

For the fifth consecutive season, the Indians will be spending most of August and all of September playing out the final games of their schedule with zero postseason potential on the line. This season, a team that overachieved up until the All-Star break watched every lucky break and fortunate bounce regress to the mean in the form of an 11-game losing streak, all against AL Central opponents.

The Indians sport the worst run differential in the American League by 29 runs. There's a reason that they're 51-60 entering a four-game series with the Boston Red Sox. Their recent stretch of horrible performances even vaulted them to the top of the list of most runs allowed by an American League team. They trail only the Rockies for league-wide supremacy and, as we all know, the Rockies play in that light air in Colorado where the ball travels extremely well. Progressive Field is actually a "neutral" park, meaning it has no history of benefitting hitters more than pitchers or vice versa.

In any event, the Indians still have games to play and are in familiar territory as of August 9 – aiming to finish the season at .500. That will probably be the end goal for this season, which, if the Indians are able to go 30-21 over their final 51 games, they will have earned the definition of mediocrity. It will also give the illusion of a better team than what the Indians really had and generate false hope about the performances over the final 51 games.

The quest for .500 begins with this weekend's four-game series against the Bahstan Red Sawx.



**Thursday August 9, 7:05 p.m. ET; Felix Doubront (10-5, 4.56) v. Ubaldo Jimenez (8-11, 5.29)**

Felix Doubront has had the up-and-down season you would expect from a Red Sox starting pitcher on a team that is 55-57. Doubront has had some tremendous starts surrounded by some poor outings. He's been able to work out of some jams because of his swing-and-miss stuff, as he's induced 115 K in 118 IP. But, he's also allowed 161 baserunners in those innings, along with 17 home runs. Since July 1, Doubront has allowed only one earned run in three alternating starts. In the other three starts, he's allowed 15 runs.

Ubaldo Jimenez's maddening inconsistency has continued of late, as he's allowed 11 runs over his last two outings. That comes after Jimenez posted six shutout innings against Detroit on July 24. Which came after allowing 13 runs in his first two starts after the All-Star break. Obviously, the Indians expect more from Jimenez. He's got a \$5.75M club option for 2013 that is a near-lock to be picked up. If you want something to laugh about, written into Jimenez's contract is a \$1M bonus for next season if he wins the Cy Young.

As you might expect, since Doubront is left handed, he beat the Indians earlier this season at Fenway Park going six innings and allowing just a run on three hits. Doubront has also pitched well away from the hitter-friendly conditions of Fenway. He has a 3.57 ERA on the road compared to a 5.52 at home. As for Jimenez, he's the opposite of Doubront, pitching far better at home (3.28) than the road (near infinity). Jimenez was blasted by Boston this season to the tune of seven runs in four innings on nine hits.



**Friday August 10, 7:05 p.m. ET; Clay Buchholz (9-3, 4.48) v. Chris Seddon\* (0-0, 7.71)**

\* - tentatively scheduled

Clay Buchholz had a 7.84 ERA entering his start on May 27. Since then, over his last 10 starts, he has a 2.21 ERA spanning 73.1 innings pitched. Along with pitching well, Buchholz has won five of his last six decisions and the Red Sox have won seven of his last 10 starts. The Indians may not be a good matchup for Buchholz, however, as lefties are hitting .295 off of him this season with a .373 OBP.

Chris Seddon is listed as the starting pitcher, even though he pitched one-third of an inning on Tuesday night. Since he only lasted 4.1 innings on Sunday in his first Major League start since September of 2007, it's likely that Seddon will be fine to make this scheduled start. Seddon gave up four runs on seven hits to the Tigers last Sunday. He had a 3.44 ERA with Triple-A Columbus in 20 starts.

Buchholz has not pitched well on the road this season in eight starts, though most of them came early in the season when he was a disaster. He has a 5.06 ERA in those eight starts. He's also struggled in four career starts against the Tribe with a record of 1-1 and a 5.32 ERA. Seddon has never made a start against the Red Sox and has only faced Jarrod Saltamacchia (walk) and David Ortiz (K) one time.



