



Bring your green hats! Come on everybody, [we're going streaking](#) ! Regardless of it being Spring Training or not, six in a row is always a good feeling. Entering the last week of Spring Training, some questions are being answered, others remain without an answer, but the most important answer of all is the question, "When is Opening Day?" Well, my friends, it's one week from today!

The best part about this six-game win streak is that familiar faces are starting to get geared up for the regular season. Shin-Soo Choo is on a six-game hitting streak, spanning March 15 to March 23. He is still homerless on the spring, but has six RBI in his last four games. Carlos Santana is 4-for-his-last 10 with a triple and a double. If we go back to March 15, Santana has hits in five of seven, including three multi-hit games.

Asdrubal Cabrera had an all-spring hitting streak snapped on March 23, taking a 0-for-3. Prior to that, Cabrera had a hit in all 13 spring training games he played. The team has put the kid gloves back on Travis Hafner as he has had just 11 AB in the last eight days. No harm as far as I'm concerned.

One not so familiar face has firmly entrenched himself into a bench spot for the Indians. Travis Buck has done nothing but rip the cover off the ball all spring long. Right now, he has a 1.213 (!) OPS, with four HR and five 2B. He also has struck out only four times in 50 AB. Over his last two springs with Oakland, Buck struck out 27 times in 119 AB. The Indians experimented with Buck at first base this past week with no issues. That is the one downfall to having Buck. It would leave the Indians with only Carlos Santana capable of playing first base when Matt LaPorta needs a day off or gets hurt. In 958 career games, Austin Kearns has never played first. Shelley Duncan would be the only other bench player candidate, because he can play 1B, but, he is right handed and the Indians desperately need a left handed bench bat.

Raising the concern level to orange, Matt LaPorta continues to struggle at the dish. He's hitting .163 for the spring. Over his last 26 AB, he has four hits. He has not seen the Mendoza line since March 3. Though the team will not come out and say it, this is a disconcerting development. I've already beaten Barbaro enough when it comes to Matt LaPorta and this weekly column, but his contributions need to be meaningful for this team to have a chance to surprise.



The Indians have an embarrassment of riches, or maybe just an embarrassment, when it comes to the backup catcher spot coming of camp. Lou Marson is raking to the tune of .160/.222/.200/.422; Luke Carlin is bashing at an impressive .158/.238/.316/.554; and Paul Phillips is the star of the group with a .423/.423/.615/1.038. Phillips is serviceable, except for when you note that 17 of the last 18 runners have successfully swiped bags off of him. The chief objective of a backup catcher is to not hurt you defensively. Conventional wisdom says that the Indians will want Marson playing everyday in Columbus.

The battle for the fifth rotation spot should have ended yesterday after David Huff fired five scoreless innings, lowering his ERA to 5.82 for the spring. Jeanmar Gomez fared about the same with a 5.50. Josh Tomlin led the group with a 1.13, but did most of his throwing in "B" games. As reported on Twitter while I write this article, [Jeanmar Gomez is cleaning out his locker](#) and moving to minor league camp. And to further update, Josh Tomlin is [officially the Indians fifth starter](#)

Fausto Carmona pitched another quality start, allowing three runs on nine hits in the March 22 win over Arizona. Anybody else baffled that a 4.50 ERA for the game qualifies as a quality start? But, the chief objective of any starting pitcher is to give your team a chance to win. Three runs over six frames does that.

Carlos Carrasco struggled again on March 23, allowing six runs over 4.1 innings of work. He also allowed two more long balls. Carrasco enters his final spring start with a 7.56 ERA and a .366 average against. A 1.92 WHIP is a frightening statistic, even in spring training where the ball travels well.

Mitch Talbot did what Mitch Talbot does best in his last start. He was not dominating, but was effective to the tune of three hits in 5.1 IP and two runs, one earned. Talbot is a great fifth starter for a handful of teams in the major leagues. For us, he's the caboose to a train that is precariously teetering on one rail.

Justin Masterson has allowed just two free passes in his last 14.2 innings. Unfortunately, he's allowed 11 runs, nine of them earned. Statistical websites and fantasy baseball analysts continue to call for Masterson to be shipped to the bullpen. Apparently they have not seen our sixth and seventh starters. There is no choice but to open Masterson in the rotation and hope and pray that he figures it out.

With one week left in camp, the rotation is set. Fausto Carmona will be the de facto ace. Carlos will follow him with Justin Masterson, Josh Tomlin and Mitch Talbot rounding out the group. Paul Konerko, Adam Dunn, Justin Morneau, Joe Mauer, Billy Butler, Victor Martinez, Miguel Cabrera, and a collection of others from the AL Central will have smiles on their faces when they stroll in to Jacobs Field or when the Tribe's team bus unloads at their home park.

This rotation will tax the bullpen, give up a lot of hits, and give up a fair share of home runs. The one benefit that they have is that they are all one pitch away from getting out of an inning. Between the five of them, they induced 77 double plays in 667.1 IP. However, between Talbot and Masterson, just 23 of their 57 starts were quality starts (6 IP, 3 or fewer ER).

All of these spring stats mean nothing in a week. Everybody has a 0.00 ERA and a .000 batting average. It's great to have baseball back.

**This week's transactions:** As mentioned on the fly above, David Huff and Jeanmar Gomez were sent to minor league camp, along with Ezequiel Carrera. Carrera opened some eyes this

spring with his speed and willingness to take a walk. Carrera walked 11 times in 22 games.

The Indians [inked LHP Jesse English off the waiver wire](#) . He provides organizational depth and the Indians lacked a serviceable lefty in the Clippers' bullpen.

**This week's bold prediction:** I am going to dig extremely deep for this one. Travis Hafner will have 90 RBI. Hafner has 123 RBI over his last three seasons



combined. But, Hafner will have two on-base machines in front of him in Choo and Santana. He will have a savvy veteran and good hitter in Orlando Cabrera behind him. Cabrera is a career .283 hitter with men on and .266 with two outs.

For that, Hafner will have plenty of opportunities. He is still a selective hitter at the plate and does not have to bear the burden of being one of the two guys who absolutely have to drive in runs. The Indians have surrounded him with better parts. Acta and the training staff seemed to figure out a formula in the second half for how to utilize Hafner and how many days per week. He will not be the feared hitter he once was, but he will bounce back this year.

**One final note:** All of you can direct your hate mail at Mark Shapiro 140 characters at a time now. @MarkShapiro is now on Twitter, as is his former (or current depending on your view) apprentice, Chris Antonetti (@IndiansGM). I give the Indians credit for embracing social media as a way to reach out to their fans. I know I have bantered back and forth with @ChrisPerez54 and it makes you feel like you can connect on a semi-personal level. So make sure you follow @MarkShapiro, and as my colleague Brian McPeek said on Twitter a couple days ago, it's only a matter of time until "championship caliber club" is trending on Twitter.

One week 'til baseball!