I'm perfectly okay with a weekend series against the Angels in which the team takes two out of three games. Set aside the fact that they are struggling. It doesn't matter because they are talented and are capable of busting out at any time. Add in the fact, despite the struggles, that two of the starters they put out there were Dan Haren and Jered Weaver? Their offense is struggling, not those two. Those two pitched well enough for the Angels to win both of those games and they won only one.

April 29th, 2012

Los Angeles Angels - **0**

Cleveland Indians - **4**

W: Derek Lowe (4-1) L: Ervin Santana (0-5)

[BOXSCORE]

So if you ask me, I'll take a loss to Dan Haren, who looked untouchable on Saturday, a win in the game Weaver pitched and rubber match on Sunday with **Derek Lowe** going for the Indians.

Because boyyyy was Derek Lowe some kind of good on Sunday afternoon. It seems like the weather perked up right at the best time for Lowe to go out there and pitch one that matched the weather. His sinker was sinking, his slider was looking good and the Angels hitters, struggling or not, were just beating the ball into the dirt and the defense was making plays.

That's my favorite type of pitching to watch. Someone who knows what they are doing and shuts down a lineup in that fashion. Nothing special, just having his best pitch going and getting players to beat it down into the dirt because that's what you do with that pitch. The Angels could be red hot and they were not touching Lowe on this day .

"Lowe was outstanding," Acta said. "They couldn't do anything but beat the ball in the ground and that's a good-hitting ballclub. That's what he does. He was cruising. His pitch count was terrific after the sixth inning. He just continued to make pitches the whole day. It was just a very good pitching performance."

He was efficient early, which enabled him to work deep into the game. Hitters did not go deep into the count against him and he only walked Macier Izturis twice. No Angels hitter saw more than 15 pitches in three at-bats against Lowe. He faced just three hitters over the minimum and had a 14-7 ground-out to fly-out ratio.

He won't pitch a better game all year in all likelihood, but that isn't to say he won't pitch like that again. That's simply Lowe at his best doing what the Indians brought him in to do. Using his infield defense to get most of his outs and frustrating the hitters by giving them something they can only roll over on. They hit a few hard but they were right at defenders.

With Ubaldo Jimenez slated to start coming here, I hope he took note. Heck, Masterson to. Lowe's aggressive pace should be mimicked. Get the ball, get the sign, go. Lowe was quick, worked fast and his defense rewarded him by being ready. That's how a pitcher should work in my mind and when we saw Ubaldo has his biggest success this season, that's how he operated, much like how Lowe was on Sunday afternoon.

"This guy is hopping around every day full of energy," Acta said, "like he's a 23-year-old who just got called up. It's great, because he rubs off on the other guys. He's always upbeat and never has that attitude that he's been up here for 16 years -- been here, done that."

Now in order to get Lowe that win, the Indians needed to score some runs, something they didn't look like they were going to do against Ervin Santana for awhile. Then the fifth hit and thank you mistake.

Santana wasn't overly dominant or anything. Heck, the first two hitters of the game reached only for him to get out of that jam with a double play and a fly out. But it seemed as if the Indians were going to need a lucky break and it didn't appear they were going to get it after Asdrubal Cabrera sent a high pop to right field with two outs.

"You can't beat the sun," Hunter said. "I've been playing this game for a long time. It seems like the sun wins. Whenever you lose the ball in the sun, you can't defeat God's light."

That was until, as Manny Acta called it, the mighty sun got in the way and caused Torii Hunter to not really see where the ball was landing. The ball hits the turf and the Indians were given two runs that I'm sure they'll gladly take given their offensive struggles.

And on this day, with Lowe pitching the way he was, that's all this team would need.

After Santana exited with seven innings, Kevin Jepsen was jumped. Hafner beat the shift and Santana clanked his third hit of the day into left off a broken back single. In this situation, with one more inning left, you play for a run to get some insurance, especially since your big-boppers just were at bat and Hannahan and Duncan are the ones you need to count on.

