It's rather hard to be so critical of the last loss of a road trip in where your team ventured off to the West Coast and managed to go 7-2. However, it's hard to put too much stock into said road trip when the three teams you racked up some wins against are the Kansas City Royals (proud owners of a 10-game losing streak), Seattle Mariners (proud victims of a Phil Humber perfect game), and the Oakland Athletics (proudly the most offensively challenged team in the American League). But uh, let's try to make sense of it all.

April 22nd, 2012

Cleveland Indians - **1**

Oakland Athletics - **5**

W: Tyson Ross (1-0) L: Justin Masterson (0-2)

[BOXSCORE]

Most fresh in our minds is the loss on Sunday to Oakland, in which the Indians dropped the final game of the series in depressing fashion. But the Indians did win the series and the previous two, which means they had a very successful road trip that included an early swing through the AL West.

While **Justin Masterson** did his best to lose one game (in which the Indians pulled off that remarkable comeback), he will only be credited with one of the two losses on this road trip. It is both concerning and kind of uplifting (in a hey look what we can do with our best starting pitcher not pitching well sort of a way) that you're best pitcher has now thrown up three real concerning starts after his opening day gem.So we might has well start with the bad.

So what's the problem overall? We saw what he did April 5th, what has changed in just a few weeks? Why is the guy imploding? He went from walking two hitters in his first two starts to walking 10 in his last two.

Uh well, let's start with that problem that once plagued Justin Masterson before he became that guy the Indians could rely on to be their horse.

Left-handed hitters. The Oakland A's did what any team would logically do. They loaded up on the left-handed hitters. This is something they've done in the past and on Sunday, every hitter minus Kurt Suzuki and Yoenis Cespedes were hitting left-handed against Masterson. He now has given up 18 of his 23 hits to left-handed hitters and 8 of his 12 walks to left-handed hitters.

Look no further. Masterson is struggling against the left-handed hitters again. Seattle did the same thing, starting seven of their nine hitters as either switch-hitters or left-handed. Chicago? They're naturally more right-handed than left and the one walk would seem to indicate there are some legs to this theory. Toronto also had more right-handers than left-handers.

We're creeping dangerously close to this being a problem. This was not an issue last year. In fact, he walked more right-handed hitters (while facing significantly more left-handed hitters) than he did left-handed hitters. The lefties hit better off of him (and hit more HR) and he struck out more righties, but the point is he did his job and he didn't let that left-handed hitter lay off his pitches and work a walk.

Early on, he's looking a lot like 2010 Masterson, which wasn't bad, but wasn't great. 2010 Masterson let up 46 walks in 443 plate appearances by left-handers compared to 27 walks in 359 plate appearances by right-handed hitters.

The start against Seattle was taken with a grain of salt because it seemed to be a blip on the radar. He was acting like Ubaldo in that he was working slow and looking not himself. But he sort of looked himself on Sunday but was not getting the results. He's laboring against the left-handers and I hope teams continue to challenge him with the lopsided lineup. He proved he can be successful against his bugaboo last year, and he needs to do it again. Right now, Masterson says that he's 'close' and just missing his spots .

"The ball is moving," Masterson said. "The ball is moving a lot and we're really close. We're not trying to pick the corners, but we seem to be right there and just missing. We're just really close. It's nothing way out -- nothing crazy. It's just something that's happened."

Boy, I sure hope so. Masterson would go on to say that he's trying to improve against all hitters and that it's 'the same for all of them.'

Well ya it's about being consistent Justin, but it isn't all the same. We've seen this before and it is not a pretty sight.

Now what was a pretty sight was this road trip as a whole. A lot of people will say that the loss on Sunday needs put into perspective. It was only two of nine on the road trip and even though the Indians failed to sweep, they end the road trip doing what they really just needed to do. Win the series. They won all three. They won all three against three teams they need to beat. That is what you need to do. You win series and you win the games you are supposed to win. They are supposed to beat these three teams and they did. They should have been in a position to sweep based off having won the first two and having Justin Masterson on the mound for the finale, but again, you do not get upset at this west coast swing.

A lot of people in turn will say, well yeah, they are supposed to win those games, so do not get too excited. These three teams are cellar dwellers right now, playing as if they should be, showing talent that dictates just that. Kansas City's pitching is awful, Oakland can't hit, and Seattle is just Seattle. There should be absolutely no reason for the Indians to not have a successful road trip, so good job for doing what you are supposed to do.

I think both groups of people are right. But it's more of a little bit of both than it is dominantly one or the other. It's a little bit of the same idea we had with the blowout in Kansas City. You need to temper your excitement, but also realize that there is something there. The Indians won't go 7-2 on every road trip or home stand, because they won't face a trifecta of teams like that every time out. But they're a team capable of winning games.

