

Morning Rundown: Tribe Drop Series to Royals, Offense Struggling

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

Friday, April 27 2012 10:00 AM - Last Updated Friday, April 27 2012 7:19 AM



Golden opportunities are golden for a reason. Let's just hope that this is... like a sliver opportunity and that the best is yet to come. Right? Right...

April 26th, 2012

Kansas City Royals - 4

Cleveland Indians - 2

W: Luis Mendoza (1-2) L: Josh Tomlin (1-2) S: Jonathan Broxton (2)

[\[BOXSCORE\]](#)

It was said that yesterday, the Indians needed to really win this series. After sweeping them last time out, going on the road, doing well, and now coming back home and seeing the Tigers lose two, and now what turns out to be three games to them, they needed to win this series.

It's not the end of the world. Far from it. But it hurts to see the opportunity like this one go away, especially when you are playing a team you need to win series from.

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We've reached a point, although still very early, where you need to be doing the calculations in your head. You need to win a series like this one against a team that isn't playing good ball. Sure, the Indians don't seem to be playing their best right now, offensively especially, and maybe Kansas City is starting to bust out of this funk.

But the see-saw of winning and losing, this is the saw part. Or is that the see? Whatever the part that goes up.

A day game = no viewing pleasure, but with the advance of modern technology and access to MLB AtBat 12, the soothing sounds of Tom Hamilton helped me out on this one.

3 Games, 10 AB, 1 H, 1 RBI, 8 K, 1 BB What I can say from afar and now looking at the box score is that my thoughts on Johnny Damon/**Shelley Duncan** from Wednesday's post are starting to echo in my brain. As I scan the box score, There's three more at-bats and three more strikeouts. He does have a walk, but the game on Thursday put his series line looking like this. Careful when you look, it may hurt your eyes.

10 at bats, eight of them strikeouts. Um, ouch.

Now strikeouts have been proven to not be the hugest of deals. If you come up with no one on and two out and you strike out, it's not as big of a deal. Sure it counts the same as if you were to come up with the bases loaded and nobody out, but the meaning is incredibly different.

But Duncan just looks a little frustrated as mentioned yesterday.

I'll be the first to admit that when Damon was signed, I pouted a bit for Duncan, going as far as suggesting that not only was Shelley Duncan better at this stage defensively (how about those two catches?) but offensively as well.

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Maybe I got a little over-zealous. Maybe I should have remembered that I used to say Shelley Duncan was made to be a bench player, coming on in a pinch and doing his work. Playing sparingly, not often, and being used as a guy to matchup against certain pitchers.

I think he's grown, having become more of a regular player than a bench player over the past few months of him playing.

But perhaps he shouldn't be starting every single day, especially against the tough-right handed hitter.

We went over those left/right splits and it's proven he needs to play against the left-handers, (which works good with Damon), but against most right-handers, it's best if he sits. Of course don't sit him completely against the righties. Find him ways to get him in there either at first or playing Damon as the DH (when you give Hafner days off, who needs more by the way, [as Paul Cousineau astutely points out](#)).

Right now, he's gotta take his lumps. He was in there and was hot to start the year, walking a lot more than we expected a guy like him to, but now he's a little frustrated, a little overwhelmed, and in need of a little mental reset.

Seems like the entire team needs it after these two games. It's two games, but it hurts because the team was playing so well on the road, they [now come home with the pressure off](#) , and they were facing the Royals.

"It's coincidence," manager Manny Acta said. "We love playing here. We scored enough runs last year here. We played well last year here. It's four bases and a mound wherever you go. No one is going to bring up the lake, the weather or anything like that. We just haven't been able to swing the bat well."

Acta said that the offense has definitely struggled the last four games. It's like a weird stretch of, they don't have it, now they do, now they don't. It just happened that it's revolved around a

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home-stand a road trip and another home-stand.

But the players, including **Josh Tomlin**, believe it's just a bit of a fluke that they can't get it done at their own home turf.

Tomlin wasn't sharp, especially not after his great performance against Seattle last week. Was it perhaps the extra time off? He got an entire week off between starts, so that's pretty unusual and it could lead to not being so sharp. Sometimes rest is good, but too much can make you loose a little bit of momentum. Perhaps that is what he's talking about in consistency.

"The consistency is not there, for sure, this year," Tomlin said. "You can't go out there and go eight innings and then go four innings or vice versa. You want to stay as consistent as you can for as long as you can. Unfortunately, that didn't happen today."

Yeah it didn't happen and it resulted in a real short outing and another early entrance for the bullpen. But in this one, that wasn't the issue, but rather that offense we've been complaining about.

"The last four games, we have struggled to score some runs," Acta said. "Today we continued to scuffle at the plate a little bit. We hit some balls hard, but they played some good defense."

It still did not equate to much, and it is a little frustrating against a bad pitching team like the Royals to only score eight runs in the entire series after you had scored eight runs in one game against them not only a few days ago.

But that's baseball I guess. Seattle was looking pretty bad, getting beat by the Indians the ways they did, getting a perfect game tossed against them by Phil Humber of all people. But now look, swept the Tigers a few days later. Phil Humber gets beat up, and the Indians can't score runs against a team that just lost 12-straight games.

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Things can change in an instant in baseball, so let's hope the Indians change it right back with the Angels and their bad luck coming to town.

Random Details...

This team has not hit a home run since they broke their streak of not going a game without hitting a home run. That's kind of... weird? These three games at home though, don't look to be home run hitting conditions and they did just play in Oakland, so, understandable.

