The Indians play the Royals like 18 times, or something like that. Right? Just checking...

April 13th, 2012

Cleveland Indians - **8**

Kansas City Royals - **3**

W: Derek Lowe (2-0) L: Luke Hochevar (1-1)

[BOXSCORE]

April 14th, 2012

Cleveland Indians - **11**

Kansas City Royals - **9**

W: Jairo Asencio (1-1) L: Greg Holland (0-1) S: Chris Perez (2)

[BOXSCORE]

April 15th, 2012

Cleveland Indians - **13**

Kansas City Royals - **7**

W: Ubaldo Jimenez (1-0) L: Luis Mendoza (0-2)

[BOXSCORE]

This past weekend is exhibit A in two different arguments that needs to be made about April baseball.

The first, do not get too low on your team's offensively sputtering start. Especially since said team was far from horrible. I mean, the reaction around Cleveland was as if the Indians had been shut out in their first five games. Hand off the panic button.

The second, do not going thinking the Indians are some offensive juggernaut.

We're talking about the Kansas City Royals and the half of the roster they call a pitching staff. This team is going to hit this year (and it is of no surprise to me they made that comeback in the second game), but they are going to struggle when it comes to throwing the ball over the plate to the opposition.

If anything, I'm shocked they didn't come roaring back in the game on Friday. If anything, credit Derek Lowe for doing what Ubaldo Jimenez and Josh Tomlin could not do. Kill the Royals when they were down.

Let the jokes roll though, right? Johnny Damon is already having an impact on this offense!

And he's not even playing...

It took only a few paragraphs for a Johnny Damon reference, so I will go ahead and refrain from it until later on, we've got some games to dissect. Overall, there was one thing the Indians did well in this series against the Royals and it was very clear in the Sunday win.

Two... Out... Hitting...

"Something we started last year was just worrying about having a quality at-bat," Indians manager Manny Acta said. "It's not basketball. The clock is not going to run out. The two-out rally is something we take pride in."

That wins you a lot of ball games and will score you a lot of runs. If you can hit with two outs, you'll score and you'll also break the spirit of the other team. Just look at the runs scored with two outs this weekend.

Friday: 5 out of 8

Saturday: 2 out of 11

Sunday: 12 out of 13

19 out of your 32 runs scored came with a two-out hit. That's well over half and well done if you ask me. The one game the Indians didn't score a majority of them with two outs was Saturday and in that one, it took til the 10th inning when Choo hit the double for them to get any. When you score 9 without two outs, then you're doing something right before hand.

So all in all, you can't play better offense than the Indians did this past weekend.

But temper your excitement for that simple fact that this is the Royals we are talking about. Again, the Royals. Now I'm not saying to take the weekend with a grain of salt, not in the least bit. But just as you shouldn't have gone crazy thinking the Indians were going to sputter offensively, don't go thinking they'll bash everyone's brains in like they did against Kansas City.

However, get excited for the way the team scored their runs, because again, you get a two-out hit, you're doing things right. The home run offense is nice, but it won't carry you far. The offense the Indians used to win these three games, that carries and that's how you play.

Some of the stars of this explosion...

You think **Shelley Duncan** is worried about his job security with Damon signing?

Hawkman on the weekend: 3-8, 5 R, 4 RBI, 5 BB, 2 K

Just goes to show you that you don't have to hit to produce. The guy was on base more than half of the time he went up to the plate. And the thing is he was doing this even the first five games. It wasn't on the scale in which he did it against the Royals, but in five games he walked three times and had five hits. His numbers flipped. He's getting on base and he's being a productive left fielder worthy of playing every day and hitting where he's hitting in that lineup.

Oh and that moon shot on Sunday? That was some serious #HawkBlood

You know what's fun? Not knowing who to highlight next because there are so many good performances to chose from.

But I might as well mention that the enigma that **Michael Brantley** was in the first five games was a little more clear. After going 1-for-17 (you heard me) and hitting .059 going into the series against Kansas City, the Indians center fielder raised his average to .206 in a single weekend.

