Who would have thought that the Minnesota Twins of all teams are headed toward 100 losses?

September 18th, 2011

Cleveland Indians - **6**

Texas Rangers - **5**

W: Justin Masterson (12-10) L: Carl Pavano (8-13) S: Chris Perez (34)

[BOXSCORE]

The sweep at the hands of the Cleveland Indians has pushed them pretty close. And it has also pushed our Tribe to the .500 mark and well on their way to finishing this season on a real high note and in second place.

Is second place meaningless? Perhaps, but in the grand scheme of things, it shows a whole lot of progress if you ask me. I don't know a team or a group of players that wouldn't feel good about a second place finish when they reflect back on the season. Was it first? Did they win the division? No, but they played damn good and it can give him a lot of confidence what they are capable of.

Especially since they did it with so many injuries and so many reasons not to.

It continues. The Indians had every reason to pack it in after the sweep to Texas. But this team, they just aren't going away quite yet
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"That's our new goal," Indians outfielder Shelley Duncan said following a 6-5 win over the Twins on Sunday. "We're going to take a lot of pride in finishing second. After the expectations people had for this team before the year, it would mean a lot to us. I also believe it'd mean a lot to the fans in Cleveland. They really got behind us this year."

See.. **Shelley Duncan** gets it. He gets it and this team gets it.

"I think finishing in second place would mean a lot to the guys in here, in terms of confidence for the organization and the fans."

Yep, he does... And his thoughts are echoed really. Manny Acta said the same, saying it was important to finish strong they are shooting to end this season on a positive note.

Nothing more positive than this turnaround here after a rough first half of the week. Not only did they come back and sweep the Twins, they did in grand fashion by scoring six in the seventh inning. Huge. It was a great weekend all around. It really is nice to see the fight still there, win or lose. Carl Pavano had stifled the Indians for much of this one. It was as much as a hit or a walk through the first six innings, then the walls fell in and Duncan stated and ended the demolition.

Duncan led off with a simple solo shot. From there, the Indians reached on an error, flied out, and grounded out into a force out. So, oh nothing, ho hum, get one run and it looks like it's going to be a quick inning with two outs.

Not. So. Fast. Marson singles and Fukudome walks and that is the end of Pavano. In comes a host of Twins relievers who all can't seem to find the zone and walk in two more runs. Thome singles off the fourth Twins pitcher of the inning, Glen Perkins, and then Shelley Duncan muscles a double to left to cap off the incredible inning.

"It's my fault," Gardenhire said. "I brought those guys in with the expectation they would throw the ball over the plate and take our chances. But they didn't do it, so I'll take the blame."

It really isn't Gadernhire's fault that any of the pitchers he tried couldn't throw strikes. But that's how it goes. Can you really stop Jim Thome from getting an infield single? If you can't, he must have placed it perfectly into a shift, or had jet packs on his shoes.

Let's go with the first option since that technology probably hasn't been perfected.

As much fun as that inning was, the game wasn't over. It was for **Justin Masterson** though, who went six innings and gave up three runs, but one of them earned off seven hits and a walk. Still, the six-run frame was enough for Masterson to be-line for the win.

"It was just one of those weird days," said Masterson, who is now tied with Josh Tomlin for the team high in wins. "It turned out to end up in our favor. I was hoping for four runs, and our guys were like, 'Hey, we'll score six for you.' You can't ask for much more than that."

It wasn't as easy as that though. In the eighth, Tony Sipp and Vinnie Pestano had some issues.

They gave up two runs before ending the inning and making it a one run game. But Chris Perez was able to shut the door and pick up his 34th save, so all good in the end, but still not an easy one in the least bit.

Random Details...

Joe Smith, clean seventh, boom. What a stud year this guy has had.

Shelley Duncan has now hit 10 home runs, with a vast majority of them coming in like, the past day. I mean seriously, how much of a roll has this guy been on? He can get hot and he can hit. He really should stick around with this team for next year and should have never been optioned out this year. He's a big part of what is going on right now and I really believe that.

Big Jimmy with a great weekend. He played in two games in his return to Minnesota, hit a home run against Joe Nathan on Friday (which proved to be really huge...) and then knocked in the go-ahead run in this one on Sunday. Not a bad return. The guy definitely has a flare for the dramatics.

Doesn't the name 'Brian Dinkelman" remind you of. Well it reminds me of something that I just can't think of right now. What I do need is someone to explain him going 7-for-9 in the last two games. As many hits as he got and as many times as he was on base, he scored one and knocked in one. Crazy.

Minnesota really goes for those average looking guys. Like Dinkelman and Luke Hughes and Joe Benson. But man they just find these players that turn out to be contributors. Nothing flashy, just winning. Granted they are not winning this season, but more times than not.

Seriously. Their entire lineup. Look at it. Drew, Joe, Brian, Luke, Chris, Trevor, Ben.

Um. I'm not really sure what I'm talking about at this point. I just know that the Twins are least likeliest to win a pickup basketball game. Unless they are all deadly three point shooters, which they might be. Paolo Espino tossed seven innings and gave up one run off four hits and a walk. Espino was great and really, the guy has been solid all year, regardless of what role or level the Indians put him at.

[COLUMBUS REPEATS; K-TRIBE ERA ENDS]

Congratulations to the repeat International League Champions , the Columbus Clippers! Columbus didn't need many chances, they put the IronPigs away in four games and beat Lehigh Valley 4-1 on Friday.

CC Lee picked up a two-inning save, striking out four in the process. With Putnam gone, Lee was really the man. He's got a future shot at the big leagues. It probably won't come early next season, but it will come. He's good.

