

## **Tribe bats unable to lift Huff in Oakland Indians take sixth straight defeat, fifth on the road**

By Jane Lee / Special to MLB.com

OAKLAND -- On April 18, the Indians scored a club-record-tying 14 runs in the second inning of a 22-4 win over the Yankees.

Fast forward exactly five months later to the second inning of Friday's game against the A's. Different result.

It didn't get much better over the next six frames, but Cleveland did manage to put a run on the board in the ninth -- too little, too late, though.

The result: a 2-1 loss to the A's in the second of a four-game set at Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum as the Indians tied their season high with their sixth straight loss and 16th defeat in their past 20 games.

In those six losses, the Tribe has scored just 13 runs on 42 hits while striking out a whopping 50 times -- 15 of which came in Friday's encounter.

A's starter Brett Anderson collected 10 of those strikeouts, which represents a career high for the left-handed rookie. He scattered just four hits and one walk while not allowing a run through six strong frames for Oakland, winners of 10 of its past 12 games.

"He really has no weaknesses as a pitcher right now," A's manager Bob Geren said. "He can do anything he wants to do with the baseball."

Cleveland skipper Eric Wedge agreed, calling Anderson a "good, young pitcher."

"He has a good arm, a clean delivery," he continued. "He did a real good job with his fastball, but he also did a good job with his secondary stuff. I was really impressed with him."

So was Wedge's lineup. And the numbers said it all.

Michael Brantley and Kelly Shoppach each collected two hits, which represented the only hits of the game for the Tribe before Shin-Soo Choo singled in the ninth to set up an RBI double off the bat of Matt LaPorta.

"Obviously we're struggling offensively right now," Wedge said. "I don't want to take anything away from Anderson, though. He threw the ball well and their bullpen did a good job."

While Anderson was fanning Indians, fellow rookie southpaw David Huff limited Oakland to two runs through six frames, scattering seven hits and two walks while striking out three.

The numbers don't scream dominant, but Wedge liked what he saw from Huff, who was making his 22nd Major League start. The 25-year-old, however, didn't think very highly of his own stuff.

"I was kind of all over the place tonight," Huff said. "I was having trouble keeping it around the zone. Pretty much every inning I got the first guy on base and had to pitch out of trouble. The defense kept making plays behind me, though, and keeping us in the ballgame."

However, a two-run third proved to be enough for the A's, who got an RBI double from Nomar Garciaparra along with a run-scoring single off the bat of Mark Ellis.

"They definitely hit my mistakes," Huff said. "I left a couple balls up, and they took advantage of it."

The Indians, Wedge said, need to start taking advantage of their own opportunities.

"We absolutely need to," he said. "We've got a young team with a couple people banged up. That's where we are, and we have to play through it."

"We have to play every day as an opportunity to get better, an opportunity to learn, and an opportunity to win a ballgame. The game can beat you down, but you can't let it."

## **Wedge works for solution to A's lefties Oakland (69-78) vs. Cleveland (61-86, 1:05 p.m. PT)**

By Jane Lee / Special to MLB.com

OAKLAND -- When manager Eric Wedge learned about the A's decision to throw three consecutive lefties out on the mound for the final games of a four-game set, he immediately knew his lineup was due for a little shakeup.

No problem.

After all, the Indians' skipper has managed 52 players this year, so he's used to the whole flexibility thing.

"We have to be somewhat creative here the next few days," Wedge said Friday before the Tribe's second game against Oakland. "We'll be picking spots for guys."

Travis Hafner received a day off on Friday and Luis Valbuena was a late-game defensive replacement, but both are expected to be back in the lineup Saturday and, most likely, for the remainder of the series.

"I think Valbuena needs it," Wedge said. "He's had a good year, but he's played more this year than he has before, so I think it's a good time for him and Hafner to get the day off."

The 23-year-old Valbuena, who began his season at Triple-A Columbus hitting .321, was recalled May 2 and currently boasts a .235 average.

"He's been up in September before but hasn't played like this," Wedge said. "Talk about the vibe of the year and, at this level, it's definitely more extreme than anything he's dealt with before."

Hafner, meanwhile, is batting .272 with 15 homers and 42 RBIs to lead a group of rather sluggish veterans.

"There's only two or three [veterans] in there every night," Wedge said. "With all the young kids in there, you're not sure what you're going to get from those guys. You just know there's going to be some inconsistencies with those guys."

#### Pitching matchup

OAK: LHP Gio Gonzalez (5-6, 6.31 ERA)

For the second time this season, Gonzalez was hit hard by the Twins. The lefty gave up seven runs on eight hits in a losing effort on Sunday. Prior to that, his only other outing against Minnesota yielded an 11-run, 10-hit night, although he didn't factor into the decision. The loss Sunday for Gonzalez was his first since Aug. 26 against Seattle. He's 1-0 this season against the Indians, earning a win back in early July when he pitched six innings and struck out eight.

CLE: LHP Jeremy Sowers (6-9, 4.49 ERA)

Facing the Twins on Sept. 14, Sowers worked seven scoreless innings. He had tossed seven scoreless in a win over the Mariners on July 25, so his performance in this one was not without precedent this season. Still, it was another strong step forward for Sowers, who has produced quality starts in six of his past nine outings after developing a reputation as a guy who falls apart the second or third time through an opponent's lineup. He gave up just six hits with two walks and two strikeouts to the Twins, stranding a pair of runners in the first, third and seventh innings.

#### Tidbits

Asdrubal Cabrera, who left Wednesday's game against the Twins with a right knee contusion, was available for Friday's contest after being deemed "better" by Wedge. ... Despite Justin Masterson's brief five-run, four-inning performance Thursday, Wedge believes the right-hander fits the starter role well. "He had a tough game, but there were not any real reasons for that," the skipper said. "Starters are where we're short, and I think he can help us." ... Wedge said the club is in the process of figuring out where some of his players will play winter ball. "We should have some things finalized by next week," he said.

#### Anderson sharp in A's win over Indians

OAKLAND, Calif. (AP)—Brett Anderson(notes) felt his slider was dominant Friday night against but it was the Oakland right-hander's slow curve that did most of the damage against Cleveland.

Anderson pitched six shutout innings and had a career-high 10 strikeouts, moving him within three of the most-ever by an Athletics rookie, as Oakland stayed hot with a 2-1 win over the slumping Indians.

"Brett just keeps getting better in the second half," A's manager Bob Geren said. "Now he really has no real weakness as a pitcher. He can do whatever he wants with a baseball. Brett's been very consistent the last month or two."

Anderson (10-10) allowed only two singles and a pair of doubles and didn't allow a runner past second base while winning his third straight start. The right-hander only ran into trouble once, in the sixth when he gave up a one-out double Michael Brantley(notes) and walked Shin-Soo Choo(notes) with two outs but Anderson got Jhonny Peralta(notes) to strike out looking to end the threat.

That was his 10th strikeout, surpassing his previous career-high of nine set on July 6 at Boston.

"Getting comfortable and sticking to one side of the rubber and telling myself I'm going to at least show that I'm going to throw to both sides of the plate, that's probably been the biggest thing," Anderson said. "Just showing that I'm going to throw fastballs away and changeups, just change their eyesights a little bit. That's been the biggest factor lately."

