



A lot has changed since 2007. Specifically, this weekend five years ago. I imagine life has changed quite a bit for my readers out there. Maybe professionally, maybe in your personal life, maybe you moved away, maybe you moved back, or maybe all of that has changed. This weekend, May 31 through June 3 in 2007 is one of the most memorable weekends in sports that Cleveland has seen in a long time.

I had just finished up my sophomore year of college a couple weeks before and life was grand. The Indians sat atop the AL Central with a record of 33-19 after starting the year just 7-7 in their first 14 games. The makeup of that 2007 team wasn't drastically different than the 2012 Indians. Obviously, the two biggest differences, and the reason that the 2007 team made the playoffs and should have been in the World Series, were CC Sabathia and Fausto Carmona at the top of the rotation. This year's version of our Tribe has nobody close to those two anchoring the rotation.

From a lineup standpoint, Travis Hafner was still a useful piece of the team. Victor Martinez was the heart and soul of the club, and also happened to be a .300 hitter with 25 HR and 114 RBI. Grady Sizemore posted a .390 OBP thanks to an astounding 101 walks. Casey Blake and Ryan Garko somehow combined to hit 39 HR and drive in 139 runs. Asdrubal Cabrera made his MLB debut that August.

The team still lacked high average guys as the only regulars to hit over .285 were Garko and

Martinez. The guys not named Sabathia or Carmona posted ERAs of 4.59 (Paul Byrd), 4.32 (Jake Westbrook), 6.29 (some guy named Cliff Lee), 6.42 (Jeremy Sowers), 4.56 (Aaron Laffey), and Jason Stanford made two starts.

Everything fell into place during that magical season, which featured 444 plate appearances from Josh Barfield and 1,411 combined plate appearances from Trot Nixon, Jason Michaels, Ben Francisco, Franklin Gutierrez, and Kenny Lofton in the outfield. It's that type of magic that the Indians are hoping to catch from the 2012 lineup that features Johnny Damon, Shelley Duncan, Michael Brantley, Aaron Cunningham, and various others.



But, back to that May 31-June 3 weekend in 2007. The schedule fell into perfect harmony as the Indians hosted the Detroit Tigers for a four-game set while the Cleveland Cavaliers took on the Detroit Pistons in the Eastern Conference Finals. Downtown Cleveland was abuzz like I have never seen it before.

On Thursday May 31, the Indians rocked young phenom Justin Verlander in front of just over 30,000. 30,000 for a Thursday game is unheard of for the Indians right now. Verlander gave up seven runs in just five innings and the Indians removed all doubt in the eighth inning by tattooing Jose Mesa for four runs. Sabathia went seven innings for his eighth win of the season.

Meanwhile, at The Palace of Auburn Hills, LeBron James was putting on a basketball clinic. With a dazzling display of talent, James scored 29 of the Cavs' final 30 points including each of the last 25 to push the Cavs to a 3-2 lead in the series and put them one game away from their first NBA Finals appearance in franchise history.

I know the vast majority of Cleveland sports fans hate LBJ now, but his performance in that game was undeniably epic. Here's [video proof](#) . I hate NBA basketball. I never watch a game. The 2007 NBA Eastern Conference Finals were my exception. One by choice, one by atmosphere. I'll explain the latter shortly. LBJ's Game Five performance stands out for me as the greatest individual performance I've ever seen from a Cleveland player. I never liked the guy, even when he was here, but I can respect talent when I see it.

The next day was the start of June. The Indians had polished off a strong 19-11 month of May and held a three-and-a-half game lead over the Tigers. With the Cavs-Pistons series having a night off, 41,365 decided to take in the Tribe-Tigers game. The ballpark was alive like I hadn't seen it in nearly 10 years. With a buzz about the Indians and the Cavs having such success with their homegrown, hometown hero, people in Cleveland were finally feeling good about themselves and their sports teams.

Fausto Carmona was on the mound against the Tigers soft tosser Mike Maroth. Carmona had been dominant so far that season, a shocking development given how awful he looked the previous year when the Indians tried to convert him into a closer. Carmona entered the game 6-1 with a 2.89 ERA. He hadn't lost since his first start of the season on April 13.

Carmona struggled in that June 1, 2007 start, however, giving up five runs on 10 hits in six innings. One of the best things about that 2007 Indians team was how they never quit. It was a year of a lot of incredible come-from-behind victories and things that even the world's best scriptwriters couldn't have come up with. Carmona left after six innings with the Tribe down 5-1. In the bottom half of the sixth, Travis Hafner walked with one out and Jhonny Peralta hit a two-run homer one batter later. After Ryan Garko singled, Jason Michaels, who was on the team solely to play against lefties, hit a 3-0 pitch out to tie the game. Carmona was off the hook.

