



A series against the Baltimore Orioles used to be viewed as a chance to get back on the right track if you were struggling and to keep moving right along if you were on a roll. Now, the Indians, losers of five straight, head to Maryland to face a much-improved Orioles club. The Orioles, playing in the ultra-competitive American League East, are right in the hunt with a 41-33 record, and would be the first wild card team if the playoffs began today.

Unless you're a pretty close follower of the teams around baseball, there aren't many recognizable names playing for Baltimore. Long-time staple Brian Roberts is still around, but he's played just 12 games this season and just 110 games over the last three seasons. Nick Markakis is a shell of the player he used to be. Adam Jones continues to be one the most unheralded players in baseball and Matt Wieters is one of the game's up-and-coming stars behind the plate.

If someone rattled off a list of the pitchers for the Orioles, one or two names might ring a bell. In all honesty, like the Indians, it's kind of difficult to see how the Orioles are in the hunt in their division, especially one with as much talent as the AL East. They're doing it with the long ball, having hit 95 home runs this season, good for third in the AL. They're also doing it with tremendous relief pitching. Despite having three starters with ERAs above 5.20, the Orioles had a respectable 3.71 ERA before getting knocked around by the Angels on Wednesday night. That bullpen has helped the Orioles to a league-best 9-2 record in extra innings this season.

The Orioles may be overachieving, but they're not the opponent to take lightly that they used to be. Let's look at the pitching matchups for this weekend's four-game set, a series where the Indians could potentially see three left handed starters.



Thursday June 28, 7:05 p.m. ET; Zach McAllister (1-1, 3.96) v. Wei-Yin Chen (7-3, 3.38)

Zach McAllister makes his return to the Tribe rotation after Jeanmar Gomez's terrible month of June. McAllister pitched well while filling in for Josh Tomlin in May, pitching 25 innings over four starts and striking out 22 to just six walks. McAllister was the most consistent starter for the Columbus Clippers this season, making 11 starts and posting a 2.98 ERA. The Indians acquired McAllister as the player to be named later in the July 2010 Austin Kearns trade to New York.

Wei-Yin Chen is enjoying loads of success in his first season in the United States, Chen, an import from Taiwan, is reaping the benefits of not having many scouting reports out about him. Chen, a left hander, won't overpower hitters and has allowed seven home runs in his last eight starts.

McAllister has made just one of his four starts this season on the road, going seven innings at Fenway Park against the Red Sox and allowing four runs. He struck out eight and didn't walk a batter in his first start replacing Tomlin. Chen has been very good at home, going 4-1 with a 2.82 ERA in seven starts. Neither pitcher has faced their opponent before.

