



I've watched a lot of baseball in my life and I cannot remember a game that entered the ninth inning at 3-2 and was three-and-a-half hours long. In one of the most brutal and frustrating games of the season to watch, the Indians hung on for that 3-2 win, despite blowing numerous opportunities offensively, needing a patchwork seventh inning of relief, and watching one of their most consistent hitters to date struggle terribly at the dish. The old adage in baseball is that you'll win 60, lose 60, and it's what you do with the other 40 that counts. I'd put this game in the "other 40" section.

From the start, it looked like it was going to be a long, interesting evening. One of those two things was achieved. Rays starter Alex Cobb gave up what looked to be a leadoff home run to Shin-Soo Choo, where the ball was ruled a home run as Choo rounded third and as BJ Upton finished jogging to the ball. Manager Joe Maddon came out in defense of his team and requested for a replay. Upon review, the call was correctly reversed to a double, however, Choo would have been at third base had the right call been made to begin with. Apparently, it's an automatic double because nobody from the Indians really protested the decision. With Choo at second, Asdrubal Cabrera, who hasn't gotten a hit with a runner in scoring position since the Ford Administration, grounded out to first, advancing Choo to third. The Rays brought the infield in and Jason Kipnis grounded out to second, forcing Choo to stay at third. Luckily, Jose Molina, the Rays catcher, was crossed up on a curve ball that bounced to the backstop, allowing Choo to score on a passed ball and give the Indians a 1-0 lead. Michael Brantley walked to extend the inning, but Jose Lopez struck out swinging after hitting a foul ball that had the distance to be a two-run homer. The first inning, with a review, took about a half hour.

Zach McAllister, who entered the game with just 10 walks in his 42.1 innings, fought with his command in the first inning. He walked leadoff hitter Will Rhymes and issued a two-out walk to BJ Upton, but wriggled off the hook when Luke Scott grounded out to second. In the second, the Indians got their leadoff man on again, a walk by Travis Hafner, but Carlos Santana hit into a double play and Casey Kotchman popped out foul to send the Indians down in a hurry. McAllister, to his credit, continued to fight with his command but keep the Rays off the scoreboard. He issued a leadoff walk to Jeff Keppinger, who advanced to second on a sacrifice bunt, but got no farther as McAllister struck out Jose Molina and got Elliott Johnson to fly out to left.

In the third, the Indians finally made Alex Cobb pay for his lack of command. Johnny Damon turned on a ball and ripped a double down the line to start off the inning. Choo followed by driving a ball over left fielder Desmond Jennings's head to push the Indians lead to 2-0. Cabrera picked up the first of his four consecutive strikeouts for the first out. Kipnis picked up his teammate by clubbing a RBI double of his own to right center, scoring Choo, and putting the Tribe up by three. After Brantley walked, the Indians had the chance to deliver a knockout blow to Cobb, but Lopez hit a ball right on the screws that was caught by the third baseman and Kipnis was forced out at second for a double play.

McAllister must have figured something out during the extended top half of the third inning because he looked significantly better in the third. He retired the Rays in order, pounded the strike zone, and gave the Indians the chance to keep their momentum. Which they did, albeit, momentarily. The Indians loaded the bases in the fourth on by going walk-single-walk to put Cobb on the ropes. After hitting a long foul ball, Damon struck out swinging. With Choo coming up, Maddon had seen enough from Cobb and he went to soft-tossing southpaw JP Howell. Choo swung at the first pitch and jammed himself, popping out weakly to short. Cabrera came up and you know how that ended. The Indians failed to score with the bases loaded and nobody out. It nearly came back to haunt them in the bottom half.

