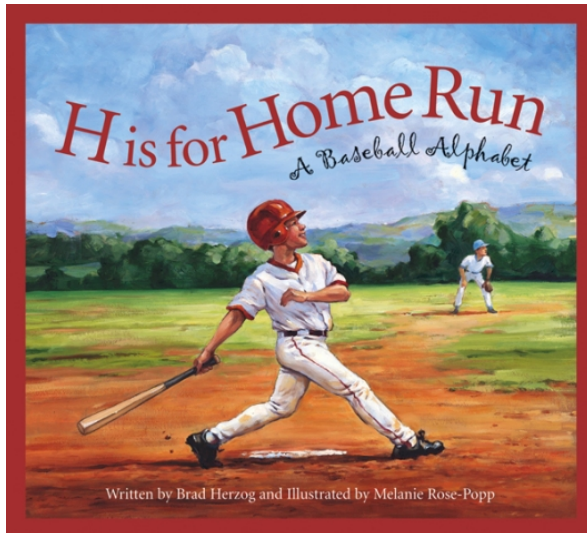


## The No-Home Run Derby

Written by {ga=jonathanknight}

Tuesday, May 01 2012 6:00 AM - Last Updated Monday, April 30 2012 8:23 PM

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Every now and then, there will be a day when you don't get any mail.

Even with a paper river of junk flowing between every business in America and the end of your driveway, and credit card companies still passionately trying to fuck up your life, there will still be that occasional day in which your mailman will just awkwardly cruise past your mailbox.

While these days are somewhat surprising (and vaguely disappointing), it's nothing all that remarkable.

Now if you go 11 straight days without getting any mail, that's something else. At that point, it's time to explore the possibility that you actually might be dead.

Don't look now, but the Indians have reached that equivalent. They've played 11 straight games without hitting a home run in a display of impotence not seen since the last Cialis commercial.

The last Indian to hit a homer - if your memory goes back that far - was Carlos Santana, a three-run shot in the fifth inning in Seattle on April 17 that sparked the Tribe's seven-run comeback win over the Mariners.

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Since then, there have been 366 at-bats by Indians' hitters - one at-bat for each day of this leap year. Not one of them has ended with the ball over the outfield fence.

When you stop and think about it - and realize this isn't a little-league team sponsored by Hussong Sheet Metal - that's pretty close to mind-blowing.

Some believe that hitting a home run - using a round object to hit another round object coming at you at the speed of Josh Cribbs driving home from practice - is literally the hardest thing to do in sports. And I think it is.

For you and me.

Each Indians' player has been planting baseballs on the opposite side of chain-link fences since before he had pubic hair. As their opposition improved, so did they.

We all knew the 2012 Indians were not going to remind anybody of the '27 Yankees, but they're sending six guys into their everyday lineup that have hit more than 10 homers in a season - four who have hit more than 20. They started this season by hitting a home run in each of their first nine games - the first time they'd ever done this in 112 years of business.

In other words, when an Indian batter steps to the plate, it's not like the possibility of hitting a home run is in the same ballpark as winning the PowerBall.

Consequently, with each at-bat that ends without a home run, the magnitude of this streak becomes all the more amazing. Three more games and they'll match the 14-game homer-less streak during the utterly forgettable 1983 season.

Thus these last two weeks have unintentionally become like the sweaty final days of 1961, when Roger Maris carried out his quest to break Babe Ruth's single-season home run record.

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Or like the golden summer of 1941 when baseball fans combed box scores each day to see if Joe DiMaggio extended his hitting streak and if Ted Williams kept his batting average over .400.

Or like 1998, when two sluggers on steroids were adored by the entire nation for doing something that could only be done when you're on steroids.

It's like all of those. In reverse.

So, perversely it *does* become like DiMaggio in '41 or McGwire/Sosa in '98. Over the past two weeks, Tribe fans have been sticking their heads into rooms and asking, "Did they hit one?" When told no, the fan silently pumps his fist - the streak is still alive. The shot at history endures.

It's easy to put a positive spin on it. Over those 11 games, the Indians are 6-5, actually a better record than they had over the first nine games in which they hit home runs. So, you could argue, maybe they're effectively focusing on the little things and not just trying to slam the ball into the stratosphere. (And as long as you haven't seen Shelley Duncan bat over the past two weeks, you could potentially buy that.)

On the other hand, they're also hitting about .172 as a team during this period, so the "little things" argument pretty much gets shot to hell.

To Manny Acta's credit, the Indians have never been a team that sits back and waits for the three-run homer. Now it seems like the best strategy is to sit back and wait for the two-out dropped routine fly ball.

Another way to look at it is that Indians' batters have come to the plate as if they're a bunch of kids playing a sandlot game knowing they've only got one baseball. If they lose it, they have to go home. Like most of their fans, they're conscientious and frugal and choose to sacrifice personal gain to keep the game going.

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So the questions continue to be asked - even if just in our own heads after watching Casey Kotchman dribble out to second for the fourth time on the night: How long can this go on?

Who will be the one to break the streak? Will it be one of the proven home run hitters who has been conspicuously silent during these last two weeks? Or will it be someone ironic like Jack Hannahan or Richie...er...Aaron Cunningham? Maybe Ezequiel Carrera will get called up and hit one out. Perhaps Johnny Damon. Better still, maybe we can keep it going until interleague play starts and then a pitcher can do it in his only at-bat of the season.

Sooner or later it will end, and the Indians will go back to being just another weak-hitting team.

In the meantime, why not make some history? I've always been a believer in the philosophy that If you're going to suck, suck hard. Go balls-out toward infamy. One way or another, carve a place in history that will be yours forever - in this case, because nobody else wants a piece of it.

Let's keep the ball in the yard and give the '83 Tribe a run for its money.

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