Dan Wheeler has tossed 4+ innings of shutout ball since he gave up three runs to the White Sox on April 11th. A little more repetition and consistency for him should be a good thing. Reasons I'd rather keep him over Asencio right now.

And Tony Sipp continues to settle in himself, which as we've talked about this week, is more important for the health of this bullpen.

Jason Kipnis stole his fourth base of the year. You don't think of him as much of a base stealer, but he could stealthily lead this team if he's given the right opportunities and steals at the right spots, because there isn't one dominant base stealer on this team.... Hmm, wonder why.

Speaking of Kipnis, since he went 4-5 against Oakland in that 5-1 win on Saturday, he's hitting .429 with three walks and three RBI. Settling to see your young second baseman settle in after a rough start.

[RANDOM RUNDOWN]

We may want him in the lineup now, especially with the adventures of Aaron Cunningham in right field and Shelley Duncan struggling at the plate, but **Shin-Soo Choo**, as I'm sure he wants to get in too, keeps perspective on this issue he's [dealing with in his hamstring](#)

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"It's still early in the season," Choo said on Thursday morning, "so I didn't want to make it worse."

There still seems to be a day-to-day timetable on Choo and it seems like it will be up to how he's feeling before he gets back in there. Choo has learned from that oblique injury last year not to rush, and with a hamstring especially, you don't want to get back into the game before it's completely right or it could lead to further damage.

And Choo says he felt a little soreness prior to the game, but it wasn't till the sixth when it was one of the worst hamstring pains of his career.

"I've never had my hamstring hurt that much in my baseball career," he said. "It's tightness, so maybe it's OK. I've had tightness many times before during the season, but not that sore. It was the first time I felt like that with my hamstring, so I shut it down."

Choo will be back, if anything by next week. It's only a few games. The Indians survived with Cabrera out for a few games and they'll survive with Choo out for a few games. They won't survive if he's missing a month or more, so patience.

Okay so I guess no one is listening to me. After I told everyone in the media to leave **Casey Kotchman** alone, they [go ahead and bother him](#) even MORE!

"You can't really control results," Kotchman said. "You control the effort you're putting in with your preparation, and you accept the stuff that comes from it. Stuff will turn around over 162 games."

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And Manny Acta went on to say that it's only been a few weeks. So just as we shouldn't get too low on the people struggling, don't get too high on the people playing above their ceiling.

"It's only been a few weeks," manager Manny Acta said. "We have a lot of guys in the lineup that we know [are] better than [how they're hitting]. And there are some guys in the lineup that we know, at the end of the day, they're not going to be hitting .350, either."

This is probably a good time for me to bring up the Matt LaPorta whispering. Stop it. More than anything, stop it. I know I was tooting a Trevor Crowe horn early on. Prematurely? Yes, but I wasn't saying that the Indians needed to replace anyone with Crowe, merely that he's establishing himself as an option and at this point, I think I'd rather see Trevor Crowe than Aaron Cunningham.

This team cannot replace Casey Kotchman with Matt LaPorta. Matt LaPorta is doing what he always does in Triple-A and the minor leagues. He's mashing hitting that he is SUPPOSED to be mashing. He's a serviceable bat in the major leagues. Great, he's supposed to be a masher, which is why most of us have some angst towards him. I would have no problem starting Matt LaPorta in like, left field, if options were scarce.

But right now, Casey Kotchman is the best fit for this team because he brings something that doesn't go into slumps. He brings more than a solid glove, especially anything LaPorta does. He'll turn it around offensively, even if it isn't anything special, he'll be a serviceable bat.

Manny Acta said that **Rafael Perez's** stuff is [simply down a bit because of his missing of spring training](#)

. He said on Wednesday, he was "off".

Well look, when we're talking about velocity early in the season, I kind of, don't talk about it. In fact I think this is the first time I'm really acknowledging head on the loss of velocity with a pitcher other than Ubaldo. Look, early in the year it's a little more cold, with players like Chris Perez and Rafael Perez, some pitchers might not be all the way there. That's why I wait a month or so before I start worrying.

However I will worry a little bit about Rafael Perez because it goes beyond velocity.

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We don't even really know the full extent about Perez's injuries this spring. He seemed to quietly get shutdown and built up to game-shape. In addition to that, he also seemed to have a slower recovery than it was being reported. There may be something a little more there because he doesn't look right, or at least he didn't on Wednesday. We'll see with his next outing, but I would be a little worried about him not being totally 100 percent.

Harold Guerrero was [suspended 50-games](#) by baseball for testing positive for a performance-enhancing substance. He pitched last year for Mahoning Valley and a little for Lake County, going 2-4 with a 5.74 ERA. He made seven starts for the Scrappers and also came out of the bullpen for a majority of his season.

[TIGER WATCH]

As hinted at, the Detroit Tigers dropped their third game to the Mariners, getting swept and with the White Sox idle, falling with the Indians out of first place into second. Rick Porcello followed up his shellacking of last week by giving up a three run homer in the first and a solo shot to Miguel Olivo in the fourth. The Tigers would battle back on the scoreboard and tie it up, giving Porcello an opportunity to not only not lose, but perhaps win if he could get through the seventh and the Tigers could score.

Not the case as he'd give up another run and not finish the inning. The Mariners bullpen shut things down from there, and they would nail down a sweep of the Tigs. You wanna start talking about their pitching yet?

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Nino has a blog that he creates dumb nicknames, even for players not on the Indians. Give it a vist at [The Tribe Daily](#).

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