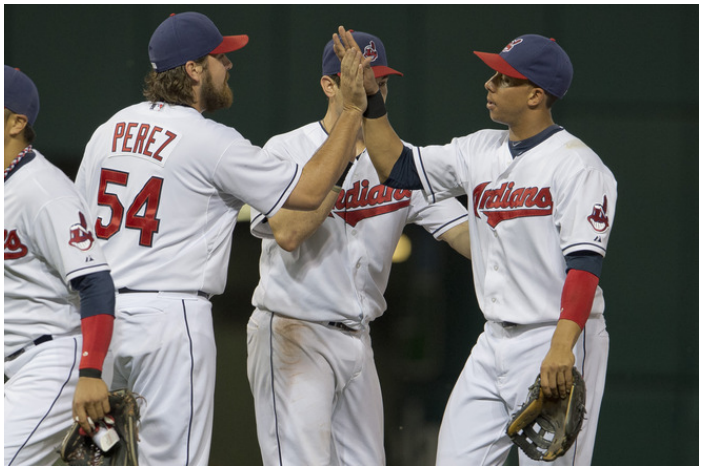

Everything evens out in baseball. A hitter who goes 10-for-25 over six games will probably have a stretch during the season where he has just four hits in 30 at bats. Everything evened out for Justin Masterson as his tough luck loss last Saturday against St. Louis was replaced with a hard-fought 2-0 win on Friday night in the series opener against the Pittsburgh Pirates.

Masterson took the loss last Saturday after allowing just one run, a Carlos Beltran home run, over seven innings in what was his best start of the season. The tables turned as Masterson outpitched Pirates starter, tough luck loser James McDonald. Masterson actually had more fly ball outs than ground ball outs in his seven innings of work but struck out nine and allowed just seven baserunners. McDonald was terrific in the losing effort going six three-hit innings and surrendered just an RBI double to Carlos Santana.

The Indians took the lead in the third inning. Asdrubal Cabrera drew a one-out walk and after Jason Kipnis flew out to left, Santana let a breaking ball go deep into the zone and took a perfect inside-out swing, slicing one just inside the third base bag down the left field line. Because it was a full count, Cabrera got a running start from first and scored without a throw.

In the top half of the fourth, Masterson got into a bit of a jam. Masterson struck out the side in the inning, but loaded the bases on two walks and a single before getting Jose Tabata to whiff on a slider to end the inning. That proved to be a big moment in the game as the Indians kept the Pirates from gaining any momentum.

In the sixth inning, Pirates second baseman Neil Walker led off the inning by smoking a ground rule double to right field over Shin-Soo Choo’s head. Walker would advance to third on a ground

ball to short by Andrew McCutchen. Luckily for the Indians, second baseman Jason Kipnis used to be an outfielder. Garrett Jones was jammed on a pitch and flared the ball to shallow right field. Kipnis tracked it with his back to home plate, made the catch, and got off a strong throw to home to hold Walker at third. Casey McGehee hit the next pitch to Kipnis at second to get out of the inning unscathed.

While the Indians failed to mount any sort of threat after Santana's third inning RBI double, Masterson pitched out of yet another jam in the seventh. Again, Masterson struck out the first hitter of the inning before getting in trouble. He walked Tabata who stole second with two outs. Masterson hit the next batter, Josh Harrison, and then uncorked a wild pitch to the backstop to put runners on second and third, prompting a visit from manager Manny Acta. The visit inspired some confidence in Masterson and Alex Presley harmlessly flew out to left.

The Indians offense finally woke up again in the seventh inning. Johnny Damon looped a single into center field and Casey Kotchman singled through the hole between first and second to send Damon to third. Jose Lopez pinch hit for Lonnie Chisenhall and had a terrible at bat, popping up to second. Jack Hannahan, in his first game back off the disabled list hit a sinking liner to left field which Pittsburgh's Alex Presley caught on the run and fired a strong throw to home plate to Rod Barajas who completed the inning-ending double play with a tag of Johnny Damon.

After Vinnie Pestano worked a perfect eighth inning for his sixteenth hold (Pestano now has more holds than hits allowed (15) this season), the Indians scratched out an insurance run in the eighth. Against former Indian, sort of, Jason Grilli (Grilli was in Spring Training but never appeared in a game due to an injury that cost him the entire season), Shin-Soo Choo led off the eighth with a walk. Cabrera and Kipnis both struck out before Carlos Santana extended the inning with a tremendous at bat culminating in a base on balls. Michael Brantley stepped to the plate with one final shot to extend his 21-game hitting streak and he succeeded, driving a solid single back up the middle and pushing an insurance run across the plate.

Chris Perez, who had just one appearance since June 6, came in for the save opportunity. Casey McGehee hit a rope to right center on the first pitch of the inning for a single. Pedro Alvarez flew out to left field and Tabata followed with a game-ending 4-6-3 double play.

The Indians are now 33-30, one game back in the AL Central with the White Sox facing the Dodgers ace, Clayton Kershaw, out on the west coast and the Tigers tied late against the

Rockies.

Stat of the Night: In Justin Masterson's first 10 starts, he had 42 strikeouts to 34 walks. In his last four starts, Masterson has struck out 26 and walked three.

Stat of the Night Part 2: Though it was definitely helped by Pirates fans, the attendance tonight was 31,920. That's the largest crowd at Progressive Field this season outside of the Home Opener which drew 43,190.

Player of the Game: Justin Masterson. This is a no-brainer. The Indians needed a strong start from Masterson after getting some subpar outings in Cincinnati. The chief job of the #1 starter in a rotation is to be a stopper and end losing streaks. Masterson did that tonight with seven shutout innings.

Tomorrow's Game: The Indians and Pirates play the middle game of this three-game weekend set at 4:05 with A.J. Burnett facing off against Ubaldo Jimenez. Bring your appetite because it's Dollar Dog Day.