The happiness from the crowd of 41,000+ was short-lived as Tom Mastny came in and lit a fire on the mound, allowing three singles and a walk, giving up two runs and then turning it over to Aaron Fultz. Fultz picked up right where Mastny left off, walking Sean Casey with the bases loaded and giving up a sac fly to Craig Monroe. The Indians trailed 9-5 when "Take Me Out to the Ballgame" blared through the ballpark during the seventh inning stretch.

It would stay that way until the bottom of the eighth. Wil Ledezma retired Hafner and Martinez

on harmless fly balls to start the inning. The Indians put together a two-out rally as Peralta doubled and Garko singled so sharply to LF that it forced Peralta to stop at third. Tigers manager Jim Leyland went to his closer, Todd Jones for the four-out save.

Jones probably didn't like to face the Indians, and with good reason. In his career, Jones faced the Indians 54 times, converting 20 saves, with a 4.70 ERA. Jacobs Field was a house of horrors for Jones, posting a 7.11 ERA and a WHIP of 1.97. June 1, 2007 did nothing to help those numbers.

Trot Nixon pinch hit for Michaels and drove in a run with an infield single to 3B. Josh Barfield followed with another RBI single. David Dellucci pinch hit for Franklin Gutierrez but ended the inning with a rocket right at the RF Magglio Ordonez. Even though the Indians went into the ninth trailing by two, the fans were sensing something was going to happen. It had just been that kind of season so far and the stars were aligning for Cleveland.

Those hopes were temporarily put on hold in the top of the ninth. Fernando Cabrera had an electric arm and great stuff. The problem was that he was never quite sure where it was going and if it would ever get there. He had worked a clean top half of the eighth, throwing the ball extremely well and recorded all three outs on just six pitches. Now, with a little bit of pressure to put up a zero, Cabrera reverted back to the guy who needed a cartographer to find home plate for him.

Placido Polanco singled on the first pitch of the inning, Gary Sheffield struck out following an eight-pitch at bat, and then Eric Wedge called for the intentional walk of Magglio Ordonez to bring up Sean Casey, a left handed hitter. Cabrera made his manager look like a fool as he walked Casey before striking out Monroe in yet another eight-pitch at bat. Mike Rabelo (who?) drew a bases-loaded walk on four pitches.

Fernando Cabrera was done and Roberto Hernandez, the one who has always been known as Roberto Hernandez, slovenly jogged to the mound. After giving up an RBI infield single to Omar Infante, he got Neifi Perez to end the inning. But, the damage had been done. The Indians were down by four and the momentum had been sucked out of the building.

There's a chart for every box score on Baseball-Reference that shows the win probability

following every single play of a baseball game. When Grady Sizemore grounded out to start the bottom of the ninth, the Tigers' win probability inched up from 98% to 99%. However, as Lloyd Christmas so eloquently reminded us in *Dumb & Dumber* that even one out of a million was still a chance, the Indians still had two outs to work with.

Casey Blake singled to extend his hitting streak to ten games (it would end at 24), Hafner walked, and Victor Martinez stepped to the plate. Martinez, who had already homered once in the game, [smashed a 2-1 pitch](#) from Todd Jones to the bleachers in left to bring the game to 11-10. The fans erupted. Jones looked lost on the mound and momentum was back on the good guys' side. Jhonny Peralta doubled and Mike Rouse jogged in to pinch run. Ryan Garko struck out swinging. Then, things got interesting.

Trot Nixon was hitting a pretty decent .276 at the time, given that he's only remembered as being the guy to start the "Rally Pie" trend of 2007. In baseball, one of the cardinal rules is to never put the winning/go-ahead run on base. Jim Leyland had already gone to his aging closer for the four-out save, so why not intentionally walk Trot Nixon? It was, incredibly, one of seven intentional walks Nixon received that season. In most cases, I would laugh at an intentional walk to Trot Nixon. In this case, it brought Josh Barfield to the plate. After the Nixon intentional walk, the Indians win probability had skyrocketed to 18%.

On a 0-1 pitch, Josh Barfield offered at a slider a foot off the outside corner. He got it off the end of the bat but it had enough juice to go over the infielders' heads. Would it drop before Magglio Ordonez could get to it? It did. Rouse scampered home and the game was tied. The ball was hit softly enough for Trot Nixon to get to third.

David Dellucci stepped to the plate with runners on the corners. It had been a tough season for Dellucci, hitting just .240 and trying to live up to the three-year \$11.5 million contract the Indians signed him to in December 2006. Dellucci never did produce anywhere close to well enough to justify that contract. But, for one night, he was a hero.



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