Brantley and Kelly Shoppach(notes) had two hits apiece for Cleveland, which fell to 0-5 on its current seven-game road trip and has lost six straight and 15 of 18 overall.

"Obviously we're struggling offensively right now, so that comes into play," Indians manager Eric Wedge said. "I don't want to take anything away from Anderson. He threw the ball well and their bullpen did a good job. Offensively we struggled. We need to take advantage of whenever we do create opportunities."

Anderson recorded eight of his 10 strikeouts with his slider and now has 139 on the season, second-most ever by an A's rookie. He needs just three more to pass Rick Langford's record of 141 set in 1977.

With at least two more starts, that shouldn't be a problem for Anderson, especially if his curveball is working as well as it was against the Indians.

"I was kind of using it as a change-up factor early in the count," Anderson said. "I got some outs on it and I think it helped set up my slider and fastballs. Anytime I feel like I can flip it in there early in the count, and tonight was one of those nights."

Nomar Garciaparra(notes) added two hits and an RBI and Rajai Davis(notes) added a pair of singles and reached 40 steals for Oakland, which won its fifth straight and 10th in the last 12.

Jeff Gray(notes) and Craig Breslow(notes) pitched one scoreless inning apiece and Brad Ziegler(notes) worked the ninth to complete the six-hitter and record his seventh save in 10 chances.

Anderson's outing extended a solid stretch by Oakland's starting pitchers, who are now 8-1 with a 3.03 ERA over the last 11 games. They needed the strong start because after scoring 24 runs in the previous four games, the A's managed just two off Indians starter David Huff(notes), both coming in the third.

Davis singled and Kurt Suzuki(notes) walked against Huff (10-8). One out later, Garciaparra doubled to right-center to drive in Davis and Mark Ellis(notes) added an RBI single to score Suzuki.

Anderson and the A's bullpen made it stand up.

Notes: The A's placed RHP Vin Mazzaro(notes) on the 60-day disabled list due to shoulder tendinitis in a move that is retroactive to Sept. 8. Mazzaro was 4-9 with a 5.32 ERA in 17 starts. Oakland called up OF Matt Carson to take Mazzaro's spot on the 40-man roster. Carson started in right field and batted eighth, going 0-for-3 with two strikeouts. ... The A's didn't commit an error for the seventh straight game, matching their longest streak of the season. ... Garciaparra now has a career batting average of .374 (96 for 257) against the Indians.

### **Manager says Brantley should...**

OAKLAND, CALIF.: Will Michael Brantley have a chance to compete for an everyday job in the Indians' lineup next spring?

"I believe he could," manager Eric Wedge said. "I believe he should. A prospective outfield of Shin-Soo Choo, Grady Sizemore and Brantley is going to run a lot of balls down."

Brantley has yet to show an ability to drive the ball, but that's fine with Wedge.

"If he sprays the ball around, hits balls in front of outfielders, hits balls in the gaps, that will be fine," Wedge said. "I think he'll get his share of doubles and triples. I look at him as a leadoff type of guy."

Could Brantley be an alternative to Sizemore in the leadoff spot? "He could be," Wedge said.

ONE MORE DAY — Shortstop Asdrubal Cabrera's sore knee kept him out of the lineup Friday night, but he thinks he will play today.

"I'm taking batting practice and ground balls," he said. "I'll be ready tomorrow."

Wedge confirmed Cabrera's opinion and said he was ready at least to pinch hit Friday night. Cabrera fouled a ball off his knee in Minnesota Tuesday night.

DAY OF REST — Cabrera wasn't the only one missing from the lineup. Second baseman Luis Valbuena and designated hitter Travis Hafner got the night off.

"Valbuena has played more this year than he ever has," Wedge said. "The season has definitely been more extreme for him, and there are signs showing that."

WHO KNEW? — Since the All-Star Game, Jeremy Sowers is ninth with a 3.18 ERA among American League pitchers with at least 40 innings of work. He has a 4-2 record in nine starts.

Sheldon Ocker

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### **Games still count, even as season winds down**

By Sheldon Ocker

OAKLAND, CALIF.: Slumps don't mean as much at this time of year if a team is not in contention for the playoffs. Even defeat loses much of its impact when a club isn't going anywhere but home when the schedule concludes.

So is it irrelevant that the Indians have lost five in a row (14 of 17) and are batting .184 over this brief span? The games still count, because players are competing for future employment, and it is hoped that pride energizes them to play hard.

Manager Eric Wedge views his team's current offensive skid this way: "It's more on us [than a consequence of good pitching]. A couple of things are happening. We don't have that many veterans in there, and they're trying to do too much, because they see we're playing a lot of young kids."

Since the trades that rid the team of Victor Martinez, Mark DeRosa, Ryan Garko and Ben Francisco, the bottom four spots in the Tribe's batting order have usually been manned by rookies or near-rookies.

That is almost half the lineup, and after awhile, the inexperience is going to manifest itself as a lack of offense. For the five games preceding the Tribe's contest with the Oakland Athletics on Friday night, it is averaging 2.4 runs.

"They're going to have young at-bats," Wedge said. "Eventually, they get better, but they're going to have inconsistencies."

At times, rookies will start their careers with a rush, then take one or two steps back. How they react to their first major-league failure can be an important juncture in their career.

"There definitely is going to be some fallback at some point," Wedge said. "Sometimes a player will hit the ground running, then fall back. That's when he has to dig himself out of it."

A novice athlete in any sport has to fight the emotions that make him doubt his ability. What does Wedge recall of his rookie season in the majors?

"It's survival at first," he said. "Then it's [concern] about how you perform. Usually, a rookie doesn't get to play every day, so when he does play, he wants to make an impact. That just makes things harder on him."

Players seldom admit to worrying about their future, but in an occupation that can precisely measure success and failure using various sets of numbers, it's difficult not to think about where you stand.

"That's always in the back of your mind," Wedge said. "In pro sports in general, with veterans near the end of their careers and guys starting out, there is always somebody trying to take your job. So you're trying to establish yourself and be able to make a living."

Trevor Crowe is one of the Indians' rookies trying to establish himself as a bona fide big-league player. So what's the hardest part about being a rookie?

"Just learning a new routine," he said. "What time to come in, getting comfortable with your teammates. You want to be yourself, but you also want to respect guys who've been here, who have some service time.

"You worry about being on time and doing things the right way. What veteran guys respect is how you prepare and how you treat them."

Initially, Crowe did not mention concern about his own performance.

"Obviously, you want to play well, no matter what," he said. "But the main thing these guys look at is not just whether you're trying, but whether you're prepared."

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## **Aeros come back to Earth**

### **13-game winning streak ends, championship celebration doesn't happen**

**By Stephanie Storm**

There will be a Game 4 of the Eastern League Championship Series.

The Connecticut Defenders staved off elimination in the third game Friday night at Canal Park, topping the Aeros 8-7 and ending the Aeros' franchise-best 13-game winning streak.

It was far from a thing of beauty with a combined 23 hits, eight walks and five errors. But in the postseason, all that matters is the final count. And in this case, the final at-bat.