Chad Huffman and Beau Mills had great postseasons. It was Jared Goedert who hit a solo home run and Paul Phillips who knocked in a run though. What's really strange is that Lehigh Valley's starter was former Tribe farmhand Ryan Edell. Crazy.

And how about Mike Sarbaugh? He's got magic in his hands or something. He's now won five minor league championships, including the third straight season a Sarbaugh-managed team has took home a League title. He's only missed the playoffs once as a manager and has been to six championship series all together.

The Clippers are not done yet. They've got one more game to play and it will be Tuesday in Albuquerque against Omaha for the Overall Triple-A National Championship. The Clippers won this title last year as well.

Unfortunately, the K-Tribe could not end their run as an Indians affiliate with a championship , but it was a damn good effort. Kinston dropped the fourth game of the Mills Cup and lost to Frederick 11-3 and the series 3-1. They gave up eight unearned runs (ouch) total in the 11-run third (yes they scored all their runs in the third) and that was clearly not going to be anything the K-Tribe could handle offensively.

Still it was a great way to end the relationship. In the playoffs and making a run for a title. The K-Tribe fans deserved it and even though Grainger Stadium was closed out with the other team celebrating a title win, the fans deserved that kind of season. Unfortunately for them, the Indians are moving on, moving to a different stadium with a different affiliate in 2012.

[FROM HERE AND BEYOND]

Manny Acta can now talk as if the race is over, because it is. The Tigers clinched Friday night and officially claimed the AL Central crown for this 2011 season. Congratulations to them. Whatever.

Acta was just another manager saying that he felt his team could contend at the start of the season. But as the first few months materialized and the Indians stayed with it into the summer months, his words were much more than simply a manager saying what he has to say.

Now a days, Acta won't blame injuries, but he certainly will elude to it hindering the offense, which is his number one reason as to why the Indians fell out of contention.

"Our offense, overall, if you want to simplify one, probably is a big reason for [not making the playoffs]," Acta said. "You can't hit below .250 as a team and expect to win the division -- unless you have over-dominant pitching. But again, why was our offense that way?"

GM Chris Antonetti went a step further and said it had a significant impact on the team this year. Antonetti also noted that this was the third youngest team in the American League and they were in it all the way to September.

More importantly than all that and what's happened, Acta is already looking forward to 2012 and putting up the expectations.

"A lot of things happened throughout the year," Acta said. "So I'm thinking we're going to be even better next year. There's no way that any of these guys are going to take a step backwards. That's the same way I felt coming in this year.

"I can't control injuries and stuff, but I can't see it getting any worse next year."

Acta isn't going to sugar coat things. That may be a bold thing to say about being even better next year. But he is right. Could the injuries get any worse than they got this year? I mean, heck, you never know, but I doubt it.

The thing I'm hopeful for the most is the fan support. A friend pointed out this link about the 12 sports teams that are "running out of fans."
Basically it is a look at the decrease in attendance and don't be surprised that three baseball teams top the list. And the number one team? Yep, the Cleveland Indians.

Basically they measure the percentage of attendance lost since 2001. The Indians decreased quite a bit. But that is expected. I don't think that means the Indians are "losing fans." We all know what happened. The Browns returned, the Cavs got LeBron, the Indians became third chair in a three-sport town.

So yeah, they saw a dramatic decrease in attendance. They are not "losing fans" though. That isn't to say, fans haven't been supporting them like they should, because quite frankly, they are not. This is the final homestand starting up here. There's a few doubleheaders, there are plenty of opportunities to go out and see the Tribe one last time. Start the initiative now and go out and

see the club one more time. I'm trying to find time in my hectic schedule to do so.

Start the movement now. Get to the ballpark and give this team your backing. They are still fighting, so you should still be supporting.

[RANDOM RUNDOWN]

Winter Ball will certainly be a topic of discussion around here with who goes and who doesn't. **Ubaldo Jimenez** is pondering it. Jimenez has done it in the past and found it helpful and the Indians are mindful of that and would allow him to do so, even if there is risk involved.

I think he needs it. He mentally feels it helps him. When you have something like that, with a mental factor involved, with him already making it up in his mind that it helps him, then I think it is something you strongly consider letting him do.

Jason Kipnis won't let up. He's one of the last people I worry about getting complacent and not fighting for his spot and playing hard. He's one of those players.

"My mind-set is, it's still up in the air," Kipnis said. "I've got to go out and compete during Spring Training, and I've got to earn that spot again. No one just hands out Major League spots or starting spots. It's something I'm going to be working hard for, and I'll try not to leave any doubt that they want me in that lineup."

Yeah, like I said, not worried.

The Indians finished the **Jim Thome** deal. They gave the Twins $20K. Fantastic. The question now becomes, what is Thome going to do ?

"I think it's really in Jim's hands," Antonetti said. "If Jim wants to play next year, I certainly think he'll have that opportunity. He's demonstrated this year that he continues to be a productive player when he's out there."

He reached his last plateau with 600 home runs, he really has only one thing left to do that there is to in a career like his. Win a title. If that's what he wants, he'll be back, because as Antonetti notes, he's going to find a job somewhere. Which is why Antonetti doesn't even say anything about evaluating or anything like that. He probably won't be in signing in Cleveland if he does want to come back to the game for another year.

The Hafner thing, it just presents too much of an issue and a roster clog if you have two guys who ONLY DH.

With that.. I'm officially retiring the Rafael Perez Tweet Watch. It was fun... But.. It wasn't fun.

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