Brantley was 6-for-17 with four runs scored and three runs batted in against KC. A complete 180 shift from what he was doing the first few games of the year. This is the team's leadoff hitter, the guy setting the table most of the time. He needs to do this type of stuff. Brantley's best game was Sunday and it came when he just simply put bat on ball. He had an infield hit and his RBI knock was turned into a double with some hustle. That's how Brantley needs to keep playing the game.

If anything, he more than Duncan is the one in the spotlight with Johnny Damon coming soon. His ass is on the line because he is in a prominent position on this squad. He's hitting leadoff. He's setting the tone and he's the one the team needs getting on base. Duncan is hitting. If Brantley isn't and Damon needs playing time, the Indians will FIND a way to make that work

and it may cost Brantley some time or his job.

I would go no further than to what Brian McPeek said better than I could even restate .

Why? Well, as old as he is Damon has always and still plays the game hard. He's a dirt bag and I've watched him throw his body around the field for nearly 20 years. I've never questioned Damon's intensity and passion and I've always admired the production he's given whichever team he's played for. Contrast that to Brantley who looks walks around as though he's disinterested and aloof and who doesn't always look like he's putting forth an abundance of effort and I'd rather have the guy busting his ass, even if he can't throw a ball from one end of the dugout to the other.

So there ya go Brantely. There's your motivation to not suck. Damon is coming and if you don't pick it up, you may be the one sitting, not Shelley Duncan.

Overall, it's hard not to highlight anyone. So here's how the rest of the lineup stacked up this weekend.

Asdrubal Cabrera: 6-16, 5 R, 2 RBI, 1 BB (1 HR) - This team is at it's best when Cabrera is scoring runs and not knocking them in. His production is nice but this team thrives if he's on base and scoring five out of seven times.

Shin-Soo Choo: 4-13, 3 R, 6 RBI, 1 BB - He had the big hit on Saturday to win the game, but things are good when he only has four hits, but knocks in six runs and still manages to score three more.

Travis Hafner: 3-9, 2 R, 1 RBI, 1 BB (1 HR) - After an 0-for on Friday and a day off on Saturday, Pronk came back in a big way on Sunday. His home run was just as majestic as Shelley's was. He made use of his first start in the four-hole since last season.

Casey Kotchman: 5-11, 5 R, 3 RBI, 3 BB (2 HR) - For all the abuse he took to start the season, he sure did laugh back all the people that made fun of him.

Jason Kipnis: 4-11, 4 R, 5 RBI, 1 BB (2 HR) - He wasn't supposed to play much on Saturday with the off day, but after Hannahan's ejection, Kipnis was inserted (Lopez was DHing) and he had himself a game, then followed it up on Sunday by homering for the second straight game.

Notice one name missing from that list of players? How about Carlos Santana who was still 3-9 with two walks, a run scored and two runs batted in. Santana did not play on Sunday though, so he missed out on the biggest production day of the year.

That's when you know things are good. When you're best offensive producer can sit down for the day and not be used and the team scores more runs than they have all season.

All this is fun and good and showing off all the nice pretty stats for the hitters is something that makes you feel better about the first five games. But there were some other storylines at work here this past weekend.

First... **Ubaldo Jimenez**... He got a win, perhaps to make up for the one he deserved last Saturday, because he certainly didn't pitch like a winner on Sunday.

Jimenez managed to get through five with the lead after the Indians big third inning. But he was not the pitcher he was the first time out. He gave up the nine hits and three walks , but he was working slowly, not getting ahead in the count and just overall not being very efficient. Against the Blue Jays he only struck out three, but throughout the game he was getting ahead and getting hitters to roll over with ground outs and hit lazy fly balls. He was working quickly and just overall looked locked in.

Against the Royals? He was working slow and not getting ahead. I don't know if the two have anything to do with each other, but it would seem as if they go hand in hand. He just didn't look like the same pitcher and that is really concerning. Was it the seven days of rest? Jimenez doesn't think so and I don't either.

"The first three innings, it was hard to get in a good rhythm," said Jimenez, who refused to use rustiness as an excuse. "I didn't have command with my fastball."