Aeros outfielder Jerad Head was at the plate with two outs in the bottom of the ninth. With the Defenders holding to a one-run lead after Lonnie Chisenhall scored on Carlos Rivero's double, Head battled for more than 10 pitches against Defenders closer Matt Yourkin before flying out to center field to end the game.

"It was a great at-bat, especially in that spot," Aeros manager Mike Sarbaugh said. "Jerad really battled."

The Aeros scored in the first inning when Jose Constanza and Josh Rodriguez led off with back-to-back singles and Carlos Santana hit into a run-scoring double play.

After going down in order in the first inning, the Defenders made Aeros starting pitcher Eric Berger work a lot harder in the second. Eddy Martinez-Esteve and Brad Boyer walked and Ramon Castro followed with a single to load the bases. Brandon Crawford's sacrifice fly to center scored Martinez-Esteve and a throwing error on Berger allowed Boyer to come home.

Berger continued to struggle in the third inning, issuing two more walks and committing another error. With one out and the bases loaded, Berger couldn't handle an infield hit in front of the mound, allowing leadoff-man Bond to score.

But Eastern League Most Valuable Player Santana tied the score with a two-run homer to left field and the Aeros went ahead 4-3 on the first of two errors of the game by third baseman Castro.

That was the end of the night for Defenders starter Craig Clark, who was relieved by right-hander Mitch Lively after just 2 1/3 innings.

The Defenders returned the favor in the fourth, chasing Berger from the game with the bases loaded.

"Eric didn't have his command tonight," Sarbaugh said. "It just wasn't Eric's night."

When Erik Stiller relieved Berger, the Defenders continued to crank out the hits and four runs crossed the plate on five consecutive hits for a 7-4 lead.

The Aeros cut the deficit to 7-5 in the fifth when Santana scored on Rivero's two-out base hit.

The Defenders appeared to have the Aeros on the ropes again in the sixth inning when they chased Stiller from the game and loaded the bases against Steve Wright, one of the best relievers in the league (10-0, 2.32 ERA).

But Boyer flied out to end to the inning and Wright went on to sit the Defenders down in order the next two innings.

The Defenders went through three relievers in the eighth as the Aeros continued to chip away, scoring another run that pulled them within one on a Head triple and another Castro error. But Yourkin struck out Aeros sluggers Santana and Beau Mills with two runners on to end the threat.

"We're going to use as many pitchers as we can to win these ballgames," Defenders manager Steve Decker said. "We've got a ton of guys down in the bullpen and there's no reason to save anybody."

In the top of the ninth, the Defenders added a key insurance run with two outs when Boyer reached on a single and came home on Tyler LaTorre's pinch-hit double that fell between Aeros left fielder Cristo Arnal and shortstop Rivero as the two collided.

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## **Cleveland Indians requesting DNA tests on international free agents: Indians Insider**

**By Paul Hoynes, The Plain Dealer**

OAKLAND, Calif.—Before Jason Knapp, there was Jose Ozoria.

No, the Indians didn't trade for Ozoria only to find he was the kind of damaged goods they received from Philadelphia in Knapp. The Indians paid Ozoria \$750,000 as an international free agent last year only to discover Ozoria wasn't Ozoria.

Instead of a 17-year-old shortstop, Ozoria turned out to be 20-year-old shortstop Wally Branyan. Ozoria/Branyan and his agents duped the Indians into a big payday with forged documents.

Branyan is still in the Indians' organization, but John Mirabelli, the Tribe's director of scouting, is doing all he can not to get fooled again.

It's the reason Mirabelli hasn't announced the international free agents the Indians have signed even though most teams did months ago.

"We've requested that Major League Baseball run DNA tests on a couple of players we're negotiating with to find out if they are who they say there are," Mirabelli said.

MLB is trying to crack down on these kind of cases with its own investigative unit in the Dominican Republic. DNA testing is one of its tools.

"Teams have to request DNA testing on players," Mirabelli said. "It's more expensive, but after what we went through with Jose Ozoria, we want to be as precise as we can be."

Mirabelli said the Indians might take their detective work a step farther.

"We're talking about conducting DNA tests on every [international free agent] we sign for over \$50,000 to \$75,000 starting next year," Mirabelli said. "That's a significant [signing bonus] for us.

"We're trying to combat these things just like every other team. There's no structure [in the Dominican Republic] so you have to be as careful as you can."

The MLB draft does not regulate the Dominican Republic and Venezuela.

Mirabelli believes MLB is getting tougher on the kind of identity fraud that was perpetrated on the Indians.

"I hope things keep changing in the next few years," Mirabelli said. "It's a big enough risk for a team just to sign a young player and try to make him a professional baseball player.

"Now you have to figure out if he is who he says he is and if he's 3 years older than you think he is."

Mirabelli says he's in the process of signing seven to nine free agents from the Dominican, Panama and Venezuela.

"I should be able to announce something by the end of the month," he said.

Until then, the Indians will keep shining lights into the dark corners of players' backgrounds, while hoping they don't get burned again.

More rest: Asdrubal Cabrera missed his second straight start Friday with a bruised right knee. Cabrera injured the knee Wednesday in Minnesota when he fouled a ball off it in the ninth inning.

"It's still a little sore, but I can pinch-hit if they need me," Cabrera said.

Left-handed attack: The A's, starting Friday, sent three straight left-handed starters against the Tribe in Bret Anderson, Gio Gonzalez and Dana Eveland.

Manager Eric Wedge says he's going to adjust his lineup accordingly.

In Friday's game, he rested second baseman Luis Valbuena and DH Travis Hafner, both left-handed hitters. Kelly Shoppach, hitting .313 (15-for-48) with five homers and 17 RBI against lefties, replaced Hafner at DH. Jamey Carroll played second.

Shoppach and Carroll are right-handed hitters.

In light of Cabrera's injury, switch-hitting rookie Niuman Romero started at short.

Possible alternative: Whenever the question of moving Grady Sizemore out of the leadoff spot has been asked, Wedge always says he'd need an alternative to consider it.

Friday he said rookie Michael Brantley might be that alternative.

Wedge said Brantley "could and should" compete for a starting outfield job next spring.

"If you look at a potential outfield of Shin-Soo Choo, Grady and Brantley," Wedge said, "you're looking at an outfield that could run some balls down."

Brantley went into Friday's game hitting .317 (20-for-63). He has one extra base hit, but that's all right with Wedge.

"All I want him to do is hit line drives and buzz the towers of the infielders," Wedge said. "He's going to spray the ball around, hit the ball in front of the outfielders.

"He'll hit his share of doubles and triples, but his job is to get on base and score runs."

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## **Cleveland Indians' Jamey Carroll questions rulebook: Indians Chatter**

**By Paul Hoynes, Plain Dealer Reporter**

Clubhouse confidential: Jamey Carroll wanted to know why he was charged with an at-bat Wednesday in the ninth inning against the Twins after replacing injured Asdrubal Cabrera with an 0-2 count.

Here's what the rulebook says, "When the batter leaves the game with two strikes against him, and the substitute batter completes a strikeout, charge the strikeout and the time at-bat to the first hitter. If the substitute batter completes the turn at bat in any other manner, including a base on balls, score the action as having been that of the substitute batter."

Carroll grounded out.

