

Morning Rundown: Tribe Burned Out of Houston, Beat Out by Sox

Written by {ga=ninocolla}

Monday, June 25 2012 4:45 AM - Last Updated Monday, June 25 2012 7:52 AM



That's not a weekend you want to have. After sweeping a first place team, losing to, what is in-effect a last place team, twice in a three game series. On top of that, the team that was chasing you caught up because they won their series and the team now directly behind you, lost two games to the Pirates, meaning an opportunity to distance yourself was lost.

June 24th, 2012

Cleveland Indians - 1

Houston Astros - 7

W: J.A. Happ (6-7) L: Derek Lowe (7-6)

[\[BOXSCORE\]](#)

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In a way, I was glad that I didn't see this one. Instead I was treated to the gross-hot weather in Pittsburgh and the annoying Justin Verlander.

He's good whoever he pitches against. He had it working even more against the NL team with no offense (different story against the Indians of course). There was a glimmer of hope though when Garrett Jones hit a two-run shot late to tie it up. The Pirates almost pulled off the sweep and had they done so, the loud Tiger fan sitting behind me would have received a decent dose of chubby Indian fan screaming at Reds fan after Asdrubal Cabrera walk-off.

Anyway, the trek to Pittsburgh was well worth it. I donned a Pirates hat (don't hurt me) and cheered for the home team, especially since they were facing the Tigers. If anything, it saved me from having to witness this second debacle against the lowly Houston Astros.

I'm not sure what to say about three games, if we're including the one win on Friday of rather poor offensive production. I mean we're even talking about a team that is just ahead of Cleveland in ERA. Unfortunately Cleveland is down at the bottom of the league in that. So I guess that will explain Houston's offensive out-put. It doesn't describe what happened to this offense though.

Four total runs the entire series? Had Ubaldo Jimenez not pitch so well on Friday, with the Indians finding a way to scrape two runs across, [we're looking at a sweep to end Interleague Play](#)

"We struggled, big time, offensively the whole series," Acta said. "When you score four runs in a three-game series, there are times when you don't even win a ballgame. To win one game scoring four runs in three games, we came out OK [considering] the way we swung the bat."

I know the argument that is going to be coming out here though, because it just is a constant thing around Cleveland. Left-handed pitching. That's why the Indians lost this game, the game before and every other game they've lost against left-handed pitching.

Look I get it, it's not only a convenient argument, it is a very sound one given the stats. But let's

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just give it a rest here with all of that. I think Manny Acta has the best deflection from this argument, but let me say this. A team has to just take blame for not getting the job done, regardless of which way the pitcher is throwing from. Two runs in two games against a team that is not very good pitching is inexcusable.

"You can't beat everybody and we do have a positive record against righties. And there are more righties than left-handers. Hey, we faced two tough [lefties] here and they beat us. If we're only going to lose against left-handers, which we're not going to lose every game, you win the division."

The rationalizing is fantastic and he's right, but the downside is you will not likely win every single game against right-handers.

This was a tough series to take not only because it was the Astros, but all the other teams and what they did. It's tough to swallow, but the Indians return to regular play and now start to get really tested with first place New York. Not time to look back and pout about it.

You'd like to see this offense figure it out though. Just five hits, one from your stinking pitcher. Only three walks. I find it hard to believe the three guys the Astros threw out there were really that good. Happ is a decent pitcher having a so-so year, maybe capable of shutting a lineup down, but the other two? They barely used their bullpen at all in this entire series.

"I'm happy that the month is over," Lowe said. "It was about as bad a pitching month as you can have. So I'm just going to take the positives out of this one and move on to [my next start in] Baltimore."

You can also point out the pitching, which was questionably off. **Derek Lowe** was not bad, but it only continued and perhaps ended what he deemed a bad pitching month.

I don't think he was too bad. Almost going seven, giving up three runs off eight hits, just one walk. He did his job and kept his team close enough to offer up a chance. I'm not sure why he's distraught. If he needs to mentally tell himself it was just June though and that he'll return to

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being a more consistent Derek Lowe in July, that's fine too. He did have a rather rough month, but it wasn't like he was all around horrible start after start.

Random Details...

Boy is Nick Hagadone struggling lately. He gave up a three spot, including a two-run shot to Chris Johnson. He has now given up runs in three of his last four outings, and emphasize the s on runs. It has been multiple amounts of runs and a home run has been involved.

The top five in the lineup went 1-for-19 with a run and a walk. Really? That's pretty bad and even more than that, sad. Casey Kotchman had two hits, Shelley Duncan had two walks. You have to do better than that as a lineup. I don't want to hear the left-handed business when the guys hitting right-handed aren't really coming through.

I can't say anything game specific because again, I have no clue what happened or how it happened. But it is disappointing overall losing to the Astros.

[YOUK CAN'T HAVE ME]

The baseball world's worst kept secret finally materialized Sunday. Boston finally admitted they were shopping Kevin Youkilis days before [they finally dealt him to the Chicago White Sox](#) for Brent Lillibridge and minor leaguer Zach Stewart.

Obviously this has a direct impact on the Indians for two reasons.