**Saturday August 11, 6:05 p.m. ET; Franklin Morales (3-2, 3.14) v. Zach McAllister (4-4, 3.60)**

The Indians draw another lefty on Saturday night as they face off against Franklin Morales. Morales has made 34 appearances, six of them starts, this season after being acquired in May of 2011 from the Colorado Rockies. Morales has been good as a starter, going 3-1 with a 3.06 ERA over 32.1 IP. Lefties are also hitting just .186 off Morales in 98 plate appearances. Lefties

also have just one extra base hit, a double, off Morales.

Zach McAllister was again victimized by his defense in his last start, but that doesn't excuse McAllister from allowing 18 unearned runs in just 70 innings of work. McAllister was bombed for nine runs in his last start against the Twins, but only two of them were earned over his 1.2 innings. McAllister has fought with his command in his last two outings and we may be seeing a pitcher who is losing some of the confidence he had earlier in the season.

Morales has made 15 appearances and three starts on the road, with a 1.35 ERA. The Indians have seen Morales six times, scoring four runs off of him in five innings. McAllister made his second start of the season against Boston following Josh Tomlin's trip to the disabled list. McAllister battled through seven innings, allowing four runs on eight hits, but had eight strikeouts. Fifteen of the 18 unearned runs McAllister has allowed have come at home.



**Sunday August 12, 1:05 p.m. ET; Jon Lester (5-10, 5.36) v. Corey Kluber (0-0, 6.10)**

Albeit watered down, the Indians face a tough lefty in Jon Lester for Sunday's series finale. Lester has been an unmitigated disaster this season, after being a perennial Cy Young candidate in the not-so-distant past. Hitters are batting .282 off Lester this season, a far cry from the .234 batting average against in 2011 and even better .220 in 2010. Lester, who averaged more than a strikeout per inning in 2010 and nearly a strikeout per inning in 2011 has only struck out 117 in 141 innings this season.

Corey Kluber was robbed of his first Major League win in his last start when closer Chris Perez blew the save in the ninth. Kluber was also the victim of shoddy defense as he was cruising into

the seventh inning of his last start when he allowed two unearned runs due to a Jason Kipnis error. Those runs let the Twins back in the game and they eventually got to the bullpen. Since a horrendous six-run first inning in his first career start, Kluber has allowed only one earned run over 9.1 innings of work.

Lester has been pretty good in his career against the Indians with a 3.53 ERA in 10 starts. The Indians avoided Lester during the four-game series at Fenway back in May, so they haven't gotten a look at the new and unimproved Lester. Kluber has never faced the Red Sox and will be making just his third career start.

### **Keys to the Series:**

**1. Play Without Pressure** – As we've seen with the Indians for a while now, when there are expectations, they falter and when there are no expectations, they thrive. Nobody expected anything from the Tribe in 2011, and then they started 30-15. When expectations came along, they folded. There's no pressure now. It's hard to have fun when you're 51-60, but, hey, give it a shot.

**2. Show Some Effort** – The Indians lost 11 games in a row because the starting pitching was awful, but the defense and the at bats weren't far behind. It was an embarrassing display from a heartless baseball team. They have nothing to play for anymore and they know that, but they're still professionals and they need to act like it.

**3. Gut-Check Time for the Starters** – Three of the four starters in this series need to pitch well. Seddon is a filler guy who won't be around next season. But Jimenez needs to bounce back. McAllister is going to be viewed as the #3 starter for this team next season and he needs to sack up and get out of this rut he's in. Corey Kluber has a chance to win the #5 spot in the rotation next year depending on how he finishes out the year. There's a lot on the line for those three guys.

**Player to Watch:**

The player to watch for this series is Shelley Duncan. With Jared Goedert and assorted others lurking in the minor leagues, it will be up to Duncan to prove his worth as the DFA Hammer keeps knocking off veterans. Derek Lowe, Johnny Damon, and Jose Lopez all got their walking papers within the last week to 10 days. Duncan could be next. The Indians face three lefties in this series, so Duncan should get the bulk of the left field at bats. If he wants to keep his roster spot, he needs to produce.

**Wishful Thinking:**

I know the Browns preseason starts on Friday, but it really sucks to go to the ballpark and be surrounded by Boston fans in their stupid green hats. If you can find it in yourself to stomach an Indians game, please do so.

**Central Focus:**

The White Sox host Oakland, the Tigers go to Texas, the Twins host Tampa, and the Royals head to Baltimore.

**One Last Thing...:**

We won a game yesterday. We win one today, that's two in a row. We win one tomorrow, that's called a winning streak. It has happened before.