"I'm very happy with the way we played on the road," Indians manager Manny Acta said. "It was a very good road trip. Winning three series, that's something that you don't see very often. We came out and played well after starting shaky at home, so I'm happy about that."

So, like we said last week. Don't get too excited, but get a little excited. Winning the first three road series is something the Indians haven't done since 1988 (this guy wasn't born yet), so it's something not easily done.

Random Details...

Travis Hafner walked two more times, which made it six total in the three games against Oakland. He now leads the American League in on-base percentage and is one of three players over .500 (Kemp at .500, Hafner .509, and Wright .510). He's tied with teammates Shelley Duncan with 12 walks and is one behind teammate Carlos Santana for second in the AL.

Hafner's RBI double in the first inning which led to the only run was pretty much a home run without that extended wall. Choo's double that was hit was also a home run if that wall wasn't there. The A's have those additional pads in right and left, with it being open in the center. Those were some hard-hit streamers.

Those were just two of the four hits as the Indians were stifled over-all by Tyson Ross in terms of the hit. But he too had some issues with the walk as he issued five free passes.

The Indians let perhaps another opportunity go by the wayside in the second after Aaron Cunningham reached on a fielders choice and Jack Hannahan was safe after an error. It gave the Indians two on and one out with Lou Marson at the plate. Unfortunately Hannahan didn't

read the pitcher well and got caught up in a rundown and Lou Marson grounded out despite a tough at-bat.

Had Marson come through, it would have been another two-out RBI (Hafner's was) and just a continuation of what seems to be this team's calling card early on.

"It's quality at-bats. That's it," Indians manager Manny Acta said. "That's what we concentrate on regardless of how many outs there are. Hey, when you have traffic, good things will happen."

Nick Hagadone's final outing before returning to Columbus was blemished by some baffling defense. Jason Donald fielded a ball deep in the hole cleanly, but couldn't get enough on a throw that brought Jose Lopez off the bag. That wasn't the bad play.

Lopez fumbled around with the ball and nerdy glasses wearing Eric Sogard came motoring around third and was able to score thanks to Lopez. Not Hagadone's fault, but not an error and an earned run for him.

In that light, I think it sucks that Hagadone is getting called back when Cabrera returns. I think Hagadone is one of the better arms right now. If Tony Sipp keeps pitching the way he is, I'd almost rather see them make that swap. I think Dan Wheeler has almost run his course though, so we'll see Nick soon enough.

[OTHER GAME STORYLINES]

There are some other things to point out. The Indians very much went with their 'B' lineup in this game on Sunday. With Asdrubal Cabrera out already, they gave Carlos Santana a break as well as Shelley Duncan. Two of the most productive bats sitting in addition to another one of those productive bats? Ouch.

The Indians have scored just a total of four runs in the three games they've started three or

more reserves. It's also accounted for half of their losses. Jack Hannahan has been on fire, but he should be nowhere near the sixth spot in the lineup, which is where he was on Sunday.

It was the first game that Shelley Duncan did not start in left field. He had Choo had been the only ones to have started every contest thus far. Which is sort of interesting considering that Johnny Damon guy is now in the fold. Granted, Cunningham would often come in for defense late and the off days have been nice, but it's interesting that Duncan is one of the two people Acta did not sit until now.

Casey Kotchman was also sat down in the midst of 0-16 slump. However I'd rather have that in there than the bumbling around of Jose Lopez on defense. The guy hit two home runs last weekend, so I think he'll be alright. Everyone does need a break, but, I'm not sure it's necessary with the off day on Monday.

Ubaldo's game on Friday... Wow. I tell you... The point was made (I think by Manny Acta) that the good pitchers fine a way to win games even when they don't have it. That Jimenez did. He's managed to get to 2-0 despite not having his greatest stuff two times out now. Which I guess is more than you can say about Justin Masterson.

But five more walks, he definitely was flirting with danger against the A's on Friday. He gets some timely hits from his offense, leaves with a lead, manages to find his way through six and he's 2-0. I guess you take it and like Masterson, hope the best is yet to come .

"I still have a lot of work to do," Jimenez said. "I have to keep working hard during my bullpen sessions and things like that. I'm trying to find a way to find myself for my next game."

Jeanmar Gomez pitched well in, what I guess we'll finally call his 2012 starting debut. I guess last week was his official starting debut, but this was his first chance to actually pitch. Gomez shut the A's down for five innings before letting a run slide in the sixth. He only tossed 88 pitches into the sixth, but you have to remember he's pitched in just two innings his first start, he's still building up.

But Gomez, great effort in what Manny Acta said was not even his best stuff...

