Michaels Caps 4-5 Day With Game Winning Hit In 11th

Game three of the Indian/White Sox series resembled 2005 much more than the first two games of the series. With the teams splitting the first two games, each winning by six runs, you just knew the finale would be tight. And it was the newest Indian who not only got them started, but finished off the White Sox in extra innings.

The Indians were staked to a two run lead in the first inning thanks to some control problems from White Sox starter Jose Contreras. With one out, new Indian left-fielder Jason Michaels got things started by fisting a two-strike pitch into center field. Jhonny Peralta singled, rifling a line drive right past the ear of Contreras and then Travis Hafner walked to load the bases. Victor Martinez hit a sacrifice fly to open the scoring before the control issues returned for Contreras and he walked Ben Broussard, reloading the bases, and grazing the oversized jersey of Ronnie Belliard to force in the second Indians run.

Indian starter Cliff Lee was in control throughout the early part of the game. Once Casey Blake made his first of a few nice defensive plays, retiring Scott Posednik on a nice running catch, Lee was never in trouble. He retired 9 of the first 10 hitters, allowing only a leadoff single to Paul Konerko in the second inning. The White Sox broke through in the 4th inning. A leadoff double by Tadahito Iguchi paid dividends when Rob Mackowiack, who replaced starting right fielder Jermaine Dye in the 2nd inning, had his bat shattered by Lee but managed to fight the ball over Peralta's outstretched arm for a run scoring, two-out single.

The Indians appeared to be ready to answer the run in the top of the fifth. Grady Sizmeore led off with a hustle single, and Michaels singled

off the ample backside of Contreras. However, after back-to-back fly-outs Contreras got Martinez to strike out to end the threat. In the bottom of the fifth inning, you might have noticed a loud gasp coming from the collective Front Office of the Tribe, as Broussard and Martinez collided chasing in infield pop up. Martinez took a pretty solid elbow to the nose and remained down for a couple minutes, before jumping up and getting back behind the plate.

In the bottom of the sixth, Chicago took advantage of Cliff Lee turning into Ebby Calvin “Nuke” LaLoosh. After a leadoff single by Iguchi, Lee beaned Jim Thome and walked Paul Konerko. Then Broussard and Martinez were involved in another very strange play. With the bases loaded and no outs, Mackowiak hit a chopper behind the bag at first and Broussard, in an odd choice, came up throwing home for the force out. The throw was in the dirt, and Martinez made an unbelievable pick of the throw for the out. Then Nuke decided it was time to hit another guy, and plunked AJ Pierzynski. Matt Miller replaced Lee and gave up a sacrifice fly to give Chicago a 3-2 lead.

Travis Hafner got the Indians back to even with a 434 foot bomb to right field, in the top of the eighth inning, which would ultimately force the game into extra innings. In the tenth inning, Casey Blake singled to center and Grady Sizemore showed that the Indians do actually know how to sacrifice bunt and moved Blake to second base. Michaels then does what he was brought here to do, murder left-handers, and doubled into the gap in right-center for a 4-3 Tribe lead, and puttig the capper on a 4 for 5 day at the plate.

Bob Wickman entered game in the bottom of the 11th, looking for his first save of the young season. Of course, Bob still has to make you nervous. After walking instant offense Iguchi, he got Thome to bounce weakly to first, where Broussard was unable to field it cleanly, so they could not get the lead runner. This brought up Paul Konerko, who had already came up empty in a couple of clutch situations. Once again

Konerko could not come through, as Bob Wickman struck him out by painting the outside corner at the knees. Wickman then struck out Mackowiak to end the game.

What a great start to the season, especially in the wake of the strange opener that went until 3 AM, and saw the team lose C.C. Sabathia to an abdominal injury.

And the fun has just started.