For one, the White Sox might have found someone who can produce at third base, a position that has quite frankly been a black hole for them since Joe Crede left. Regardless of what he did in Boston this year, Youkilis is capable of so much more and he is a definitive upgrade over Brent Morel.

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The second is that the Indians were in on the Youkilis 'sweepstakes' if you'd like to call it that. Having a need for someone to hit the freakin' ball, the Indians were at once considered favorites to land him according to several sources, however it was yesterday that Ken Rosenthal noted that the Indians [were more of a longshot](#). Seemed like it was the White Sox all along that had Youkilis in their sights and the Red Sox made it happen.

You have to wonder what it would have cost the Indians to acquire Youkilis. If you want to do the comparison, Brent Lillibridge is a utility guy, probably with no shot of being an actual everyday contributor that you can count on at one position. Maybe just maybe he can compare to someone like Cord Phelps or Jason Donald. I really have no base of knowledge on Zach Stewart.

He's a starter for one, having pitched mostly as a starter through his minor league ascension. He played last season, throwing in 11 starts for the White Sox, but mostly starting in Triple A Charlotte to the tune of a 4.26 ERA. He had good years, was traded in the Edwin Jackson deal, probably is a decent prospect, in terms of comparing him to someone, heck if I know at this juncture.

What I do know is that the Red Sox also sent a chunk of change (\$5.5 Million) to Chicago in order to complete the deal, which basically means they did it to acquire better players. That's always the case. The \$5.5 will cover a portion of his salary this year and if they want, the one million dollar buyout for next season, something that would have likely been more of a discussion had he actually gone to Cleveland. It stings a little to know the price tag now after the fact because I think the Indians could have parted with a decent package to get the right-handed hitting Youkilis and stick him at first place.

I think he just needs a new start somewhere out of that Boston environment. Things are not going well there and I don't think he's completely lost it like the statistics indicate. I'm legit worried that the Sox have just got themselves another major force for their lineup that may put them over the top.

Oh and they have first place now.

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[RANDOM RUNDOWN]

I'm sick and tired of seeing Jose Lopez hit in the cleanup spot. Maybe that's why this team is scoring four runs in three games against the freaking Astros. You know what, that probably is it. Because of Carlos Santana laboring, Manny Acta has decided that clearly Santana is getting more regular breaks, not even keeping him in the lineup when he needs a day off from catching. And that **Jose Lopez** [will hit in the cleanup spot](#) when that is the case.

I tap, I give, enough. No more of this.

"I've played there before. I just try to do my job, try to bring the guys in to home plate and do my job." ☐

Look Jose, I know you are trying to do your job and that you are only put in the spot, I can't really blame you for being there. Seriously, though, what is Manny Acta thinking? I know he's struggling but I can't take my run producer out of that spot. You need to stick with him there and show him the team believes he'll break out of this funk at a moments notice.

I'm just done with this Jose Lopez business. Forget taking "pressure" off Carlos Santana. In fact, put the pressure on him. Let him know that he's the guy that makes this lineup productive and that he needs to start hitting. Maybe it will actually spark him to start hitting.

Let's get on to less frustrating topics, [which includes the turn around](#) of **Ubaldo Jimenez**. We saw him not pitch completely clean on Friday, but get through the rough spots and the walks to lead his team to victory and more than do his part. Acta says he isn't panicking, gets there, throws the ball, gets it back and throws it again.

"It's a different ballgame for him right now," Tribe manager Manny Acta said. "His command issues are much better now than they were at the beginning of the season. Earlier in the year, when his command wasn't there, he got into some situations where as soon as he gets a couple of guys on base, things just unraveled for him." ☐

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And again, that was always the book on Ubaldo. He got himself into trouble and it would just spiral out of control. When he's good, he's good, and he's on and he doesn't fool around. He hasn't been fooling around, he's just been going. He's been Ubaldo. Acta did opt for Joe Smith though against the Astros to finish off the seventh inning of Friday's game because it would have been Jimenez's fourth trip through the lineup and Acta felt he was nearing the end.

Regardless of how the starters are pitching, Smith, Pestano and Perez have all been the constant. You have been able to rely on all three of them. And just to show you how dominant they are, when Pestano and Perez appear in the same game, usually indicating the save situation, the team has lost just twice.

Acta has not been able to trust **Tony Sipp** though, who he [finally threw after a week off](#) in Saturday's loss.

"He threw strikes and saw a couple of lefties and took advantage of that," Indians manager Manny Acta said. "That's good for him to build confidence. Tony's pitching good against lefties, struggling against righties. Whenever he hasn't made a pitch, they've made him pay for it. That's been the thing with Tony."

I've railed on Sipp here in the past few weeks, thinking he needed to get sent down to fix whatever is wrong. But the Indians seem set on fixing him at the big league level because of what he's done the past few years. Perhaps this was a start to that. Acta is very much not one to say "What have you done for me lately?" and give up. He needs more regular work though, I don't think you can go many days between appearances for him or you'll likely not see consistent results.

[TIGER WATCH] I already told you about the Tigers and you know the White Sox have won two straight in their re-claiming of first place by a half game. So I have nothing more to add other than this. I really do dislike the Tigers. -

Nino has a blog that is protected by a statue of Luke Carlin. Give it a visit at [The Tribe Daily](#), or he might eat your face off.

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