If the Indians needed one thing. It was their ace to step up and deliver. And deliver he did. It was the pre-show, the warm-up, the final minutes, and the hype to a crucial battle that starts off today. It was something that was much needed.

July 23rd, 2012

Baltimore Orioles - **1**

Cleveland Indians - **3**

W: Justin Masterson (7-8) L: Tommy Hunter (4-5) S: Chris Perez (27)

[BOXSCORE]

Justin Masterson pitching into the eighth, giving up just a run off seven hits and a walk, was exactly what the doctor, the psychiatrist, and Manny Acta ordered. As Acta would say about this game. You don't want to go and face Detroit coming off a five game losing streak, especially

with them so hot. As we said yesterday, a lack of confidence facing a team that is rolling could be the end to everything the Indians have done right this year.

You separate that weekend disaster and just count it as a three game sweep as we said. This was one game, one game that the Indians needed, because today the big dogs are rolling in and you need to focus. You need momentum. You need to go in feeling good.

That should do the trick. It was just how you draw it up. Masterson gets into the eighth, **Vinnie Pestano**
comes in to finish it off, including a absolutely HUGE strikeout of Jim Thome to end the inning, and Chris Perez helps him earn hold 27 and himself save 27 with a clean ninth himself.

What did we say? Pitching wins. Pitching wins most of the time and in the end, all of the time. You get pitching, you get a chance more times than not. This was an example of the more times as Masterson was brilliant and the bullpen does what we've come to expect from them.

It didn't matter how many runs the Indians scored, because it was enough. It will always be enough.

It was almost not enough as when Pestano came into the game, he surrendered a double to Endy Chavez. Nick Markakis was on base and was flying around the diamond. He rounded third, got halfway there and just stopped.

He surely could have attempted to score. It would have been a close play depending on the throw home. But Because he froze, he was done for.

"I should have kept going, regardless," Markakis said. "I should have made them make two good throws to get me out, but I froze. It's tough, especially when you could have second and third with your 3-4-5 hitters coming up. It's 99.9 percent my fault."

But as Pestano would say, sometimes you'd rather be lucky than good. And a little bit of luck helped out the fact that the Indians were good, specifically Justin Masterson.

"Masterson did a tremendous job," Acta said. "He did what we expect our No. 1 guy to do, to go out there and shut down the opposition. ... When he's good, sinking it down, it doesn't matter who you put out there. That was the case today."

The trend of not really giving him any run support continued of course, but Masterson was good enough to not need much. And after Vinnie Pestano almost gave the lead away, the Indians put one more on the board for good measure and an extra cushion for Chris Perez.

"Whenever guys are kind of going down," Masterson said, "hopefully you keep a team to nothing. You have to ease a little bit of the pressure off the offense. Say, 'Hey, just give me two, boys, and we'll try to get it done.'"

All-in-all you like the fact that the offense did enough, but it doesn't mask the fact that they still went 3-for-11 with runners in scoring position, leaving more opportunities on the board. It continues to go back to the fact that the team is hitting, they just can't seem to hit when it counts. Shin-Soo Choo's two-run blast in the third accounted for the two runs all game, then Brantley added the RBI single in the eighth.

But your top three hitters were all 2-for-4. Granted the team didn't get a walk, but they had 10 hits. They again had their opportunities. Heck the Brantley single in the eighth was the fourth straight hit without an out. But a Santana force out at home, a Hafner strike out, and a Cunningham infield pop out ended any sort of opportunity to add more. You would have liked to see at least another run or two when you have bases loaded and nobody out.

But you also can't complain when Chris Perez comes in and gets the job in three hitters.

Random Details...

Again not a single walk, in fact, the Orioles only walked once, making it a fairly well-pitched game on both ends. The Orioles struck out eight times, the Indians five. So even though the Indians didn't come through in those at-bats late, credit the O's and Indians' pitching staffs.

A lot of double plays for the Indians. A few normal groundout double plays, and in addition to nabbing Markakis in-between third and home in the eighth, another capitalization on some bad baserunning by the Orioles. They caught Adam Jones in a rundown earlier in the game when a groundball was hit to Masterson, it took a few throws back and forth, but the Indians got him and that is just as good as a double play as the threat is really neutralized.

There was a double play the Indians recorded in the sixth with a runner on and one out. Matt Weiters grounded to Kotchman, who threw to second for an out, then threw back to Masterson who was covering first. It looked as if Masterson got there, but didn't quite touch the bag. It took forever for the umpire at first to make the call, but it would appear as if he made the right one as Masterson's toe just seemed to hit the bag.

It also looked like Wieters stepped on Masterson's foot, and that made me cringe. The play made the Oriole's base coach dance around in frustration at the call.

[RANDOM RUNDOWN]

The most anticipated bullpen session of all time (not really) was thrown yesterday prior to the game against Baltimore. **Roberto Hernandez** stepped onto the rubber and threw pitches at Progressive Field for the first time since last season. How'd he look?

