You up? Good... Time to wrap this baby up, let's go, one more time for the regular season.

September 28th, 2011

Cleveland Indians - **4**

Detroit Tigers - **5**

W: Ryan Perry (2-0) L: Vinnie Pestano (1-2) S: Jose Valverde (49)

[BOXSCORE]

Hmm... Well... The season is over friends. It's almost hard to talk about this game here because... The season is over!

I guess we'll just start it off this way... I, like Manny Acta, am disappointed that the Indians did not finish this season with a .500 record. I know, some people are probably saying to themselves, "It's one game."

Yes, but it does signify something and in Acta and the team's mind, there's some validation in it.

"I'm disappointed that we couldn't at least finish with a .500 record," Acta said. "I thought we

played too well for too long to end up this way."

Now make no mistake about it, when he says "end up this way," that in no means is some horrible awful ending. It is actually just one game and the Indians have a lot to be proud of. Jim Leyland took his hat off to the Indians and is prepared for them to be back next year.

"You know what?" Tigers manager Jim Leyland said. "Most people picked the White Sox or Minnesota [going into the season], and really -- and rightfully so -- the talk of baseball for about four months was the Cleveland Indians, not the Detroit Tigers."

Before we go down any of that road though, let's talk about this game, because there was some significant stuff in there that we need to recap before we move on, recap this season, and preview next.

It was a most interesting start with Manny Acta getting ejected. Some speculate, or at least assume, that since Acta got ejected on purpose so he could let his long-time friend Tim Tolman manage a game. It was announced that Tolman will be stepping down as bench coach. Acta, pretty much said, laughable
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"I would never make a mockery out of a baseball game," Acta said. "If I wanted Tolman to manage a game, I didn't have to get thrown out of the game. I would've just handed the lineup card to him and let him manage the game. He didn't manage the game. I managed the game from the tunnel. All I did was sit in the penalty box, that's it."

He managed the game from the tunnel? Haha good to see that when the umpires eject someone, they make sure they leave.

(Acta pokes his head out from the tunnel)

"Hey... Hey Tolman! Take out McAllister... Bring in the rightie!"

On a serious note... Acta wasn't really sue why he got ejected. He was arguing balls and strikes, but didn't feel like what he did was something he should have been ejected for that quickly.

Anyway, the Indians got out to a nice lead on Rick Porcello. Zeke Carrera had a big triple in the third and in the fourth, it was 3-0 with a Super Jack single and a error by Wilson Betemit. Of course the Indians had a chance to add on with the bases loaded and one out, but of all people, speedy Zeke grounds into a double play.

The bottom of that inning was when the Tigers plated their only run against Zach McAllister, who went out and pitched his best game thus far in the finale. Heck, the run wasn't even an earned one and he walked just one person. The way the Tigers lineup mashed their way through this final month and in the previous two games how they roughed up the likes of Ubaldo Jimenez, you really got to credit McAllister.

It wasn't a B-Lineup either. Detroit had their full host of starters out from Miguel Cabrera to Victor Martinez. So give credit to McAllister, a great effort tonight in his last shot. Where guys like Gomez didn't make the most of their final final chance in 2011, McAllister certainly did, which is good to see heading into next year.

Offensively, Hafner had a few hits, scored a run, Hannahan had a few hits, knocked in two. Ultimately it came down to a rare bullpen collapse. Not a "hey let's test the rookies" or anything, this was a bullpen collapse. From Joe Smith blowing the lead to Vinnie Pestano losing the game, the Mafia in their last attempt of what was a stellar 2011, came up with a loss.

Let's not even talk about who did it to Vinnie in the eighth inning either. Okay? Okay!

All in all, it pretty much sums up the Indians season. Good start, rocky middle, close in the end, but ultimately just short. But it's something the team can hang their head high about.

"We made great strides," Acta said. "We fell short, but we had a lot of great moments. Some of the things that happened we couldn't control. Hopefully, we're going to be in it for a few years with the young core of players that we have here."

Some will look at the 11-game improvement and be like, yeah, big deal, 11 games. It's how they played those games though that really makes you believe there's something going on here. Travis Hafner said something about expectations for next year being really high and that this team is already thinking playoffs. Which is great. But for them, that was a goal this season.

"There are a lot of positives on the season," he said. "Our young players really developed. Our pitching staff really took some strides forward. We got off to a great start to the season. We had a lot of come-from-behind wins at home. I think we really got the excitement back as far as baseball in Cleveland. I think everybody's excited for next year. Obviously, our goal coming in was to win our division and make the playoffs. We came up short there, but certainly you look around and you see all the young talent that we have in the clubhouse and things definitely look bright for the future."

