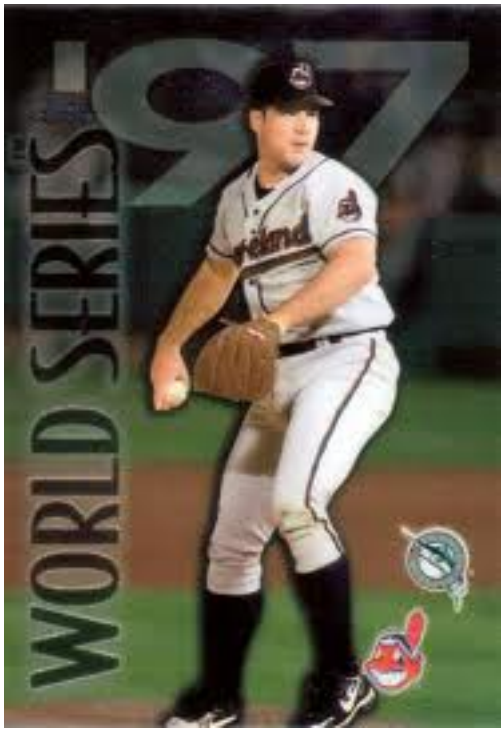



In the 1997 playoffs, the Cleveland Indians had hurdled the defending World Series champion New York Yankees and the Baltimore Orioles. They were going to the World Series!!!

To this point, the Indians had benefited from several events which fell their way:

* A grounder off of the pitcher’s glove which resulted in a game-winning hit.

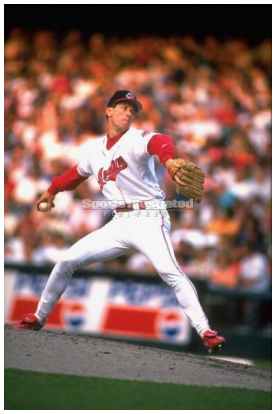
* A line drive off of an Indians pitcher’s glove which resulted in a double play.

* A missed ball on a squeeze bunt attempt which resulted in a game-winning run.

* A wild pitch and a throwing error which resulted in two runs scored.

Please see Part I here.

And it was on to face the 1997 National League champions, the formidable Florida Marlins. The NL wild card winner had won 92 games vs. the Indians' 86. They'd defeated the San Francisco Giants and the ubiquitous 1990s NL playoff team, the Atlanta Braves. The Marlins franchise was five years old, but shrewd personnel moves and manager Jim Leyland had them in position to win a championship sooner than any other franchise in history (of note, the Colorado Rockies- the other expansion team of 1993- had won the NL wild card two years earlier, in their third year).



Orel Hershiser was the Tribe's Game 1 starter in Miami. His opponent was Livan Hernandez, a 21 yr old from the Dominican Republic who was completing his rookie season in the big leagues. The Tribe drew first blood off of Hernandez when David Justice singled home Bip Roberts in the first inning. The Marlins tied the game in the bottom of the third, when Edgar Renteria's weak ground ball plated Craig Counsell. Then in the fourth, Florida went walk-single-homer-homer off of Hershiser and took a commanding 5-1 lead. Manny Ramirez went deep, before the Marlins scored two more in the fifth.

Pretty much Game Over, but not before the Tribe scored a couple of single runs to close the gap a bit. Jim Thome's solo jack in the sixth was a hopeful sign for the Tribe, as he'd been fighting a hitting slump. The Marlins took the early Series advantage.

