

Morning Rundown: A Story of Defense, Masterson, and Situation Hitting

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

Thursday, April 12 2012 9:00 AM - Last Updated Sunday, April 15 2012 9:53 PM



I haven't physically watched an Indians game since Monday. Thanks to rain/snow/whatever the reason it was for the game to be called on Tuesday and a noon start on Wednesday. I was dissuaded from listening to the game on my Kindle at work thanks to the 4-0 start. That will keep me productive, ya?

April 11th, 2012

Chicago White Sox - **10**

Cleveland Indians - **6**

W: John Danks (1-1) L: Justin Masterson (0-1)

[\[BOXSCORE\]](#)

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A four run spot is never good for a team that hasn't scored more than four runs all season.

Granted the Indians would break that streak of not scoring more than four, but there was the small problem involving not giving up any more runs.

Which happened... By the way.

After a rainout/snowout/whatever it was that caused the postponement of Tuesday's game, the Indians and White Sox would end their two game series Wednesday afternoon before you even started eating lunch.

Maybe a little mid-day magic would do the trick?

Offensively, things better, but still reasons to gripe.

You can't fault a **Justin Masterson** outing in which he gives up three earned and can at least go five innings. With all the defensive miscues and then the early sputtering, to battle back and get through five is what you'd expect of someone like him. Granted you want what he did less than a week ago, but when your best guy doesn't have his best stuff, [you at least expect him to be serviceable](#)

Or you can categorize it the same way Masterson did, as an odd occurrence.

"There's not anything else to work off of, so you've got to blow it out of proportion, right?" Masterson said with a laugh. "You guys tell me. You're the ones writing it. ... I think you can look at it as this will be the trend, or it's just an odd occurrence. Knowing the history of the individuals, it's like, 'Well, this is just an odd occurrence.'"

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You also have to remember that Masterson's way of pitching could turn him into having games like this. He throws a sinker and there may be days where the hits are just that, hits. The ball might find the holes and drop in where a defender isn't.

"I got what I wanted. They just didn't go exactly where I wanted them to go," said Masterson, referring to the ground balls. "You never assume that they'll find this hole, find this hole and then go to this hole and this hole. The ball's got to go to somebody some time."

Then of course you'll have times when those balls do go to somebody and they don't make the play, which happened with the two best defenders on the team in the same game.

And please, save the snark about the defensive infield. Those two will make more plays than anyone on this team. They'll save more runs than they let up in the long run, so don't start on that case. **Casey Kotchman** and **Jack Hannahan** may never make errors in the same game ever again this season. They'll make errors, everyone will make their errors, it's just a matter of when. These turned out to be ones that hurt the team, but you just live with it because they are rare occurrences.

The other aspect to this loss was the offense that showed up, but still was not good enough on this day. Six runs is good, it's typically going to win you a game if your pitching does even just a decent job. But not on this day. You don't fault them, especially with a team that's been starved for runs... But the situational hitting is one thing you look at and just cringe at.

"Offensively," Duncan said, "I think we saw drastic improvements throughout the whole lineup with guys' swings. There were a couple times we left guys on base that could've been big innings for us, but offensively, I think we're taking the right steps."

The club was 1-11 with runners in scoring position. That is hurtful, especially when you already score six runs. Half came off the big home runs by Travis Hafner (Visit to Pronkville!) and Shelley Duncan, but you had the opportunity to add more with simple hits?

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Look this offense is scuffling to a point where if they don't get a big fly, they're not scoring much. The 1-11 isn't anything out of what we haven't seen so far. It may be the most and since the other team scored so many runs, it might mean a lot... But this game is just a continuation of what's been going on.

There wasn't a lack of hits, Duncan had three, Cabrera, Hafner, and Hannahan all had two. But the hits when it counted were not there. Six walks in addition to that, enough baserunners to get some more than six, but not enough situational hitting. Is it progress? Yes, and certainly enough reason to stat laying off that panic button, not that you should have been pressing it right now anyway.

"Five games is not going to make me panic," Indians manager Manny Acta said. "We have to give it a little more time. It's five games into it. In five more games, things can change again. Everybody goes through those periods -- those ups and downs -- and we're in it right now."

1-4 to start out is a little disappointing, especially at home and with two of those to a division rival. But stay seated please.

Random Details...

I will do something though here that I normally rally against. I'm a little worried about Michael Brantley. He was 0-4 in this one and has now started off 1-for-17 with NO runs scored. Not a single stinkin' run at all. He's walked just four times, which does nothing when you've been caught stealing once.