So now we look ahead right? I guess so. It was a fun season though. It was something that held our attention all the way into September. Some of us are still here, but when you can keep your entire fan base hanging around for a good few more months than you were expected to, that to me is a success.

I mean, how much more dull would this summer have been without the Indians? Even though a majority of the summer is actually when they started to kind of come down to earth, they were still in the race. The fun months were April and May, but it was still a glimmer of hope there.

And look at what happened last night. With two teams coming back from eight game deficits to win the both the AL and NL wild card. It just goes to show you that until you are mathematically eliminated, you are not eliminated in the game of baseball. So it truly wasn't until Detroit reached a new level on this season that the Indians really fell by the wayside.

All in all... We've got a 80-82 season, but also second place. We had a lot of injuries, but a lot of young players get to step up and get some valuable experience. You take the good with the bad and get that count started.

(It was at this point that I would have liked to include a countdown, but I don't have time to find one and the first one I found messed up.... Just know 189 days until Opening Day. Get with it!)

[COACHING SHAKE UP]

So, as mentioned, **Tim Tolman** is stepping aside. But he isn't stepping away. Th is is not a retirement or even a firing. Tolman has Parkinson's, so he's decided to step aside and transition into a baseball operations role with the team.

"I think it's time," Tolman said. "There's some slowness of movement involved that wouldn't allow me to do some of the things that I want to do on a daily basis. My feeling is that it's time for me to step away, make sure that I'm getting the right treatment and that we keep our handle on it."

Acta will now have to adjust to not having Tolman on his staff or in his ear. Tolman managed Acta in the minor leagues and was with him in Washington. Acta stated that Tolman is his mentor and he's going to miss having him on the bench with him.

"That was something that I envisioned since I started in the Minor Leagues," Acta said. "He's been my mentor throughout the Minor Leagues. He's a guy that when I was managing in the Minor Leagues, and I envisioned myself managing up here, I envisioned him being right next to me up until the end of my career.

"It's not going to be easy. He was the first guy I called for both managerial jobs that I have gotten already. I didn't envision it ending this way. It's going to be hard for me. He was a lot of help."

Tolman realizes that the team this year took a lot of good steps. Acta says he feels Tolman could still do what he needs to do to be the bench coach, but that stepping away would be the best move for his family.

"I have two families," Tolman said. "I have this family and my family at home. I have to take care of my wife, who's been great through this whole thing. I wouldn't be able to get through it like I did without her help.

"I felt like the body of work we had this year, with the way the team played, and Manny and I being together, I think that we did a great job."

So what's this mean? Tolman steps aside and there is an opening on the staff. Well naturally, I think we all know where everyone's mind is going to go.

With the possibility that **Sandy Alomar Jr**. could garner some interest from the South Side and their newly open position, it makes sense to elevate Sandy right now. That's exactly what the club is going to do. If he doesn't end up getting or being considered for the White Sox job, this will be his next step in development, because you know that day will soon come for him. He's going to manage in the big leagues, it's just a matter of where and when and not if.

"Sandy's very talented," Acta said. "I think eventually he's going to end up being a big league manager. I think being a bench coach, it's a good step for him. He's very prepared. He's got passion for the game and he's one of those few gifted guys that not only was a very good player, but also has the passion and the willingness to put the time into preparing for his duties."

And of course, if Sandy goes get a chance, no one's going to stand in his way. The plan is to make Sandy the bench coach, but I'm sure the Indians will adjust if he moves on. Either way, the promotion means that unless he gets a managerial job, he's staying in Cleveland, that's for sure.

Regardless of promotion, it means there is an open spot on the coaching staff. If Sandy leaves, there will be two, but they most certainly need to find someone to coach first base. The nice thing is, Sandy is still the catching guy, Steve Smith is still the infield guy, and you will have your pitching coaches back for another go.

Tolman was kind of designated as the guy who worked with outfielders and Manny roamed.

I know who the number one choice is for that first base job. I think you make sure Magic **Mike Sarbaugh**
doesn't get away with another job and get him on the big league staff and do it right now. He's earned it. There's nothing left for him to prove in the minor leagues and it would be a shame to lose him to another organization at this point. Get him up to the big leagues.This should be an easy one.

[RANDOM RUNDOWN]

We talked a lot about strides a little earlier and to me, there was a real big stride that one player took. It had nothing to do with his performance, although that was certainly nice and we all know he took a huge step in that department. But performance aside, one player took a tremendous step in terms of being a leader for this team.

Asdrubal Cabrera demonstrated that in the finale, forcing himself into the lineup . Take in mind, Acta had "probably" ruled him out
for last night's game.

"He came in and said he wanted to play," Acta said. "I was trying to rest him and play the kids, but he wants to play. He wants to be out there for the final game to set an example for the kids."