The Rays put together three straight singles, their first three hits of the game, to score a run in the fourth. The third of those hits was a rocket back up the middle that was a direct hit on McAllister's right forearm. He was checked by the trainer and Manny Acta, but elected to stay in the game. Apparently, the comebacker woke up McAllister who got Jennings to hit into a double play. With two outs and a runner on third, Jose Molina, whose speed is best timed by a sundial, hit a ground ball to Cabrera's left. Cabrera dove, took his time, threw from his knees, and got Molina by two steps on a tremendous pick by Casey Kotchman. It was a huge Houdini act by McAllister and probably the turning point in the game.

Despite having approximately 900 chances to score in the final four innings, the Indians couldn't push any more runs across. In the fifth, they had runners on first and second with nobody out and hit into a double play and then a pop up ended the inning. In the sixth, the Indians put runners at first and second with two outs when Cabrera struck out again. In the seventh, the Indians' leadoff man reached base on a walk, but the inning ended on a strikeout-caught stealing double play. At least while all of this was going on, the unheralded McAllister continued to keep the Rays at bay. McAllister did not give up a hit in the fifth or the sixth and gave Acta and the Indians six outstanding innings. Despite having four walks, McAllister gave up the one lone run on three hits and struck out five.

Rick Manning gave out the stat that the Indians entered the game 17-0 on the road when leading after six innings. That stat was put to the test tonight. With Joe Smith unavailable after throwing two relief innings on Sunday in Toronto, Esmil Rogers was Acta's first choice out of the bullpen. His first pitch went 380 feet into the left field seats to cut the lead to 3-2. Rogers would settle down and get back-to-back groundouts to shortstop, but couldn't finish the inning after walking Will Rhymes. Acta summoned Tony Sipp from the bullpen to face Carlos Pena. Joe Maddon countered by sending up Sean Rodriguez and his .221 batting average. Sipp challenged him with all of one fastball, the first pitch of the at bat, and walked him. Acta went back to the mound to bring out Vinnie Pestano to face Ben Zobrist. Pestano blew Zobrist away to preserve the one-run lead.

Tampa went to a lefty in the eighth, so the Indians went quickly. Indians fans have been spoiled by Pestano's dominant eighth innings this season. Monday night's was, in a word, unconventional. After putting Upton away quickly to start the inning, Luke Scott lined a single to left that defensive replacement Aaron Cunningham cut off in the alley, holding him to first. It looked like a big play until Scott stole second. After Jeff Keppinger popped out to shallow center, Desmond Jennings reached on an infield single. With Jose Molina due up, Maddon went back to the bench to get pinch hitter Brooks Conrad with the tying run on third. Conrad worked Pestano to a full count before being frozen on a backdoor slider on the outside corner to end the inning. Cameras showed Pestano pounding the bench in the dugout during the commercial break.

In the ninth, the Indians got their leadoff man on for the seventh time in nine innings, but failed to do anything more as Choo hit into a double play and Cabrera struck out, giving the crowd of about 1400 in Tampa coupons for free pizza as the tenth strikeout of the night. Chris Perez came out and slammed the door for the Indians, striking out two of the three hitters he faced, including Hideki Matsui to end the game.

Zach McAllister picked up the win and moved to 4-1 on the season. His ERA for the year sits at 3.17, but he has posted a 2.31 ERA in four starts since taking over in the rotation for Jeanmar Gomez. Chris Perez picked up save number 26. Alex Cobb was the loser, dropping to 4-6 on the season. With the win, the Indians moved to 46-43 and picked up a game on the White Sox who lost 5-1 in Boston. They're still in third place behind the Tigers who beat the Angels 8-6.

**Stat of the Night:** It was mentioned above in the article, but the Indians are now 18-0 on the road this season when leading after six innings.

**Stat of the Night Pt. 2:** The Indians are now 5-for-38 in their last four games with runners in scoring position.

**Player of the Game:** The Zach Attack. Another excellent outing from Zach McAllister who really toughened up in the face of adversity at times throughout the game and put up a lot of zeroes to help the hapless Indians offense.

**Tomorrow's Game:** The Indians will try to guarantee a series split with Josh Tomlin on the mound opposite Matt Moore at 7:10 p.m.