"We were worried a little bit about his stamina and pitch count," said Acta, who turned to reliever Dan Wheeler when Gomez reached 88 pitches. "This guy hadn't thrown more than two innings since like the third week of March. But, he got better as the game went on. He didn't have his best stuff, but he did battle."

Well I guess none of the starters have their best stuff. Masterson bleck, Jimenez so-so, Lowe, arf, Tomlin, seems to have turned it around, Gomez, battling.

I hope they all get their best stuff soon.

[RANDOM RUNDOWN]

Josh Tomlin went toe-to-toe on Thursday with King Felix. He was masterful in his second start and seems to have put some of the early season worries to rest. And he was given some credit from Phil Humber after the White Sox starter threw a perfect game against the Mariners. Humber said he watched what Tomlin did in his eight-inning masterpiece and worked off that.

He also happens to be a good friend of Josh Tomlin.

"We're good friends," Tomlin said. "I wasn't nervous watching. I'm happy for him -- don't get me wrong. I'm excited for him. He deserves it. He works hard."

Great for Humber... Nice of Tomlin to help him out.

Johnny Damon Watch: The veteran has been in extended and he has been playing against some young-bucks. He hit a home run on Saturday and looks to be "on track"

for a May debut. You have to think he'll be in the minors at some point this week.

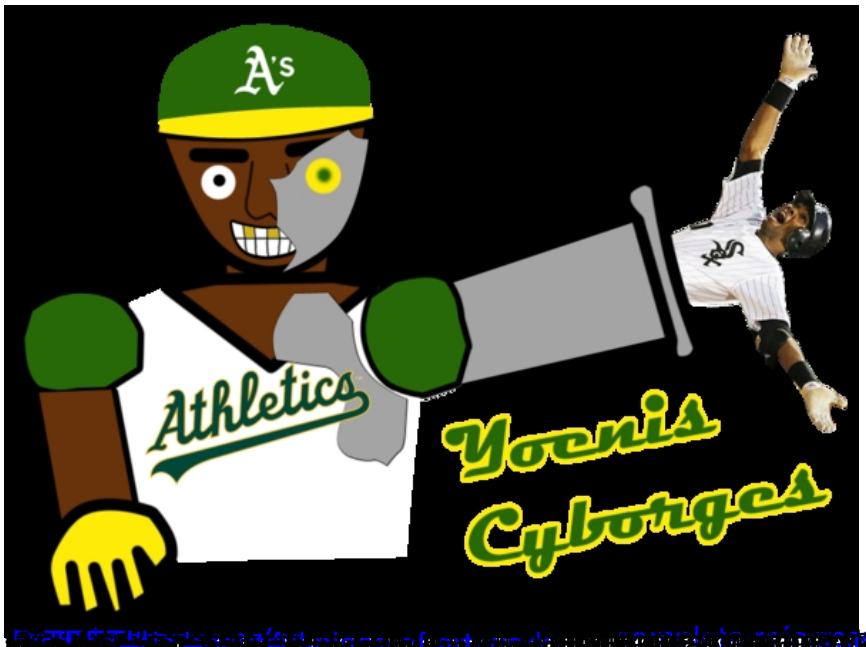
The Clippers will be receiving **David Huff**, fresh off his activation from the Indians 15-day disabled list. He was activated and immediately optioned to Columbus. Couldn't have come at a better time as **Kevin Slowey** was scratched on Sunday after he was hit by a line-drive in batting practice on Friday. More on that situation whenever there's more, but right now, that depth isn't needed.

Great analysis over at Waiting for Next Year on the UniWatch competition. Mentioned the opening up of that "rebranding" contest that the UniWatch blog was putting on for the Cleveland Indians and Washington Redskins. There were 35 entries for the Indians, many of which reused the old "Spiders" moniker and some more creative ones.

As cool as some of these look (and as bad as some do, when did we get Strasburg?)... I'm pretty holding firm that this is just a nice little way to see what people can come up with, but no real groundwork in getting anything changed. I will not like any of these other ideas better than the Cleveland Indians. I've avoided voicing my opinion on the "Indians" name on this space and will continue to do so. I like the current look, I like Block C, I like Wahoo... I like the Cleveland Indians. I mean, it looks cool, but the
Cleveland Deers
? DEERS?! If a deer ran across downtown Cleveland, it wouldn't survive.

And if anything, I would never rock a hat that had a spider on it. Eww.

I do appreciate a good tribute to the midges though. And I can appreciate the idea of just calling the team "The Cleveland Tribe" but that has no ring to it. I mean, I use the Tribe more than I do the Indians, but I just say the Tribe, not the Cleveland Tribe. It just doesn't have a good ring to it.



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