't have to worry about the higher HR/9 numbers to Tomlin and Gomez though.

They aren't the walk machines that Talbot and Masterson are. Given the early evidence that they are keeping runners off the base paths via the walk, it becomes less likely they give up home runs with runners on base.

You look at those successful guys up there, the four I pointed out, and you can see some of the same patterns.

Sabathia and Price tend to walk more, but their home run numbers are low. Weaver and Pavano give up some long balls, but they are keeping their walks low.

I guess the overall point here is that the control needs to improve amongst the starters, but that it isn't the biggest problem that this club faces with the pitching.

I'm sure you are probably asking me then, what is?

Bullpen....Bullpen..... BULLLLLLLPENNNN!!!!

## Walk This Way

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

Saturday, September 18 2010 12:00 PM - Last Updated Saturday, September 18 2010 9:21 AM

---

No no no no, don't get on the bullpen. They've been so good so lately!

The facts may surprise you though. The Indians bullpen is actually not contributing as much gasoline to the fire as the starting pitching is. They may be equal, but one part of the club isn't to blame more than the other.

Yes, they are seventh in the majors with walks and 10<sup>th</sup> in home runs. That's a horrible combo. As a whole the Indians lead the American League with 535 walks. The bullpen accounts for 195 of them.

That is 37 percent of their team's walks though and comparison to the rest of the majors, it is actually pretty good. Now you have to take into account some bullpens get more use than others, but given Cleveland's position among the leaders (or I guess, bottom-feeders) their pen is better than most.

Among the top ten bullpens in walks, the Indians 37 percent is actually second lowest behind San Francisco and Milwaukee. Along those lines, a bullpen like San Diego's is the best with 31 percent.

That number really tells you that they aren't contributing an inordinate amount of walks, compared to the starters. Where you worry is with Pittsburgh, where they lead the majors in walks, but their bullpen has accounted for 44 percent of them. Give that the Pirates also lead the majors in bullpen innings pitched; their 4.06 BB/9 tells you that they are probably overworked. Either is a cause for mass concern.

The Indians come in at 4.02 which for my money, is right about right in terms of averages among bad teams given the innings they've pitched and the walks they've surrendered. Of course the average is probably lower, but you need to be a better team overall for that to improve.

## Walk This Way

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

Saturday, September 18 2010 12:00 PM - Last Updated Saturday, September 18 2010 9:21 AM

---

Simply put, the overall problem is that the Indians are just walking too many hitters as a whole. Now that isn't something you didn't know and you could probably just cut the discussion off at the fact that they are seventh in the game in walks as a team. The fact that the numbers don't stretch one more way than the other tells you that both sides are putting an equal amount of gasoline on the fire, but it is comforting in a way to know how these numbers actually lie. Let's answer some questions though.

Mitch Talbot has a 4.0 BB/9 and the Indians have one at 4.02, which should tell you all you need to know. As well, only one team in the top ten in terms of bullpen walks is currently in the playoff hunt (San Francisco has a low percentage, a higher inning count and a higher BB/9, they're overworked) while six of those teams are in the bottom ten of bullpen walks. You need a bullpen that can keep the walks down to contend, but if you don't have that, at least have a starting staff that can.

When you look at the bullpen though, who are the main culprits? We know Masterson and Talbot can be attributed to not having very good walk numbers, but who from the pen is to blame for the inflation?

For one, Chris Perez has no problem walking people. We know he feels better walking someone than letting them beat him. Perez ranks second among relievers with 27.

Yet the bigger culprit is probably Tony Sipp, who has 35 walks, bad enough for seventh among relievers in the entire major leagues. Look at someone like Rafael Perez who has just as many innings pitched as Sipp and Chris Perez, and his 21 walks is manageable. A quick glance at some of the other successful closers around the game, they've given up just as many walks as Chris Perez and have had success.

So with the Perezes absolved and Sipp seemingly one of the problems, there has to be more. Perhaps you can look at the fact that Joe Smith is walking more people than Rafael Perez is in a little less than half the innings and start to narrow it down.

Narrowing down bad BB/9 among relievers and other than Sipp and Smith, Jensen Lewis and Kerry Wood's numbers immediately pop out. Wood is gone and was in and out of the bullpen all year while Lewis was in and out of the parent club himself. Still their 50 innings have produced

## Walk This Way

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

Saturday, September 18 2010 12:00 PM - Last Updated Saturday, September 18 2010 9:21 AM

---

30 walks. Rafael Perez has walked 21 hitters in 57 innings. That tells you all you need to know about that ratio.

I think it's time to get to the point.

We've got a few problem children with the walks, both in the starting rotation and the bullpen. The ones in the rotation seemingly have ways of making the walks not a problem based off their, I guess you could say status as a starter and their talents.

The ones in the bullpen simply have to shape up because they don't have the margin for error that the starters do. Tony Sipp can strike anyone out, which gives him a little bit of leeway, but the club has to try and find ways to eliminate the problems from pitchers like Lewis and Wood.

Now you don't want to throw strikes to the point you are Hector Ambriz, but you need to throw strikes to at least be viable. Aaron Laffey and David Huff are two other guys who you look at and just shake your head. More than anything they've got horrendous looking WHIP numbers at the major league level. Laffey struggled with the walks and Huff struggled in getting hitters to simply not hit him.

The point is this though. Acta is right, he has some young players that haven't pitched more than two years. The ones that have are the ones that are successful. Who have been the most positives names mentioned throughout this entire thing?

Chris Perez, Rafael Perez, and Fausto Carmona.

Does Chris Perez walk more than you would want? Yes, but he has success and judging on the numbers of closers like Heath Bell and Brian Wilson (both successful this season), as long as they get the job done, you'll take it.

Does Fausto Carmona not strikeout as many as you would like him too? Yes, but if he gives up

## Walk This Way

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

Saturday, September 18 2010 12:00 PM - Last Updated Saturday, September 18 2010 9:21 AM

---

a hit or a walk, he's just as likely to get them erased on a double play and he doesn't give up home runs.

I throw Joe Smith out of the conversation because he is what he is, a right-handed specialist. He can be as experienced as Mariano Rivera and the guy would be just as unpredictable as he is now.

The young guys, Tony Sipp, Jeanmar Gomez, Justin Masterson, Mitch Talbot, whoever else they choose to fill the bullpen out with...the point is they all are growing and trying to learn how to get the job done.

We've seen it with Masterson and Talbot. They may have their issues, but they also have shown spots in where they've used their talents and abilities to overcome their issues.

The Twins may have three starters up there with good walk numbers, but they're entire pitching staff is just downright good. All their best pitchers are experienced and have matured to the point where they know how to play their game.

If anything, this year had to be a year that some of the Indians young pitchers learned to play theirs.

-

*You can follow Nino on Twitter @ [TheTribeDaily](#) where he often tweets about his parties with Andy Marte and sometimes about the Indians.*