"[He looked] very good, very smooth," said Tribe manager Manny Acta. "He threw the ball pretty good. Granted, it was just a bullpen, but it was good to see him. Everybody that was over there was pretty happy. He does look like he's been pitching."

Well that's good, he looks like he's been pitching. I'm glad.

It looks like Robbie (get used to it) will be going to some affiliate on Thursday and throw anywhere from 70 to 75 pitches. The fact that he's already able to get up to that count is great. Hopefully he'll be ready to go with no worries when he's eligible to be activated.

We heard Justin Masterson say that the Indians had "something planned" for him in regards to the whole "identity thing" and well, I'm not sure if it's something Robbie wants to joke around about, but what the players did was kind of funny, but also tasteful. His birthday isn't til the end of August, but they did bring him three birthday cakes , one for Fausto Carmona and his 29th birthday, one for his 30th birthday and one for Roberto Hernandez's 31st birthday.

My question is simply, who made the cakes? Cause they look delicious. I bet Mrs. Masterson the baker had something to do with it.

Grady Sizemore may be closer than we think. Mainly because I think he's years away from returning. Sizemore has now re-reached the running period of his rehab. He now hopes to get through this rehab without any setbacks.

"It slowly got worse as time went on," said Sizemore, who hasn't played this year after signing a one-year, $5 million deal in the offseason. "We had gotten pretty close to completing that rehab, and we had a setback. It wasn't major, but it was enough to where we had to back off for a couple weeks. It ended up being a good chunk of the season."

It's not just the back right now, it's the knees as well. Running is the last step he needs as the hitting and throwing has been fine. Sizemore says he thinks he'll play, but that "it is just a matter of when."

Um, yeah that's the $5 million dollar question. When. It is always when. And it will always be when.

One thing is for sure, I'm not sure Johnny Damon's "Grady Sizemore clause" is much of a big deal. You think **Johnny Damon** is thinking about retirement? Heck, maybe he's thinking about it sooner rather than later. Sooner being before the season ends, later being after the season

ends. He did say that he's thinking more with his offensive struggles, but if the Indians do end dropping him at some point, it will probably be the end for him.

He certainly thinks the Indians may drop him at some point.

"If we're not in contention, I'll be the first one they drop," Damon said. "The team needs to work toward the future. Obviously it's up to [general manager] Chris [Antonetti], but that's the way I see it."

At least he's being honest. I wouldn't be thinking of not being in contention though. That is kind of depressing. But I have to imagine that the thought is in his mind that he's going to be hanging them up soon and if the Indians drop him in the next two months, well, what is the point? It essentially means his career is done. He isn't likely to get much interest if any at all (it took a dire need from the Indians to bring him on) especially with his struggles.

He says he would like a shot but it has to come before Spring Training starts. We'll see for him, but I wouldn't be surprised if he goes out of it as an Indian the way things are going.

We might have to create a splinter group to the Bullpen Mafia called the **C-Bus Lineup Mafia**. Or how about the Fratuzzi. It will start with the leaders, Matt Pagnozzi and Vinny Rottino, who both knocked in five runs in the Columbus Clippers' 14-9 win over Lehigh Valley.
Pagnozzi went deep twice and both had three hits. Oh yeah! This is going somewhere.

The big move yesterday was the Yankees acquiring Ichiro from Seattle. However the biggest move that the Indians need to be concerned about is the one the now first place Detroit Tigers made. They swung a deal with Miami that brought them not only a decent starter in Anibal Sanchez, but a dynamic utility player in Omar Infante, who will surely sure up defense at any spot for them but a much needed presence at second base.

I'm a little worried about that one. Sanchez is an upgrade from what they had and now gives them five capable starters who can go out on any night and be good. Heck three of the five are absolute strikeout machines.

So if the Indians acquired Roberto Hernandez, Detroit's counter-strike was getting Anibal Sanchez, unfortunately he can pitch for them immediately and while he is not slated to start in this three game series, the Indians will no doubt see him at some point.

The other hot rumor concerning the Indians is the Ken Rosenthal report that says the San Francisco Giants are interested in **Chris Perez**. Rosenthal at least suggests it is a good idea based off two factors. The first is that they probably won't end up being contenders and the depth makes Perez and his likely salary increase expendable.

Well, okay.

I think it is funny. Now San Francisco has interest, but I do not think there is any idea for the Indians to trade Chris Perez right now. It benefits you in no way. Sure it will net you something in return, but it can net you the same amount if not more in the offseason. The Indians are still in it and even if they weren't, keeping Perez makes sense. If the Indians want to consider making a move, they should really do it in the offseason before he gets his arbitration raise.

Good for the Giants for being interested, but the Indians just need to hold steady on this market in both ways right now. Unless they get an offer that can help them add a piece. No trading Chris Perez, no trading Choo.

Four games behind, three coming up. Things can change in an instant and this is not over.

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Nino has a blog! Give it a vist at The Tribe Daily , or else Will Smith will drop down and erase your alien face memory.

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