Great strategy overall by Acta to do such as he was rewarded with two runs as Jepsen threw the ball away on Hannahan's bunt. The fact that it hit the plate and bounced high up into the air meant it would be nearly impossible for him to get Donald at third, but he still gave it a look, which caused him to rush the throw and while it was in the area and Izturis caught it, his arm was looking like it was going to get bent the wrong way with Hannahan bearing down.

So the Indians pretty much were given their four runs, but when you aren't manufacturing them yourself, take what you get, just take what you get and the Indians got enough. Duncan flied out to center, which was more than good enough to get a fourth run in.

You take it. It isn't like the Indians didn't deserve to win this game. They got out nine hits, their pitcher was dominant. If not for Kendrys Morales he would have had a no-hitter going through the entire game. If not for Morales and Izturis, he'd been tossing a perfect game as those were the only two hitters giving him any sort of issue.

The Angels didn't get a whole lot of run production for Dan Haren, their offense really wasn't good enough to get that win, but Haren was on Saturday. So a few runs, an excellent Dan Haren and that is a win.

Same formula for the Indians on Sunday. And despite me laughing at Eric Karros mistakenly calling Derek Lowe the Indians number one starter during the FOX broadcast, he may have inadvertently been correct as Lowe has been stellar thus far.

Random Details...

Not one inning after Hunter's adventure in right, did Aaron Cunningham have one of his own. A fly ball sent him forward, or not as he slipped. Luckily the ball wasn't going too much further than where he already was and Cunningham was able to get up quickly and travel back enough to make a great catch on what could have been a horrible mistake.

Speaking of sir Cunningham, in his mini-starting gig with Choo out since last Sunday against Oakland, he's had a hit in all but one game. Overall he went 7-for-20 with a few RBI in the six games against Kansas City and Los Angeles. Not bad for a fourth outfielder. Some of his at-bats have been frustratingly short though.

Michael Brantley ended any sort of no-hit business for Santana with the leadoff hit. It was the first time since his no-hitter last year that Santana returned to Progressive Field.

Big spot for Vinnie Pestano to come in on the eighth. Lowe had run out of gas by the time Ianetta had clubbed one to right to set up a two-out and two on situation for the top of the order. It was clear Acta needed to get Pestano and he did just that. With a little room to work he walked Trout and then got Kendrick to strikeout. Big... Strikeout...

Of course Perez got a few strikeouts himself but was taken out of a save opportunity by the two runs in the eighth inning. I'll take the insurance over a save opportunity though.

Perez's clean ninth led to the first shutout of the season for the Indians pitching staff. About time, ya?

Should be noted in addition to getting the bunt down with runners on in the eighth, Hannahan walked in the fourth inning with Santana on second and two outs. The opportunity was there for Hannahan to do his two-out-runner in scoring position routine, but Santana was clearly just scared.

It's worth noting that Lowe has over 1/3rd of the Indians wins thus far.

From the previous two games...

Saturday's start was delayed by rain, but the two teams did get their chance to play. We already talked about Haren and he was good. Eight solid innings and he finally got his first win of the season. But Gomez... Gomez was just as good.

Jeanmar Gomez only went six, but he gave up two runs off five hits and two walks. He struck out a career high seven and his slider looked to be really developed and really good. The Indians have themselves quite the fifth starter on their hands. When he's actually 'started' he's done nothing but go out and give the Indians a qualify start. You won't argue with the effort from Gomez even though he had to take the loss.

It's a shame the Indians had to lose that game 2-1 because Joe Smith and Nick Hagadone were also excellent coming out of the bullpen. Smith even went two innings, didn't allow a baserunner at all and got a pair of strikeouts.

It struck me to check out some numbers and this is what I've found.

This year the Indians bullpen's numbers look as such after the first month of play.

ERA: 4.35, 7 HR, 26 BB, 61 K

You take those first five games at home out when the Indians pen was rocked by the Jays and White Sox?