Squeeze play: Former Indian Ryan Garko's role with the Giants has been reduced to basically a pinch-hitter as manager Bruce Bochy is sticking with his hottest hitters to try and catch Colorado for the NL wild card.

"The Indians would have traded me over the winter anyway," Garko told the Contra Costa (Calif.) Times. "So I get to be part of this race and we'll see what happens."

Stat of the day: Kerry Wood hasn't had a save or a save opportunity since Sept. 6. He's appeared in only three games in September.

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### **Offense is the offender in 2-1 loss to A's**

**By Sheldon Ocker** Beacon Journal sports writer POSTED: 07:47 a.m. EDT, Sep 19, 2009

OAKLAND, Calif.: Same old story, only just a little older.

The Indians lost for the 15th time in 18 games, as the Athletics earned a 2-1 win Friday night at Oakland Coliseum.

The score is an obvious clue to the Tribe's problems: The offense has gone into hibernation. Facing their second rookie starter in as many games, the Indians were virtually helpless, as Brett Anderson yielded only four hits and one walk in six innings.

In the first game of the series Thursday night, an even less experienced starter, Clayton Mortensen, limited the Tribe to two runs and four hits in five innings, Oakland winning 5-2.

Against Anderson, it appeared that the Indians were bent on setting a record for swinging at breaking pitches in the dirt or within three inches of the dirt. The result: Anderson established a career high in strikeouts with 10.

But the Tribe demonstrated proficiency in striking out no matter who was on the mound. Three A's relievers combined for five more strikeouts in three innings.

Lately, Indians batsmen had been slowing their tendency to strike out. The last time they went down on strikes 10 or more times was Sept. 11 against the Royals, but it took 12 innings for Kansas City pitchers to strike out 13.

The last nine-inning game that saw the Tribe achieve double digits in strikeouts was on Sept. 1, when Tigers pitchers struck out 11.

Sidearm Brad Ziegler allowed the only Cleveland run Friday night. Shin-Soo Choo began the brief rally with a one-out single and scored on Matt LaPorta's double. LaPorta is one of the few Tribe hitters who have contributed anything to the cause on the current trip.

LaPorta is 7-for-19 with a double, two home runs and six RBI, but his team is 0-5 for Minnesota and Oakland so far.

David Huff already has made his mark in his first major-league season. With 10 wins already, he is virtually assured of leading the Tribe in wins. He also is one of six rookies in the American League with double digit wins this year, and he is the first Cleveland rookie to win at least 10 games since Ryan Dreese won 10 in 2002.

The Indians' runnerup in victories is Aaron Laffey, but he would have to win all of his remaining 2009 starts to tie Huff, who probably has three starts left.

None of this helped get Huff a win Friday night, even though he gave up only two runs.

Huff allowed the leadoff to reach in five of the six innings he was on the mound but was able to work out of trouble all but once, in the third.

Rajai Davis led off the inning with a bloop single to right and advanced to second on a walk to Kurt Suzuki. Scott Hairston was retired on an infield fly, but Nomar Garciaparra doubled to score Davis, Suzuki stopping at third.

Huff induced Bobby Crosby to pop to the second baseman, but Mark Ellis singled sharply to left. Suzuki scored, but Ellis was thrown out on relays by Trevor Crowe and Jhonny Peralta, when he made a big turn at first and got hung up between bases.

Otherwise, Huff continually stymied the A's, despite allowing seven hits and two walks.

The first two Oakland batters reached in the first, but neither advanced past third. Ellis led off the second with a hit, Davis singled to start the fifth, and Garciaparra singled to lead off the sixth.

Choo saved a run in the fourth, when Daric Barton led off with a drive to right. Choo retreated quickly to the fence, leaped and caught the ball before it could clear the fence.

### **Indians lose sixth straight, 2-1, to Athletics**

**By Paul Hoynes**

Oakland, Calif. - The Indians are finishing the season just like a team that's lost 25 more games than it's won.

They don't pitch well, hit well or field well. They have trouble scoring runs, hitting cutoff men and keeping their heads in the game. The one thing they do consistently is lose.

The Indians proved that once again Friday night in a 2-1 loss to the A's at the Coliseum. They've lost six straight - tying a season high - 10 of their past 11 games and 15 of their past 18.

They are 61-86 overall and have gone 3-14 in September.

Manager Eric Wedge keeps saying young at-bats are victimizing the Indians. That's true to a certain degree because the Indians had six rookies in Friday's lineup, and another, David Huff, on the mound.

The A's, a team that can match the Indians for roster makeovers the past two seasons, had only one rookie in the starting lineup - left-hander Brett Anderson on the mound.

While the Indians hitters took a lot of young swings, Anderson (10-10, 4.21) threw a lot of mature pitches. He struck out a career-high 10 batters in six scoreless innings. The A's removed him after only 88 pitches because they're trying to protect him for next season.

Anderson, who came to the A's from Arizona in the Dan Haren trade after the 2007 season, is 7-3 in his past 15 starts. He was 3-7 after his first 13 starts this season.

Huff (10-8, 5.98) gave up two runs in the third and that was enough to beat him. The loss broke Huff's three-game winning streak.

He allowed two runs on seven hits in six innings. He struck out three and walked two. Huff had to work hard in the first three innings, stranding five runners. He wasn't quite slippery enough to escape damage in the third.

Nomar Garciaparra gave the A's a 1-0 lead with a one-out single. Huff had only himself to blame as he gave up a bloop single to leadoff hitter Rajai Davis and walked No.2 hitter Kurt Suzuki.

Huff retired Scott Hairston, but Garciaparra lined a single to center. Huff retired Bobby Crosby, but Mark Ellis lined a 3-2 pitch into left field to make it 2-0. Ellis took too wide a turn around first and was tagged out to end the inning.

Garciaparra doesn't play a whole lot anymore, but he still wears out the Indians. He went 2-for-4 with a stolen base. The former Boston shortstop entered the game with a .372 (94-for-253) lifetime batting average against the Tribe.

Huff pitched himself into a jam in the first when he walked Davis and gave up a single to Suzuki to start the game.

"I was in trouble almost every inning. I was all over the place. The defense made some plays behind me and kept us in the game," Huff said.

With Hairston at the plate, catcher Lou Marson was returning a pitch to Huff when Davis stole third without drawing a throw for his 40th steal. Huff pitched out of trouble by retiring the next three batters, but for Huff and Marson to be caught napping like that is one of the rookie mistakes Wedge has been complaining about since the start of this trip.

"It's one of those things that happens to a young catcher. I will almost guarantee you that's the first and last time that will happen to him," Wedge said. "Those are some of things we've been seeing lately that we don't want to see again. We'll address it on this level of play and they'll be better for it."

Jeff Gray, former Indian Craig Breslow and Brad Ziegler completed the six-hitter for Oakland. The Indians didn't score until Matt LaPorta's two-out double in the ninth, but Ziegler struck out Kelly Shoppach to earn his seventh save.

Shin-Soo Choo kept the Indians close with a home-run saving catch in the fourth against Daric Barton in the fourth. Choo stretched above the right-field fence to catch Barton's leadoff drive.

Anderson entered the game leading AL rookies with 129 strikeouts. He showed the numbers were not a fluke.