**World Series: Tribe 0, Marlins 1.**

Game 2 featured our tough luck starter from the ALCS, Chad Ogea, and Florida's dominant ace, Kevin Brown. One of these pitchers hurled a gem. And it wasn't the future $105 million man of the Los Angeles Dodgers. No, it was the almost-forgotten Ogea, whose playoffs had begun so dubiously against the Pithy One, Paul O'Neill, and the Yankees back in the ALDS. Both teams scored once in the first inning, after which the bats fell quiet for several innings. Well, Renteria was getting his base hits, but the score remained 1-1 through four. In the top of the fifth, Marquis Grissom singled with two aboard to score a run. Up came Chad Ogea to the plate. Seldom batting as an American League pitcher, he hadn't gotten a base hit since his college career as a starter alongside fellow LSU Tiger Paul Byrd. On the first pitch, Ogea delivered a crucial sacrifice bunt to move the base runners to second and third. Bip Roberts promptly rewarded him with a ground ball up the middle to score the pair. Sandy Alomar later tacked on a home run, and the Series was tied. The groundball-hitting Tribe lineup was not a great matchup for the sinking pitches of the angry Brown, whose velocity also sank from about 95 mph to about 92 mph during the course of the game. The Tribe did not want to go back to Cleveland down 0 - 2, so Ogea's start was clutch.

**World Series: Tribe 1, Marlins 1.**

Game 3 at The Jake saw Charles Nagy face veteran Al Leiter. Neither pitcher was very effective, and the game was a comical mix of offense and bad defense. This was another seesaw game, with the Indians up 7-3 in the sixth. The Marlins tied the game at 7 in the seventh, with Renteria playing a role. In the top of the ninth, with the score tied, the Marlins sent 13 men to the plate and scored seven runs. Three Indians pitchers gave up 4 hits and suffered from 3 errors behind them. Not to be left out of the party, Jose Mesa contributed with two hits allowed and a crucial wild pitch before the Marlins finally succumbed with a line drive rocket to deep center field. Of course, with Florida up a touchdown in the bottom of the ninth, Cleveland scored four runs of their own against closer Robb Nen before the game finally ended with the tying run on deck. *(Two B's, one N. Parents musta hoped it would seem like he was hott stuf).*

**World Series: Tribe 1, Marlins 2.**

The Indians jumped quickly on Florida's other rookie starter in Game 4. Ramirez homered and Thome doubled off of Tony Saunders to score three runs in the first inning, and the Tribe never looked back. Jaret Wright pitched a nice game over six innings and enjoyed plenty of run support in a 10-3 win. The Series was knotted up.

**World Series: Tribe 2, Marlins 2**.

Game 5 featured another Hershiser-Hernandez showdown. The Marlins drew first blood, with two runs in the second. Sandy Alomar drove in an Indians run in the second, and then rocked Hernandez in the third with a three-run home run. The Tribe held the 4-2 lead until the top of the sixth, when Hershiser, Alvin Morman and Eric Plunk surrendered 4 runs on 4 hits and 3 walks (sigh). With the Tribe down by 3, the submissive Mesa gave up his ninth inning run before the good guys scored 3 of their own against Nen to ultimately lose by one. Cleveland found themselves facing two World Series elimination games. And the first would be against Kevin Brown. But they'd already overcome a two-game elimination situation this postseason, against the New York Yankees. Nobody thought they could not come back.

**World Series: Tribe 2, Marlins 3.**

Chad Ogea was the man to face Brown again, this time in Game 6. The Tribe had lost the 1995 World Series in six games; would history repeat itself? Ogea had the big bunt in Game 2, and came out swinging in Game 6. Using Hershiser's bat, he fouled off a pitch into the dirt in the second inning, which bounced up and hit him in the face. Unfazed, he then spanked a two-run single over the drawn-in first baseman. Ogea also slapped a double inside the first base line in the fifth.

He'd come around to score the third run. Ogea pitched a fine game, leaving in the sixth after walking leadoff batter Gary Sheffield. With runners at second and third and two out, Mike Jackson induced a ground ball to the hole between shortstop and third base. Omar Vizquel

made the defensive play of the Series on the ball, robbing Charles Johnson of a sure hit with a diving backhand stab and quick throw to first to nab the slow catcher.

I wasn't going to mention the triple Jose Mesa allowed in the ninth before the Indians made the win official- but why not?

Indians pitcher (and local product) Brian Anderson would later tell reporters that Chad Ogea would be available to pinch-hit in Game 7!

**World Series: Tribe 3, Marlins 3**.

As a Tribe fan, you know what happened in Game 7. I won't agonize over the toughest parts. In the bottom of the eleventh, I was standing with my finger on the TV power button, and shut it off as soon as the game ended. I've never seen the postgame celebration (except for the random, accidental glance at a photo).