Their ERA is 2.01 since they hit the road for Kansas City. Much much better.

On Friday it was the first walk off win of the season. The Indians didn't do much winning their first home stand and this current one was looking gloomy after the two games against the Royals, but that walk-off was much needed. Of course it was Asdrubal Cabrera who came up with the big hit, who else?

But of all the one run games the team was playing (and until the game against Haren, they were 6-0 in those games), they had not yet walked-off until Friday.

They didn't touch Weaver for runs, but making him walk four hitters, cranking out seven hits and even striking out eight times got them to that maligned Angels bullpen and the Tribe did all their damage in the seventh inning on. It's not how you start, but how you finish as Masterson shut the Angels down after some early trouble. To go into the ninth giving up four hits says something. He did walk five and that is troubling, but he got the job done and went deep into the game.

He spread the walks out, so he didn't get himself into many jams and tough situations. Take in mind in what we we've been discussing with Masterson though in the battle against righties and lefties. There wasn't a true left-handed hitter in the Angels lineup Friday. There were many switch-hitters hitting left-handed, and he actually walked them three times.

Michael Brantely over the past few weeks since the road trip in Kansas City, after Opening Weekend when I tore him up: 18-for-59, 5 RBI, 11 R, 4 BB, 6 K. That's a .300 hitter kids... That's what we need from the Tribe's leadoff hitter.

[HERE COMES DAMON]

Well, so much for minor leagues right? All **Johnny Damon** needed was a few weeks in extended spring and he appears to be ready. Early May? How about the earliest in May possible. It's Paul Hoynes who is indicating that the Indians are going to be purchasing the contract of Johnny Damon and he will join the team for
their series in Chicago starting Tuesday
.

I guess it's time. Damon has been playing in extended, hitting well and has had plenty of time to test himself in the field. Really when you think about it, if he's playing and in game shape, what is the point of even sending him to any of the affiliates? It's not like he's rehabbing, it's not like he can get used to major league pitching in Columbus any better than he can in extended. He's played so many years that the only thing that will get him ready for the majors is the majors. If he's in game-shape, he should be on the major league roster.

So, we'll see Damon Tuesday and I have to imagine he'll be in the lineup, whether Choo is ready to go or not. Duncan could use the mental break even with two of the three pitchers the White Sox are sending out this week are left-handers. It may not be the greatest timing matchup-wise, but I'm not sure it matters, let's just get him up and in the lineup.

Many would believe that this is Aaron Cunningham's end, but this could actually mean the end of Jose Lopez if you ask me. The Indians need someone to play center field and with Choo's injury, the extra outfielder is also probably necessary. Lopez is expendable because Donald is the main backup infielder and if the Indians need someone to play third base, they can always have Donald there, and still have Hannahan among others able to back up at first.

[RANDOM RUNDOWN]

Asdrubal Cabrera was awarded with his 2011 Silver Slugger award prior to the game on Saturday. Congrats Asdrubal!

Acta was non-committal about keeping **Jason Kipnis** in the second spot in the order. Right now, the only reason he is there is because Choo is out and the lineup needs shuffled a bit. He says he likes him everywhere, not just in the two hole.

"He's got pretty good power for a second baseman and a guy his size," Acta said. "He can run. He can bunt. So I think he's going to be a very good player. It's just that there's a process with these guys. You don't want to put too much pressure on them right away. Hitting second, he fits good there because he's got some juice.

Shelley Duncan's struggles are puzzling. He seems to grow in frustration and it's building. Acta says he's overly aggressive and not laying off pitches he was just a week ago. He got a big RBI with the sac-fly on Sunday, so hopefully he can settle down .

"Hey, if they don't pitch to you, just walk," Acta said. "That's what he was doing good earlier."

He is not doing that though. He was walking and now he's not. It's a little odd that he's gone away quickly from what he was doing, but maybe it speaks to how he is as a regular starter.