I'm not sure how to pinpoint why Jimenez wasn't in a rhythm but it better not continue. We need to see the Jimenez we saw on Saturday. He needs to get the ball, get the sign, and go. When he was laboring he was getting the ball, walking around in a pacing like manner, taking his glove off... He was wasting time. It didn't look like he was locked in and it didn't look like he had his head in the game.

Random Details...

Derek Lowe gave up 11 hits, but from the Josh Tomlin school of control, you can do that when you don't walk anyone. It was not Lowe's best outing on Friday, but it was effective and with the offensive backing he got, it made enough for a win as he pitched into the seventh inning and hadn't even reached 100 pitches. And he did it all with a quick warmup . Such a pro, such a vet.

The final out in that seventh inning was nabbed by **Tony Sipp**, who other than that out, has struggled in all of his appearances thus far. He pitched in all three games and on Sunday he was a bit better with a clean frame, but he labored Saturday night and of course last week against Toronto. Inconsistency is not what you want right now.

I want to credit the bullpen for sticking with it as best they could Saturday, but I simply can't. Josh Tomlin does not factor into this equation. He's simply an extra arm right now until the Indians throw him out on Thursday against the Mariners . He had a rocky time out in relief of Jeanmar Gomez, but he got through a few innings and managed to get the game to the pen at a manageable point.

And they simply did not get the job done. Smith, Sipp and Pestano were all tagged for runs. They slowly let the game drip away and if not for Choo, who knows what would have happened. However credit Asencio for striking out a pair in the ninth to get it to that point and Chris Perez for making rather quick work in the 10th for his second save.

Jason Donald fed off the hitting mojo. He originally started at second and moved to third after the Hannahan ejection on Saturday and went 2-4 with a RBI. I'll continue to bemoan every time I see him but if he can knock in runs every other time he goes out, I guess I'm fine with Jose Lopez for now . A two-run double is nice.

Oh and the Indians have homered in all eight games so far to start the season. So as bad as the offense was, they still put runs on the board and have this very weird streak going to start the year. Go figure.

[MARKED MAN?]

Shin-Soo Choo's battle with...well...everyone that throws at or near him reached a boiling point on Saturday when Choo was face to face with the man who broke his thumb last year. When with San Francisco, Jonathan Sanchez hit Choo with a pitch and shattered his thumb. The two are now reunited with Sanchez's arrival in Kansas City.

And Sanchez hit him again on Saturday .

"I know he didn't hit me on purpose," said Choo, who now has been hit three times already this season. "But still, I have a memory of last year."

But that didn't stop Choo from getting a little feisty. Again. Yes again. It was just a week ago Choo was miffed when Toronto got a little too close and now benches cleared again when Choo was beaned by Sanchez. Even though Choo believed it wasn't intentional, he simply got heated at Sanchez and told him to throw it over the plate.

It's understandable and I get it. No one wants to get hit, especially when it injured Choo last year. But he needs to reign things in. The fire is great and I like it, but he can't get irritated every time someone hits him. It's baseball and it's going to happen, especially if you are a good player

who pitchers want to pitch in on. He just has to wear it and take that anger back up to the batter's box next time like he did in the tenth inning.

In reality, it cost the Indians a starting pitcher. Had Choo simply put his head down and taken his base, the Indians evidently don't lose Manny Acta and Jack Hannahan, but they perhaps keep Jeanmar Gomez too. When the benches clear, the warning is given from the umpires and then retaliation is clear.

Gomez hits Moustakas and that likely is the warning and he stays in the game. It's as simple of that. It ruined what could have been a nice little outing for Gomez as he was cruising through with no issues. Acta wasn't too pleased losing his starter and putting his bullpen in a tough spot.

"I believe he's trying to protect his teammate," Acta said. "He went overboard a little bit on that one. First of all, there was a warning in place. Once you hit a guy, you're going to be thrown out of the game. That early in the game, it really taxes your bullpen."