The Indians finished with 15 strikeouts.

Shoppach had two of the Tribe's six

### **Tribe has choice to make on Carmona**

By Jim Ingraham [JIngraham@News-Herald.com](mailto:JIngraham@News-Herald.com)

So how do you think the Indians are liking that four-year, \$15 million contract they signed Fausto Carmona to after his 19-win season in 2007?

In the first two years of that contract, the Indians have paid Carmona \$3.25 million, and Carmona has gone 11-18 with a 5.98 ERA.

And that contract is going to get even worse if Carmona doesn't get any better.

The Indians are still on the hook for \$11 million to Carmona over the next two years. He'll make \$4.9 million next year and \$6.1 million in 2011.

That's a lot of money for a pitcher who has won one game in the last four months.

And he hasn't been injured.

On Sept. 19, 2007, the year he went 19-8 with a 3.06 ERA, which earned him financial security for the rest of his life, Carmona was 17-8 with a 3.07 ERA. On Sept. 19, 2009, Carmona is 3-11 with a 6.58 ERA.

So much for the recuperative powers of a trip to the Arizona Rookie League. That's as far from the major leagues as a major-leaguer can be sent, and that's where the Indians sent Carmona in the middle of this season.

That's how lost he was.

When Carmona left he was 2-6 with a 7.42 ERA. He was gone for about six weeks. Since his return, he's 1-5 with a 5.48 ERA.

If you're looking for the poster boy for the Indians' 2009 season, here he is.

Since his 2007 season, when he also finished fourth in the Cy Young Award voting, Carmona's career has been in full retreat. Worse yet, nobody seems to know how to fix whatever it is that's wrong.

Sending a player to the lowest outpost of the minor-league system is almost unheard of.

Having that pitcher pitch at each minor-league level on his return to the majors is also almost unprecedented.

And after all that, Carmona looks no better now than he looked prior to his demotion.

Which raises the question: Now what?

What do the Indians do with Carmona? Keep him in the rotation as a starter next year and hope for the best? Move him to the bullpen and let him work on his problems in the low-stress role of long relief? Let him start next year at Columbus and tell him he has to pitch his way back to the majors?

Try to convert him into a left-hander? Turn him into a knuckleballer?

Give him a year off?

At this point, Indians officials are probably open to anything. Because right now they've got \$11 million committed over the next two years to a pitcher who looks totally lost on the mound and no closer to figuring anything out than he was before he went on that minor-league hiatus.

This wouldn't be as big an issue for the Indians if Carmona was a back-of-the-rotation guy. But he's not. To the contrary.

Based on the team's current inventory of starting pitchers, Carmona would normally be considered the No. 1 starter.

At least the 2007 Carmona would be a No. 1. But the 2008 and 2009 version? No way.

Maybe the Indians will ask Carmona to go to winter ball to see if he can get back on track there. Failing that, or even if he does go to winter ball and pitches well, Carmona will need to have an impressive spring training to be the Indians' No. 1 starter next year. The only other candidate is Jake Westbrook, who hasn't pitched in a year and a half because of Tommy John surgery.

That's what makes the Carmona case so crucial to the Indians. They don't have many alternatives for the No. 1 slot in their rotation. Carmona, when he's right, is far and away the best option for that role.

But Carmona hasn't been right in two years — three years come the start of next season.

The Indians, however, have so much money invested in Carmona that they have little choice but to keep working with him, hoping that eventually the light bulb will come on and Carmona will magically return to his 2007 form when his dive-bombing sinking fastball made him unhittable for most of that season.

For most of this season Carmona has been unwatchable, not unhittable.

In a season in which almost nothing has gone right for the Indians, the most "gone wrong" player of them all is the one whose future is critical to the future of the Indians. The Indians have traded away Cy Young Award winners in each of the last two years.

There's nobody left on the staff who is even close to being a Cy Young candidate for next year, or, probably, in the future.

Except for Carmona. The right Carmona.

The reconstructed Carmona.

The completely overhauled Carmona.

Not this Carmona. [JIngraham@News-Herald.com](mailto:JIngraham@News-Herald.com)

### **Ingraham's I chart: Pryor a work in progress**

By Jim Ingraham

n If the Indians fire Eric Wedge as manager — I'm not saying, I'm just saying — it will probably happen the day after the season ends, which would be Oct. 5.

Then comes the cascade of names rumored to be candidates for the job. One of those names will be Torey Lovullo, the manager at Columbus. Nothing against Lovullo, who is a great guy and might one day make a fine major-league manager.

Replacing Wedge with Lovullo would be nothing more than rearranging the furniture. It would not address the biggest need in the organization now, which in my mind is hiring a new voice with fresh ideas and opinions.

You would do that by hiring an outsider. The last time the Indians hired a manager from outside the organization was 1990, when they hired John McNamara.

I'd want an experienced outsider, with the credentials that would get the players' attention, somebody who has definite ideas on who should and shouldn't be considered a core player and on how to better prepare the team in spring training for the start of the regular season.

The problem there is you're looking for an experienced major-league manager, which is going to cost you some money. And if the Indians fire Wedge, that means they will have two managers on the payroll next year, only one of whom will be managing.

And consider this: 1990 (McNamara) was also the last time the Indians have hired a manager who had major-league managing experience prior to coming to Cleveland.

Would ownership be willing to bring in a big-ticket manager? Or would the inclination be to hire the most economically priced (i.e. least experienced) manager?

n Finally, it's interesting to note eight of the last 11 Indians managers, going back to 1972, had never before managed at the major-league level when the Indians hired them: Wedge, Charlie Manuel, Mike Hargrove, Doc Edwards, Mike Ferraro, Jeff Torborg, Frank Robinson and Ken Aspromonte



**Reassessing three underachievers and notes around the majors Story Highlights**  
**How will the Mets, D-backs and Indians avoid repeating their embarrassing years?**  
**The Mets, baseball's biggest disappointment, should target Holliday and Bay**  
**The Yankees think they've detected the flaw in Joba Chamberlain's delivery**

For most teams, it is time to turn the page on this season. In a few cases, it has been that way for months. But one major advantage to being eliminated early is that there is plenty of extra time to assess one's needs, and several also-ran teams already have begun that process. (Of course on the flip side, more time is likely needed.)

Here is a close look at three teams that entered the season with high hopes but went nowhere and have been in the reassessment stage for weeks, if not months. The Mets, Indians and Diamondbacks have been out of contention for quite a while (although in the case of the Mets, it wasn't that long ago that GM Omar Minaya stopped saying his team was a "buyer").

But now it's definitely time to get real. Here is what these disappointing teams might do, and how they can avoid repeating the seasons they just had. I'll start with the most disappointing of all the disappointments -- yes, the New York Mess ...

**New York Mets**

A disaster on almost every level. Nobody gets a gold star for this one. Picked by Sports Illustrated to win the World Series (that wasn't me, though I had them as a wild-card winner), they have degenerated from mediocre to awful as underperformance and especially injuries accrued.

