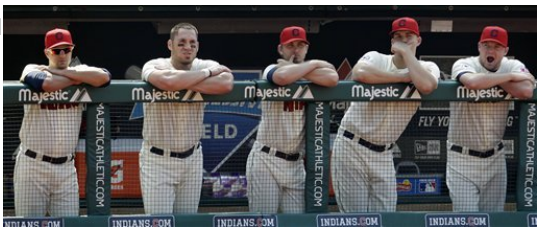
Maybe Manny Acta means something different when he says, “We’re not going to let Jose Bautista beat us this series.”

Because when I hear or read that I’m thinking that you’re going to pitch around the guy leading the majors in home runs and that you’ll walk him when necessary and not let him swing the bat late in ballgames. You know, take your chances with the immortal Adam Lind or someone else in the Blue Jays lineup.

Apparently I’m way off base because Bautista pretty much beat the Indians in every single game of their four-game series this weekend, including in the only game the Indians actually won last Thursday night.

You remember Thursday night I assume? The Indians surrendered a solo homer to Bautista in the 9th inning to give Toronto a 4-0 lead. That lead was erased and the Indians won dramatically in the bottom of the 9th when Travis Hafner clubbed an incredible grand slam home run of his own to give the Tribe a feel good walk-off win. That win gave the Indians wins in six of their previous eight games, kept them in control of first place in the division and set the weekend up for a nice little run heading into the All Star break.

But the best-laid plans often go to hell in a handbasket or something to that effect.

The Blu 

e Jays took the final three games of the series when Bautista hit 12 or 13 home runs and now the Tribe heads into the break losers of three straight and looking up at the Tigers in the AL Central. Yes, they trail by only half a game and have surpassed even the wildest of expectations (especially given a year ago they were 20 games under .500 and 15 ½ games off the pace in their division). But it sure seems like there are any number of folks in that Tribe clubhouse who can desperately use the next three days to unwind, relax and gear up for what could be an interesting second half of baseball.

That includes Manny Acta. The Indians skipper has pulled far more positive strings than negative ones but his handling of Bautista this weekend is a head scratcher. Hopefully Acta can get in some rest and relaxation in between four hour flights to Phoenix and the Mid-Summer Classic itself where Acta will be a coach for the American League.

The Defense Rests (And Apparently Sleeps A Lot As Well)

Ask anybody what the Indians need to continue to compete in the soft AL Central and it won't be long before you hear, "They desperately need a bat".

I agree to an extent but I think with Shin Soo Choo recovering more quickly than was expected (the cast is already off that thumb he injured a couple weeks back in San Francisco) and with Hafner not being restricted to PH duties since interleague play has ended that the Indians offense (as poorly as its produced at times) can support an excellent pitching staff. And at times in the first half all of the Indians starting pitchers have been very good (with the possible and noted exception of Mitch Talbot).

The bullpen has been tremendous as well, though clearly a few guys will benefit from a couple days off. The Indians simply aren't going to club too many times and their wins are far more likely to be close and relatively low scoring giving their pitching and their offense are what they are.

Where I see the need for the biggest improvement and where I see the biggest need being is defensively.

The Cord Phelps experiment failed miserably because Phelps simply isn't ready offensively to outhit his horrific defense. Five errors in an 11-game span proved that to be the case and the Indians correctly shipped Phelps back to AAA Columbus when Acta became reluctant to watch Phelps give major league teams extra outs in an inning.

The issue is that the 37-year old Orlando Cabrera is clearly the best 2B option the Indians have right now. Recent Tribe picks Phelps, Lonnie Chisenhalll and Jason Kipnis are similar in that they all project as major league hitters but they also project to be adequate defensively at best. And 'at best' isn't right now. In fact, I can't even see it from here.

All three of those kids have bounced around from position to position during their high school, college and minor league careers. In part that's because they are versatile and the Indians recognized needs at 2B and 3B long term but it's also in part because none of them rate very highly defensively regardless of where they play.

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