Part of the reason Duncan can't get a mental break by sitting is the fact that Choo is still out. However we could expect to see **Shin-Soo Choo** back in right field on Tuesday. He continues to get better, jogging on Sunday and I think with that weather warming up, he'll probably feel a lot looser.

"I think so, but who knows?" said Choo, standing at his locker in the clubhouse. "I don't like to stay in here and not play."

Another off day on Monday should do the trick, but we can never know until Tuesday when he wakes up, goes to the park and tests it out.

Grady Sizemore was swinging a bat on Saturday but has not started running the bases.

And to continue our run of outfielder injury updates, it won't be WASH Time for a few months as **LeVon Washington** is expected to undergo hip surgery today . He'll miss two to four months, likely taking him out a good portion of this season. He got off to a really hot start, getting 11 hits in 25 at-bats for the Captains this season, but it looks to be another lost season for the former second and first round pick.

More injury news from a few days ago, **Rafael Perez** was placed on the disabled list Friday . It only furthers the speculation some of us had a few days ago after he looked to have a major dip

in velocity and a concerning battle with his command. The surprise to this move though was why the Indians put him on the DL and it had nothing to do with the shoulder that caused him to miss some spring.

"It's a different spot [than the shoulder soreness]," said Indians manager Manny Acta, referring to the source of the injury. "We were concerned because we saw his lack of velocity, but we kept coming to him and asking him about how he felt and he said he was fine. He felt that it was probably just a lack of Spring Training."

It is telling though that the Indians think it was due to a lack of spring training that Perez is hurt. We've seen this happen before, especially to Joe Smith, so it isn't surprising. And Perez's actual arm is so durable, it seemed unlikely that was what was hurt.

And because Perez is out, **Nick Hagadone** is back. And now that he's back, Acta thinks he's here to stay for a little longer
and he will be called upon in crucial situations because he's essentially being thrust into Rafael Perez's role.

"He's the second lefty out of the 'pen," manager Manny Acta said. "I trust him now to come out and do those type of things [that Perez did]. Plus, it looks like he's going to be here for a while with Raffy out. So we might as well test him out."

Hagadone was not gone long. In fact because the Indians placed Perez on the disabled list, that gave the Indians the ability to recall him before the 10 mandatory days passed for Hagadone to be recalled.

And as we've seen this weekend, Hagadone has already been called upon in close situations, so they're definitely going to be testing Hags as time goes on here.

I questioned aloud on Twitter as to what the hell it was that Aaron Cunningham was coming up to bat to. It sounded some sort of weird trumpet-like polka music, but not quite. Of course even though I had already read the annual CastroTurf event of all the Indians batting music , I had

skipped over Cunningham's music.

But uh, it's this thing .. At least the part from seconds 0:24 to 0:34... That little bit sounds weird. And if you listen to the rest of the song, it sounds like some straight up Jamaican type music. So that's our fourth outfielder.

On that note, Travis Hafner really turned up the WWE-fan boy this year with his music, using three wrestling themes... So there's that too.

Kind of on the topic of themes... I guess you can use that as a segue? Yeah I can. I think everyone pretty much uses Chrome. Or even FireFox. Heck, even if you don't, and use silly IE Explorer, you can download this free Cleveland Indians Browser theme . I'm using it now and it's pretty cool. Thanks to Brand Thunder sending the link my way, they did a nice job with it.

[TIGER WATCH]

The reason the Indians sit atop first place after this past weekend? The Yankeeees Win, Theeeeeee Yankeeees Win!

Yuk, but in this instance, I'll take it. The Tigers and White Sox are now both 11-11, .500 teams with the Indians sitting at 11-9.

The Yankees won a pair from the Tigers with Max Scherzer struggling again on Sunday and a walk-off passed ball on Friday. Justin Verlander was semi-human, giving up some runs and although it seems Prince Fielder is heating up, the Tigers could not outscore the Yankees enough this past weekend.

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Nino has a blog that he creates dumb nicknames, even for players not on the Indians. Give it a vist at *The Tribe Daily* *.*

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