This guy hasn't made it past second base all season and for the leadoff hitter, that is really concerning and something that has me on high alert early on. It is one thing that needs to change and change quickly.

You're big guys in the middle, Choo/Santana each go 0-3 but walk twice and score runs. There's going to be those games, where the teams don't give them anything to hit, but they get on base. That's up to Hafner and Duncan to clean up and to their credit in this one, they did

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that.

I'm a little perplexed as to why Manny Acta pitched Dan Wheeler and Rafael Perez in that sixth inning and then went with **Jeanmar Gomez** in the seventh. What really changed for the better in the seventh that he went with Gomez? Why not just go with him in the sixth when it is still early and even then, closer than when you put him in after Wheeler and Perez barfed on their own shoes.

Gomez is now gone for that start on Saturday, which means Tomlin will probably slide in and Gomez will continue to be available in the bullpen. Acta obviously altered the plan for this weekend (Gomez would go Saturday, Ubaldo Sunday and Tomlin would be available in the pen until he'd make a start in Oakland. That's obviously changed with Gomez pitching but it's perplexing to me as to why he'd waste Gomez for two innings after the game had already gotten worse.

Never mind using Wheeler period in that situation. Again, I usually stay the course, but I'm inching closer to wanting to see Nick Hagadone. Wheeler threw 10 strikes out of 22 pitches and still gave up two hits. That's a given recipe for disaster. I didn't even have to watch his outing to guess that he was likely nibbling.

[SANTANA AND BEYOND]

We got clarification at the [official announcement](#) as to what **Carlos Santana** and the Indians had agreed to and it was not the four year deal some unknown twitter guy was boasting about. Well kind of. The fifth year is an option year, which mean it is technically not guaranteed, but if the Indians want him, he's under their control for 2017 at their choosing.

The Santana deal is great for the Indians, great for Carlos and he sounds genuinely happy to be in Cleveland. I think we could tell someone like Victor Martinez meant what he said and was genuine. We'll come to see if Carlos is in the same light, but it's good to see him be happy with where he is at.

"It's my best birthday in my life," Santana beamed. "This is my second home. I'm so excited. I'll

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be here for a long time. I want to help my team and try to win a championship. I'm just so excited. I don't have words for what I'm feeling."

I won't spend too much time, because I think if [you read what Paul Cousineau has to say](#), you get the full picture. If anything, it's strikingly odd how he really is signing a deal eerily similar to what Victor Martinez signed years ago when he was inked to a long term deal with the Indians.

Carlos will get a \$550,000 salary in 2013 and then it shoots up in what would likely be his arbitration years (he very well could be a Super Two candidate), going to \$3.5 Million, \$6 million and then \$8.25 million. The option is for \$12 million and the buyout is \$1.2. All that? \$30 millos for five years? I take it. I take it every day for a catcher who is just entering his prime and will spend the majority of it through this contract.

Would have liked a second year of free agency, but again, not complaining. It takes him up through his late 20's and into his 30's and then, it's a question of whether he is worth it. Given history, it will probably be the end of his stay with the Indians the way they do business. Even a guy like Martinez didn't stick and he loved this club and was probably willing to cut back on a salary to return. But that isn't how Indians do things and given the bucks he banked in free agency (and now that he's hurt), I'd say the Indians probably transitioned as well as anyone could ask them to. They'll look to do the same from Santana to whoever they go to next.

What this all does though it rehashes a pattern. It was a pattern we saw in the stages of that Mark Shapiro blueprint. There's a reason that it is similar to Victor Martinez and it's because the Indians are using the same principle because it worked.

You may want to bemoan the Hafner and Westbrook deals, fine, go ahead. But the Indians got it right with Martinez, Sabathia, Lee, Peralta, and Sizemore the first time around. They did it the right way and it eventually helped them to a 2007 ALCS appearance. Surely the Indians expected more than that, but for more than one reason, it didn't happen.

This is the beginning stages of them positioning themselves for another one of those runs. That and Cabrera and the possibility of [making Masterson their next](#) Lee/Sabathia deal. Antonetti didn't elude to that as a possibility, but he only seems like the next logical domino to fall.

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"It's really nothing new for us," Antonetti said. "We've continued the same process that we've had for a number of years and have explored multiyear deals with a number of players, not only this winter, but in the past. This was two occasions where the right players with the right value and the right term aligned, and that's why we were able to get something done."