- Do they have money to spend or did that psychopathic swindler Bernie Madoff steal most or all of it? There's no denying he stole a significant chunk of the club-owning Wilpons' personal funds, though club sources insist the \$700 million estimate making the rounds is greatly exaggerated and that the Wilpons were diversified enough that the all-time Ponzi schemer won't deprive them of a chance to participate in free agency. Reports have suggested the Mets plan to cut from an NL-high \$145 million payroll, but even a small reduction might be a tough sell in their second season in Citi Field. The guess here is the payroll stays about the same. Mets people already are discussing big-name free agent targets -- though, of course, that doesn't guarantee they'll actually sign any of the big ones.

- What positions are they aiming to improve? The Mets understand they need to acquire a left fielder or first baseman (and maybe both), a catcher and a starting pitcher. They also better improve their overall depth. They like what Angel Pagan's done in the second half (his 10 triples in half a year are only one off the lead league) but still see him as a fourth outfielder and also haven't ruled out a return to the minors for more seasoning for first baseman in training Daniel Murphy.

- Who are some of their targets? They badly need to add power, so it should be no surprise they are looking at top free-agent outfielders Matt Holliday and Jason Bay. Additionally, they will be one of the teams interested if the Padres shop star first baseman Adrian Gonzalez, who's proved he has the power to hit it out of any stadium by doing so at PETCO Park. Barring a big deal for Gonzalez, the Mets will also consider a return for Carlos Delgado, provided it's on an incentive-laden contract. Bengie Molina, another free agent, could be a fit for catcher.

- What about the pitching? They have buyer's remorse for signing injured head case Oliver Perez over steady veteran Randy Wolf and might try to go back on that if Wolf's willing to leave L.A. Whoever they sign to pitch has to be someone they can count on to pitch 200 innings, so Jon Garland is another one who makes sense for them. As does native New Yorker Jason Marquis. They will once again look into Roy Halladay if he's available but will be reluctant to package all their best prospects for a one-year rental.

- Who might go? The Mets might take another crack at trading second baseman Luis Castillo with an eye on signing free agent second baseman Orlando Hudson. That very thought occurred to them last winter, but Castillo was a non-hitting, no-range second baseman back then (and therefore not too tradable). While he still lacks range, at least he's hitting .306 now.

- Are Minaya and manager Jerry Manuel safe? It appears that way. Both received a private vote of confidence from club COO Jeff Wilpon two months ago. And while Minaya should not have let personal feelings trigger a beat writer beat down at that memorable press conference, as that's what hurt his status as much as the dreadful Mets, Minaya has \$3.5 million and three years to go on his contract. Whatever the Wilpons' financial situation, they are in no mood to eat that sort of loot. Manuel has only a year left but also has the excuse of a baseball-high \$35 million on the disabled list at last count. As for the medical staff, it appears Mets people feel they were simply unlucky in that regard and are not blaming their doctors for all their continuing pain.

**Arizona Diamondbacks**

The loss of staff ace Brandon Webb to shoulder trouble and outfielder Conor Jackson to Valley Fever wiped them out. They were too young and too shallow to compete in a vastly improved NL West without their best pitcher and arguably their best hitter. They still have a very nice young positional nucleus, but after trading Jon Garland and Tony Pena, and continuing concern about Webb, they'll enter 2010 with a lot of pitching questions.

- What to do about Webb? The Diamondbacks have an \$8.5 million option on him (and \$2 million buyout), and word is they will try to bring him back on a compromise salary somewhat shy of that \$8 million figure. They have to be relieved that they didn't dive into a long-term deal for Webb, but even \$8.5 mil looks a tad high at this point.

- What about the rest of the rotation? With Garland gone to the Dodgers (and possibly about to become a free agent) and Doug Davis weeks away from free agency, they have holes to fill. They've been talking to Davis and seem to like him more than anyone else based on his limited trade market, so it's possible they re-sign him. Top pitching prospect Jarrod Parker isn't ready to step into the rotation yet, so a group of less-glorified youngsters including Kevin Mulvey and Billy Buckner will likely battle it out for one spot. But that still leaves two more pitchers they'll need. Plus, with Pena gone to White Sox, they could use a veteran arm or two in the 'pen, too.

- Who'll man the right side of the infield? Brandon Allen, acquired in a smart trade for Pena, is going to get every opportunity to win the first-base job. But that still leaves second base as an open question. Tony Abreu will be the player to come for Garland if they can work out a service-time question that's in dispute, according to people familiar with the deal. If not, perhaps Blake DeWitt could be substituted for Abreu. In any case, their new second baseman could possibly come via that trade.

- Who might be on the way out? The Diamondbacks may pull the plug on the \$30 million, three-year deal for broken down Eric Byrnes that didn't work. Speculatively, a Byrnes-for-Castillo trade might work. Catcher Chris Snyder could be another candidate for trade. Arizona will need to add some mature veterans to man the bench and provide leadership for the youthful team -- a guy like Tony Clark, but not Clark, as he has gotten on with his new career as a baseball analyst on MLB Network.

## **Cleveland Indians**

The pitching-poor, cash-strapped Indians did the right thing by jump-starting a rebuilding program with trades of stars Victor Martinez and Cliff Lee, an unpleasant necessity for a small-market team that needs the funds and a fresh start. They also traded Mark DeRosa, Rafael Betancourt and Ryan Garko and wound up with 11 prospects under 25 (some are under 20) in return, nine of them pitchers. So there's hope here -- though hope's ETA probably isn't 2010.

- Did they get anything for their trouble? Yes, in fact they appear to have done as well as could possibly be expected in an environment where the value of prospects is through the roof. They are especially happy with young reliever Chris Perez and young starter Justin Masterson, though there's plenty of talent to sort through. Nick Hagadone, Carlos Carrasco and Scott Barnes are three more potential keepers.

- What kind of shape is their rotation in now? They are hoping Fausto Carmona and Jake Westbrook, who both provided nothing this year (Carmona was bad, Westbrook hurt), can bounce back to peak form. If they do, they might be all right. But if not, it could be a repeat of 2009 all over again. Others in the mix include Aaron Laffey, Jeremy Sowers, David Huff, Carrasco and Masterson. They will still need to go out and get another innings eater after also sending Carl Pavano away in the purge, and the trades of Martinez and Lee should give them a few dollars to spend (it saved them \$21 million between this year and next).

- How's their everyday lineup shaping up? Not too bad, especially with the infusion of young talent. Grady Sizemore is expected to return to full strength, allowing newcomer Michael Brantley to move to left field and pair with Trevor Crowe. Power prospect Matt LaPorta appears like he may be ready to take over first base. Most of the rest of the lineup looks pretty well set with Shin-Soo Choo in right field, Luis Valbuena at second, Asdrubal Cabrera at shortstop, Jhonny Peralta at third and Travis Hafner the DH. Hafner, unfortunately, appears to be a shadow of his former self. Lou Marson, acquired in the Lee deal, has a decent chance to win the catching job, as top catching prospect Carlos Santana is still thought to be a full year away. Meanwhile, Kelly Shoppach, who struggled at the plate this year, looks like a candidate to be non-tendered.