All in all, the Indians survived, they also made it through Sunday despite their starter going five innings in that one and now they have a much needed off day on Monday to get the bullpen back to full strength. And Choo came up with the game-winning hit on Saturday, which makes it all good. Everything seemed to subside on Sunday as well and as mentioned, these team's have a lot of games left, so hopefully no bad blood lingers . Although it would be fun if a little rivalry ignited with these slugging youngsters as they have a bright future.

[THE UNOFFICIAL DAMON]

The worst kept secret in baseball right now is that **Johnny Damon** will become a Cleveland Indian. When? Not really known,
but the reports look to be true
, or I don't think Damon would be telling everyone that he's headed to the Tribe.

"I had a conversation with them today," Damon said on Thursday. "I told them I've been staying in great shape, been running, been throwing, been hitting, been playing soccer. So I told them I

feel like I could be ready in a couple of days. But I understand the grind of standing between innings and all that stuff, so I think I'm going to go out and work out for a week, and hopefully that's enough.

"Like I said, I've kept myself in pretty good shape, and I'm just excited that Cleveland is giving me this opportunity to see what I can do and also go help out a young team and provide some leadership to them."

We've gathered that the Indians have signed Damon to a $1.25 million dollar deal with a extra $1.4 million to be made in incentives. Damon also has what is being called a "greener pasture's clause" in where he has a handshake agreement with Cleveland that he can go elsewhere if Grady Sizemore returns and is essentially unhappy with his playing time. There is nothing in the contract that states this specifically but it is certainly one of the most creative things the Indians have ever done and they've done some creative things before.

The Indians continue to dance around the subject though as the deal is not official. It seems to be the Indians are waiting to get Damon situated, get the go-ahead from MLB, check Damon out physically and develop a plan of attack in getting him ready to play in Cleveland. The report is that he's going to sign officially on Monday and get worked out in extended spring training. The Indians will basically sign him to a minor league deal, get him ready, send him to Columbus and get him to Cleveland as soon as possible. Terry Pluto says the Indians believe May is the target and he could even stop at Akron, probably depends on who's playing at home.

So, out of sight, out of mind right now. The Indians are hitting well right now. I still think the move is knee-jerk based off a few games and that the start only hastened the desire to get something done with Damon, but that he really is not an answer, what this team did this past weekend is. It will be nice to have another bat like Damon, but he's not fixing anything that's incredibly broken. Pluto goes on to note that Damon likely platoons with Duncan, with Damon getting right-handers (a majority of the starts) and Duncan contining to play against left-handers. But Damon will likely stay in the lineup if he hits by playing DH (no more Jose Lopez) and maybe even some first base.

He will be reunited with a few teammates, Derek Lowe from his time with Boston, Shelley Duncan with his time with New York, and Casey Kotchman from his 2011 with the Rays. Kotch

man had high praise
...

"Johnny has a lot to offer any team," Kotchman said. "He's a winner, as history shows. He brings energy and is always upbeat. He never has a bad day. To have him on the [Tampa Bay] team last year was critical. Over the course of six months, you're going to have ups and downs. It's nice to have somebody there who has been there and done that. Johnny always brings a positive attitude."

It's never bad to have a nice presence in the clubhouse, but he just should worry about hitting and being somewhat serviceable in the outfield, because that's where he's playing.

[TIGER WATCH]

Looks like we may be having to keep an eye on the Chicago White Sox now too. The White Sox have now started 3-1 in the division after taking two out of three from the Tigers this past weekend. If not for a Rick Porcello gem or a postponement, it could have been 5-0 or 5-1.

The Tigers scored just three runs in two losses to the Sox, falling to Jake Peavy and Gavin Floyd. There are two things that stick out in terms of what I said in my AL Central Preview .

1.) The White Sox can be really dangerous if their pitching comes through... See that series as Example A.

2.) The Tigers may be a great hitting lineup, but that ultimately loses to great pitching. It will also win games, Example A and B with their first two games and then Porcello on Sunday.

Looks like a muddling division to me right now. Game On...

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Nino has a blog and it's so entertaining it should be nominated for most entertaining blog competitions. Give it a vist at The Tribe Daily .

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