Of course there is risk, but there is also planning involved in all of this, which Paul Dolan [puts very well](#)

"When you have cost certainty," Dolan said, "which you achieve when you enter into these kind of multiyear deals, it becomes easier to plan and budget around them. You know what costs are for your core players. You just hope and expect that Carlos becomes -- remains -- the player he's been and even grows a little further. Today is all about Carlos. These are the kind of deals we're prepared to do when the values line up on both sides. Today, we're celebrating the fact that we were able to reach an agreement with Carlos."

[RANDOM RUNDOWN]

I mentioned the perplexing situation with Jeanmar Gomez being used, which leads me to believe Gomez is not going to be starting Saturday. Or maybe he is? I mean it's only Wednesday, but that's two days off between a relatively painless relief appearance and a start. Are the Indians really going to do that?

I'm not sure, but **Josh Tomlin** before the game [was moved to the bullpen temporarily](#) . He was set to be available Friday and it was even pointed out that he did not throw his normal side session following his game because of it. After the postponement on Tuesday though, Acta said that the plan of Tomlin coming out of the pen was "not etched in stone." So it all simply could be media playing up the likelihood.

I'm not worried about the disruption of the routine if that's the case. Whether he's needed to start or he'll be in the pen, this guy has done that type of stuff before. He was the swing guy in the minors because he was never a rotation headliner. He's been a reliever and a starter and he

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knows what it takes to be in this kind of odd role.

"I think you just kind of approach it like the bullpen guys do," Tomlin said. "If you kind of know a day you're going to be available, maybe you don't run as much the day before the game. You just approach your outing the same way as a starter. Maybe you do a little bit more throwing before the game."

Tomlin's a guy I have no issue with toying around with in that aspect. He's also the type of guy that it won't really make a difference for because he isn't someone who's throwing gas out there.

Regardless of yesterday's switching around, **Ubaldo Jimenez** will start on Sunday, [making his second start of the season](#) slightly out of turn due to that suspension and a day later than planned because of the missed game on Tuesday.

"That's OK," Jimenez said with a shrug on Wednesday morning. "Of course I can't wait to get back out there, but that's part of where I am right now. You just have to take it. I didn't even realize that I was going to go another day because of the rain. They just told me right now."

And after what he did on Saturday, I'm ready for him to get back out there too.

Going Friday is **Derek Lowe**, [who will be making the first road start](#) of the season for the Indians. Lowe struggled last season, but he did have a better looking ERA on the road (4.74) than he did at home and with six more starts to boot.

This begins a nine game road-stretch that will see the Indians make their what seems to be usual early season west coast trip. After Kansas City they go out to Oakland and Seattle for three and three. And if there's ever a time to get ignited, it's right now. These teams are expected to be at or below the Indians level. It's time to win some.

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It's also worth pointing out that with Tuesday's unscheduled off day, it gives the Indians SIX days off. It's certainly welcomed following a hard series against Toronto in which a lot of innings were played, but like Acta says, the Indians [will probably pay for it down the road](#) .

"For our guys," Indians manager Manny Acta said, "just based on that first series that we had, I guess it would be OK to have one more day off. We'll have to pay the price in May," Acta said.

David Huff was back in Cleveland to continue [his rehab from a hamstring injury](#) . He threw on Wednesday and continues to progress. He's behind Kevin Slowey still though, especially with Slowey throwing well in Columbus, so unless things get really bad, he's going to Columbus.

Shin-Soo Choo would have been on the DL and worse, says he would have [had a broken thumb](#) had he not been wearing his thumb protector that shattered when he was hit on Monday.

[TIGER WATCH]

The Tigs Lost! Yay?! Not after winning one more though. A 5-2 win over Tampa happened Tuesday and aside it all, my eyes are on Rick Porcello, who pitched seven innings and gave up just two earned off seven hits and a walk. Porcello is going to be key to their rotation, especially since as an outsider, I'd put minimal trust into Max Scherzer, Doug Fister's injury, and whoever else the Tigers are going to find in their fifth spot.

The loss came on Wednesday after Justin Verlander went into the ninth with a 2-0 lead and promptly surrendered it. Jose Valverde came in after some dilly-dallying and gave up the two runs that untied the game and put the Rays ahead for good. Celebrate?

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Nino has a blog and it's so entertaining it should be nominated for most entertaining blog

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