- What about Wedge? Manager Eric Wedge has long had the support of GM Mark Shapiro, but Wedge's status appears iffy with the Indians saying there will be no announcement on the manager until after the year. Shapiro is still seen as a Wedge supporter, but two straight disappointing seasons (one Indians insider said things seem "stale") have to be considered. The bigger question becomes whether ownership will feel strongly enough to nudge Shapiro to make a change (so far, their faith in Shapiro is so strong they've let him run the show -- other than insisting he cut payroll this summer). If a change is about to be made, Indians insiders say it isn't showing on Wedge, who remains the same consistent and calm fellow. If Wedge does go, the most obvious choice to replace him would be Red Sox pitching coach and former Indian John Farrell.

## **Around the majors**

- Andy Pettitte begged the Yankees to keep pitching through his shoulder fatigue -- though it appears he's going to make almost all his incentives and more than double his \$5.5 million salary, anyway. Yankees people realize they need Pettitte in the playoffs.

- While Jorge Posada's feistiness generally makes him a beloved figure around the Yankees, club personnel were not pleased Posada ignited a brawl with the Blue Jays. As Toronto manager Cito Gaston pointed out, the Yankees were the ones with something to lose. The Yankees didn't fight Posada's three-game suspension (perhaps they knew he got a break).

- The Yankees think they may have detected the flaw in Joba Chamberlain's delivery that's caused him to be so mediocre lately. Pitching coach Dave Eiland is said to have noticed something was awry.

- Torii Hunter was right, of course, that the Angels had been choking vs. Boston. He said they weren't showing any ["guts"], only he used a different word that rhymed with guts. Very true. The team responded with a big win on Thursday, though.

- Home plate umpire Rick Reed blew two straight strike calls that cost Angels closer Brian Fuentes, then complained how Angels manager Mike Scioscia and Angels coaches treated him. Reed did admit the 3-and-2 pitch might have been in the lower portion of the strike zone but suggested catcher Mike Napoli nudging the ball up led him to believe it was a ball. How about just admitting he blew the call?

- The Twins have a shot this weekend, hosting the first-place Tigers at the outgoing Metrodome. Big start tonight for Tigers Rookie of the Year candidate Rick Porcello.

- Losing Michael Young and Josh Hamilton was just too much for the young Rangers. Both are expected back soon, but it may be too late.

- I should have included Marlins bench coach Carlos Tosca on my recent list of managerial candidates. They're all doing something right down in Miami.

- Dan Uggla said he thinks he'll be traded this winter. I'd concur. The Marlins aren't going to want to pay \$7 million-plus in arbitration for him.

- If Chipper Jones does retire after next year, he is indeed a first-ballot Hall of Famer.

- Best wishes to legendary Tigers broadcaster Ernie Harwell, who is handling his terminal illness with dignity.

- Best wishes, too, for longtime Reds beat writer Hal McCoy, who was honored after being forced out by the Dayton Daily News after 37 years as one of the best beat writers in the business. McCoy was always a class act and an excellent reporter.

## **Tom Verducci > THREE STRIKES**

### **The Twins' resiliency, Billy Butler's breakout season and more Story Highlights**

#### **The Tigers' lousy play has enabled the Twins to hang in the AL Central race**

#### **Billy Butler could become the eighth player to hit 50 doubles at 23 or younger**

Don't be surprised to see a long, slow winter for the free-agent market

1) The Twins have played the entire season in a narrow window of mediocrity. They never have been more than three games better than .500 and never worse than six games below .500. Their first baseman and their third baseman are hurt. But here they are with just 16 games left in the season and they still could be a division champion, especially with seven of those games against first-place Detroit, starting on Friday. Really, it's only by virtue of the lousy play of the Tigers that Minnesota has hung in the race.

The Tigers simply are not a very good team right now. With a chance to put away the division, they just went 3-7 in 10 games against the Blue Jays and Royals. They are 37-37 in their past 74 games. They have allowed exactly as many runs as they have scored for the entire season. And now the heat is on them to win at least one game this weekend at the Metrodome, where they are 1-5 this year while allowing an average of 7.5 runs per game. The AL Central has devolved into an honest-to-goodness race. That's bad news for the Tigers, but good news for the rest of us in an otherwise largely uninteresting September in baseball.

2) It's been a miserable season for Kansas City, which in recent years borrowed from the losing Pittsburgh model by stocking the team with questionable mid-level veterans who never won anywhere. Zack Greinke has been the obvious exception. But there is another bright spot for the Royals that has received little attention: the breakout year for first baseman Billy Butler. Remember, he's still only 23, and he needs just four more doubles for 50 on the season. Only seven players have ever hit 50 doubles at 23 or younger, and there is not a fluke in the club: Hank Greenberg, Enos Slaughter, Stan Musial, Alex Rodriguez, Albert Pujols, Grady Sizemore and Miguel Cabrera.

3) Assorted observations and thoughts:

- Something for the Cy Young Award voters to keep in mind when considering Greinke's low win total: He has a 1.95 ERA in his eight no-decisions.
- GM Brian Cashman's plan to remake the Yankees' rotation into more of a power staff has worked perfectly, and bodes well for October. In the five seasons since they last reached the World Series, the Yankees' ranks in strikeouts were 6, 6, 7, 12 and 5. This year? They are number one.
- Some of the best free-agent deals last winter didn't go down until February (Randy Wolf/Dodgers, Bobby Abreu/Angels, Orlando Hudson/Dodgers, Adam Dunn/Nationals). Some of the worst happened quickly (Edgar Renteria/Giants, Kerry Wood/Indians, Kyle Farnsworth/Royals). That may be a cautionary tale for GMs this winter to wait for the market to play out. Look for another long, slow winter.

### **Cardinals duo has work cut out to win Cy**

#### **by Ken Rosenthal**

I was going to write, "The National League Cy Young award is Tim Lincecum's to lose," but that's a ridiculous statement. Lincecum, the league leader in ERA, strikeout rate and opponents' OPS, is not going to lose the award. The question is whether the Cardinals' Chris Carpenter or Adam Wainwright still can win it.

His .718 on-base/slugging percentage is the lowest of his career.

The debate, if there is one, will be over if Lincecum pitches the Giants into the postseason — his ERA since May 21 is 1.83 and his ERA in three starts against the Rockies since Aug. 23 is 1.64. But if Carpenter finishes 19-4 and pushes his 2.45 ERA below Lincecum's 2.30, this race could get interesting.

Carpenter will make the first of his final three starts Saturday against the Cubs (MLB on Fox, 4:10 p.m.) The Giants also will be on FOX, visiting the Dodgers, as will the Tigers, who will try to hold off the Twins in the AL Central in their final trip to the Metrodome. Both Lincecum and Wainwright are next scheduled to pitch Sunday.

As close as the NL Cy Young race is, it might have been even closer if Carpenter had not missed more than a month early in the season with a strained left ribcage muscle. Carpenter's lesser workload is his primary negative when compared to Lincecum — and virtually his only negative when compared to Wainwright, who leads the league with 18 wins and 212 innings, but trails Lincecum and Carpenter in most other statistical categories.

Carpenter has pitched 34 2/3 fewer innings than Lincecum, 39 1/3 fewer than Wainwright — the rough-equivalent of four nine-inning games, give or take a few on either side. Perhaps Carpenter's innings should not matter — Twins catcher Joe Mauer, who missed the first month of the season while recovering from kidney surgery, is the front-runner for AL MVP. The Dodgers' Eric Gagne, a closer, pitched a mere 82 1/3 innings in 2003 and won the NL Cy Young.

