Justin Masterson threw 7.1 strong innings and Shin-Soo Choo slugged a two-run homer to push the Indians back to the .500 mark and back in the win column with a 3-1 victory in the series finale at Progressive Field. The win kept the Orioles from their first four-game sweep of the Indians in Cleveland since 1971 and gave the Indians something to build on with a big series against the Tigers set to begin tomorrow night.

The Indians and Orioles combined for 18 hits, but both Masterson and O's starter Tommy Hunter weaved in and out of potential danger to keep putting zeroes on the scoreboard. Masterson was aided by three double play ground balls and some solid relief work from Vinnie Pestano and Chris Perez. The Indians got on the board first with Choo's homer in the third. Casey Kotchman singled with one out and advancd to second on a passed ball. One batter later, Choo hit the home run, his 12th of the season. That was all that the Indians and Masterson needed.

Masterson gave up a run in the fifth after he hit Ryan Flaherty with two strikes and two outs. Omar Quintanilla followed with a double to left center and Flaherty scampered around the bases. It was the only run that Masterson gave up, going seven innings and scattering six hits. He struck out six and walked just one. He only threw 92 pitches and pitched into the eighth inning, Sixty of his pitches were strikes. Masterson had little margin for error all night long as the Indians continued to struggle with the bats and were stymied by Tommy Hunter who also pitched into the eighth and was charged with three runs, one of which scoring after he was removed from the game.

With a lack of excitement during the first seven innings, the eighth provided some action. In the top half of the eighth, with the Indians clinging to a 2-1 lead, Nick Markakis singled with one out. Indians manager Manny Acta went out and pulled Masterson, even though he was at 92

pitches. Vinnie Pestano entered and engaged in a long battle with Endy Chavez. Chavez eventually hit a fastball up and out over the plate into the left field corner. Defensive replacement Aaron Cunningham had to chase it down deep into the corner before firing it in to the cutoff man. Asdrubal Cabrera bobbled the ball on the transfer and Markakis ran through a stop sign at third. To compound matters, Markakis inexplicably stopped after rounding third. Cabrera gathered the ball, fired to the plate, and Markakis was caught in a rundown. He was tagged out as Chavez went to third. Pestano struck out Jim Thome to end the inning.

The Indians, desperate for a big hit, finally got one from Michael Brantley, who had gone just 2-for-14 in the series. Choo, Cabrera, and Jason Kipnis all singled to start the inning. Choo's was a solid line drive to right, Cabrera's was a one hop smash off Hunter's leg, and Kipnis's was intended to be a sacrifice bunt but wound up being his sixth bunt single of the season. With the infield in all around, Brantley sliced a single between short and third off lefty Troy Patton, who had replaced Hunter to face Kipnis. It was the only run the Indians would muster as Travis Hafner worked a 3-0 count before striking out and Cunningham popped out to shallow left.

Chris Perez fired a perfect ninth for the Indians, retiring Wilson Betemit on a 12-pitch at bat to end the game. With the win, the Indians climbed back to even at 48-48. The Orioles took three of four, but fell out of a tie for the second wild card spot in the AL at 51-45. Justin Masterson was the winner, improving to 7-8 on the season. Tommy Hunter was the tough luck loser, falling to 4-5. Chris Perez notched save #27, his first since July 16. The Indians picked up a half game on the idle Tigers who they play tomorrow night. The Indians are four back in the division and 3.5 back in the wild card.

Stat of the Night: Shin-Soo Choo is now hitting .320 with 11 HR when batting leadoff this season. Credit to Manny Acta for shaking up the lineup by putting Choo at the top. The Indians have struggled offensively, but Choo has now hit .325 since the start of June, so you can't blame him.

Player of the Game: Shin-Soo Choo. The Indians needed all the offense they could get tonight and Choo provided enough. There were rumblings and concerns about him early in the season, but he's back to being a consistent offensive threat.

Tomorrow's Game: The Indians welcome the Motor City Kitties to town tomorrow night. Ubaldo Jimenez, who is 2-0 with a 2.84 ERA against Detroit this season, will battle Doug Fister. First pitch is at 7:05 p.m.