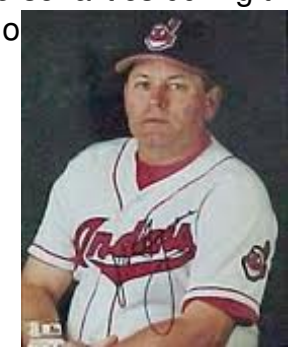
Hargrove had passed over Jaret Wright in favor of Chad Ogea for Game 2. He wanted to protect Wright from being exposed in two Series games. Ogea's performance had made certain the decision was a good one. But Wright's Game 4 performance convinced Hargrove that he could handle Game 7, even on only three days' rest. Wright pitched a great game, leaving in the seventh with a 2-1 lead. Although the Tribe allowed the game to be tied in the ninth- to be lost in the eleventh- they were warriors, having fought through adversity all through the playoffs. Some blame Tony Fernandez for the loss. I don't. Anyway, he'd been a hero subbing for Bip Roberts earlier in the postseason. I even heard someone blame Game 7 reliever Charles Nagy, but that doesn't make much sense.

No, I pretty much blame Jose Mesa. That October, Mesa clenched his sphincter so tightly, the national television feed actually picked up the squeaking sound through the parabolic mics at field level. It was broadcast to over 170 countries and Armed Forces Radio. Mesa's Game 7 meltdown was pretty tough to stomach. It had been repeatedly foreshadowed throughout October. Furthermore, since he was pitching with the lead, most of the pressure was actually on the opponent.

Omar Vizquel agrees with me. Here's a really good three-part chronicling of his take, and his post-1997 feud with Mesa.

And former Tribe catcher Tony Pena understands. Once, during a game back in 1995 vs. the Yankees, Pena was standing on the mound with Mesa. Searching for a way to get the pitcher to focus, Pena smacked Mesa in the face with his catcher's mitt in front of the entire crowd.

In second place on my blame list would be Mike Hargrove. Yes, he did a fine job with all of those different personalities during that era. His decision to start Wright in Game 7 was solid. And yes, he can o



nly play the players on his roster. Jose Mesa was his closer. But again: long before Game 7, Joe Table had morphed into a 5 gallon, red and yellow gasoline can. Most Tribe fans saw wisdom in having Mike Jackson put out fires in the ninth in that postseason. He was obviously a tough competitor, carrying himself as though he had a chip on his shoulder. He warranted that kind of faith. I've heard some mention of an injury Jackson had during the Series, but he pitched in the eighth inning of that Game 7 and looked fine to me.

Once the fourth starter on a three-man rotation in the 1997 ALDS, Chad Ogea ended the World Series with 2 wins and an era of 1.54. He was also the hitting hero in Game 6, with the season on the line. Most Tribe fans agree that he was their World Series MVP.

Some additional thoughts on Ogea:

* He was a member of perhaps the best draft in Cleveland Indians history. Manny Ramirez was

the big prize, but also taken by the Tribe in that 1991 draft were Herbert Perry, Paul Byrd, Albie Lopez and Damien Jackson. *(Every time I see the name of Damien Jackson, I laugh. Once, in a preseason baseball piece, one national publication named Cincinnati Reds Jackson and Barry Larkin as the top double play combination in the majors. Starting for the Tribe at the time? Omar Vizquel and Roberto Alomar. Yeah.)*

* After his playing career, Ogea earned a landscaping degree at LSU. He and a former LSU pitching coach are now in business together building and tending baseball diamonds.

* Ogea played for legendary coach Skip Bertman at LSU, helping the school win their first of several NCAA championships.

* Ogea and Brian Anderson are recent additions to the annual Cleveland Indians Fantasy Camp.

* The correct pronunciation of Ogea's name is apparently "AH-go". I had never heard that until recently. He was always known as "O.J." with the Indians- and this was during the era of O.J. Simpson's Bronco chase and trial for the murder of his wife and her friend.

Famously, Manny Ramirez was told that the police were "chasing O.J." in L.A.- while Chad Ogea was probably in the same locker room as Manny at the time. Manny's eyes widened, and he asked, "What did Chad do?"

*Thank you for reading.*