Cabrera said he is happy for his season and his numbers, but he's proud of two other things a little more. He is proud that the team finished in second and proud that he stayed on the field. And really, that's big. With all the injuries the guy went through this year and in previous years even. He had some dings and bruises through out the year, but he stayed healthy enough to play the entire season.

That shows guts and it shows the rest of the team that you are in it until they force you off the field. That's a mentality that kind of spreads and it sets a huge precedent with the other players. That is leadership whether you intend it to be or not.

Overall, Cabrera is a leader vocally and by example. He took a huge step this season in cementing his leadership of this team. He's our guy and his numbers not only proved it, his will and guts did.

The whole second place thing? Well, the Indians gathered around a television after their loss to Detroit to see what the White Sox were doing in Toronto. As if their playoff hopes hinged on it, right?

"I heard them," Indians manager Manny Acta said with a grin. "I heard all the oohs and ahhs and all the celebration. It's gratifying in a way. We were disappointed that we didn't make the playoffs, but we shifted gears and placed importance on finishing second."

You see, there is'a little more of a bonus ($10K per player) for the team that finishes in second. Acta and the team referred to it as "Pride Plus 10."
Ah yes, money. Of course!

Grady Sizemore will be in Colorado on Monday to visit Dr. Richard Steadman for a examination on his right knee. That is the same doctor who performed surgery on his left knee last year. So uh oh, what's up? Well right now, not a whole lot. It's just to get an idea of what the best route is to take in regards to that knee. There is no plans of surgery, and it's simply to get a doctor's opinion.

"We're going out there just with Grady's best interest in mind," Soloff said, "both short term and long term. We're open to [Steadman's] assessment and his recommendation."

You better freakin' believe that the Indians are going to cover every single base in terms of Grady and his health goes. With that $8.5 million club option out there (that I don't think they pick up regardless, we'll eventually get to that though), there is no way that the Indians are not

going to do their due-diligence in regards to his health.

[WHERE WE GO FROM HERE]

Speaking of health.... I'm drained, tired, beat-up, exhausted. Mentally, this season has been fun, but it has also been draining. On a personal note, I've decided in recent months in a shift of career aspirations. Most of you who read this post every morning and all the other stuff I've done on the blog and at Cleveland Fan that I had aspirations of someday covering the game of baseball for a living.

Reality has sort of set in over the past few months and also has opportunities to pursue something I love equally, if not more. I love baseball. What I don't love is the prospect of some of the things that goes in to being a full-time journalist.

What I do love, is this. Doing this. And I'm happy to say I'm going to be doing this for awhile. I'm still a writer at heart and in a way, this works. I graduate from The University of Akron next spring (just think, when that's happening, we'll be will into our first month of the 2012 season) with a double major in Communications.
At this point, I still have to go through the application process, but a week after I graduate, the overall plan is to immediate start Graduate School where I'll be pursuing a masters in Higher Education. I've ultimately found a passion in life that I'd like to make a career. Baseball is still there though. In a way, this works for me. I love writing about the Tribe, but I love doing it my way. With the blog and thanks to awesome people like Rich and Brian from the Cleveland Fan, I can do it my way.

That's rare, that's really rare in the world of journalism. To get to do what you want to do. I have that opportunity. Is it one that I'll make a living off of? No, heck no. But I don't need to. I do this because I enjoy it and ultimately, I'm going to continue to do it. It's on my terms.

I'm living out my "dreams" as an intern right now covering High School games. I'm getting the full experience. It is great, I like doing it, but ultimately it isn't what I want to do for the rest of my life. This is what I want to do and I'm going to keep doing it.

So a separate set of thanks. To the people who've been with the blog from the start and especially the nut-jobs that follow my antics on Twitter. And of course to the readers at The Cleveland Fan who have joined in on my madness since I started last July. Thanks for putting up with me. I look forward to what I think we all is a even better 2012.

Morning Rundown will not be every day going forward, simply because the links won't be as plentiful. But it will remain a staple of what I do throughout the offseason, especially since it is expected to be, at least in my mind, one of the busier offseason the Indians will be a part of in a long time. That isn't to say they're going to be spending, but there will be some moves made and decisions to ponder.

Keep a look out for Morning Rundown at both the Fan and on the blog. But also look for other features by myself and if your reading this at the Fan, keep an eye out on Hitting the Fan. I will be sure to touch up on any breaking Hot Stove news revolving the Tribe as soon as possible.

Thanks for a wonderful 2011 to the readers and especially to the team, for giving people like myself something to write about. There's nothing worse than waking up in the morning or sitting up at night trying to write this when it revolves around a team that isn't interesting.

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You can read more Morning Rundown and other features on Nino's blog, The Tribe Daily .

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