Still, for Carpenter to overtake Lincecum, he would need to clearly demonstrate that he is the best candidate, the way Mauer is doing in the AL MVP race. As good as Carpenter is, that probably is not going to happen. Seriously, what are the odds that Lincecum will go into a slump?

Yes, Lincecum has "only" 14 wins, and no starting pitcher has ever won a Cy Young with fewer than 16. Well, get used to the idea. Voters from the Baseball Writers Association of America, with a nudge from sabermetricians, have come to understand that victory totals are largely contingent on bullpen support and run support. Royals right-hander Zack Greinke, who has "only" 14 wins, is the clear front-runner for the AL Cy.

Three times Lincecum has left games with leads and ended up with no-decisions. He has received much better run support than teammates Barry Zito and Matt Cain, and only slightly worse run support than Carpenter. But consider: The Cardinals score 1.3 runs per nine innings more for Wainwright than the Giants do for Lincecum. Wainwright's run support is the fourth-best in the NL.

I'm not trying to denigrate anyone — we are talking about three fabulous pitchers. The Cy Young simply goes to the very best. Right now, it's Lincecum. In two weeks, it could be Carpenter. And if both falter, what the heck, we can just settle for that slacker Wainwright.

Will Junior be back?  
Ken Griffey Jr. doesn't like a fuss.

He had no intention of announcing plans to retire and embarking upon a farewell tour, friends say.

He is not even sure he wants to retire.

Griffey, the Mariners' part-time designated hitter, will decide after the season ends whether he wants to return in 2010.

"The Kid," who turns 40 on Nov. 21, might want to spend more time with his family. Or, he might want to play one more year.

The Mariners will await word from Griffey before proceeding, general manager Jack Zduriencik says. The team, according to one source, would not reject Griffey if he wanted to play. Griffey, in turn, would lower his expectations, accepting a minimal role and minimal salary, another source says.

Griffey spurned the Braves last off-season to sign a one-year, \$2 million deal with the Mariners. He had the chance to earn an additional \$3 million in incentives, but will fall short of almost all of those bonuses, most of which were based on a combination of his plate appearances and the Mariners' home attendance.

While Griffey is batting only .217, he is second on the M's in walks and fourth with 15 homers despite making only 408 plate appearances.

Duncan's impact: How significant?

It's no secret that pitchers often perform better for the Cardinals than they do for other teams. Think of Joel Pineiro this season, Kyle Lohse last season, Jeff Weaver in 2006, Jeff Suppan from '04 to '06 — and those are just a few examples.

Cardinals pitching coach Dave Duncan deserves credit for the many turnarounds and breakthroughs he has overseen. But the true measure of his worth might be easier to assess if his 14-year run with the organization ends after this season.

Tony La Russa and Duncan might be the best manager-pitching coach combination in the game. But, as recently detailed by Joe Strauss of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Duncan could depart over philosophical differences with the Cardinals' minor-league department and his frustration with the media's treatment of his son Chris, a former Cardinal.

La Russa, who is in the last year of his contract, probably would not follow Duncan — if anything, his leverage with the Cardinals only would increase, and he has little motivation to bolt. None of the potential managerial openings — Houston, Baltimore, Washington, Cleveland — are anywhere near as attractive as St. Louis. The Cubs' job is not likely to be open until after next season, when Lou Piniella's contract expires.

It would be different for La Russa without Duncan — the question is how different.

The Braves certainly did not suffer much after losing their own accomplished pitching coach, Leo Mazzone, following the 2005 season.

The team's pitching staff has had two excellent seasons and two poor ones under Mazzone's replacement, Roger McDowell. But Mazzone lasted only two seasons with the Orioles, reinforcing the notion that manager Bobby Cox was the true mastermind behind the Braves' pitching success.

Duncan is more deserving of credit than Mazzone, and La Russa frequently cites his contributions. Some pitching coaches excel at fixing mechanics; Duncan's strength is preparing game plans. A new pitching coach likely would bring a different combination of skills. Yet, as long as the Cardinals keep Carpenter and Wainwright, they probably will be OK.

Right?

The Twins: What about '10?

The Twins, thanks to the deteriorating state of the Tigers' rotation, still might steal the AL Central. Still, let's not get too excited about the final Metrodome edition of the Twinkies. We're talking about a team that is two games over .500. A team that would stand little chance against the Yankees in the Division Series.

Perhaps the more intriguing question with the Twins is what they will look like next season. One scout following the team believes that the performances of some of their pitchers — most notably, groundball specialist Nick Blackburn — might improve significantly as the team moves from FieldTurf at the Metrodome to natural grass at Target Field.

The Twins' bullpen figures to benefit from the return of right-hander Pat Neshek from Tommy John surgery. But the team will need to add a veteran starting pitcher — someone like Dodgers left-hander Randy Wolf would be ideal — and reconstruct the left side of its infield.

Shortstop Orlando Cabrera, a free agent, has been a positive influence on second baseman Alexi Casilla. However, Cabrera rates well-below average defensively and has the third-lowest OPS in the American League. Third baseman Joe Crede, another free agent, appeared in only 90 games this season due to his chronic back trouble and had only a .289 on-base percentage.

One other thought on the Twins, from the scout who has been tracking them: Either Delmon Young or Carlos Gomez — probably Gomez — should have been at Class AAA this season. Instead, both played part-time, and both were devalued.

Stark

Sandwich Awards: Yanks, Mauer/Cuddyer, McCoy  
Friday, September 18, 2009 | [Print Entry](#)

Grab your paper plates -- because it's time once again to honor the most sandwich-worthy feats of the week with another edition of the ever-popular Generic Sandwich Awards. But first, it's the ...

## MUNCHIES OF THE WEEK

We're turning most of this week's munchies over to our buddy Greg Agami, who computes playoff probabilities for [coolstandings.com](http://coolstandings.com) and for [our ESPN.com standings page](http://our.ESPN.com_standings_page). How 'bout all these nuggets:

- While the Yankees' magic number to clinch a playoff spot is, technically, still stuck at 4, in reality they're already in. Coolstandings did a simulation of the rest of the season 1 million times this week -- and the Yankees made it to the postseason in *every one* of those 1 million scenarios. You can bet the Steinbrenner family loves those odds, huh?
- The Yankees also now have a 96.8 percent chance of having the best record in the American League. Coolstandings estimates that the Red Sox have only a 1.9 percent chance at this point, and the Angels have a 1.3 percent shot.
- The Dodgers are runaway favorites for the best NL record, with a 72.5 percent chance. But even though the Phillies have only a one-game lead on the Cardinals for the second-best record -- two games behind L.A. -- Coolstandings gives the Phillies a 20.9 percent probability of finishing with the best record in the league, to the Cardinals' 5.8 percent and Colorado's 0.8 percent.
- Speaking of the Rockies, let's be careful about calling their amazing resurgence from the bottom of the NL West heap "the greatest comeback ever." They've passed 11 teams in the wild-card race and made up a 9½-game deficit. And they still have a shot to pass the Dodgers, a team they trailed by 15½ on June 3 -- when they were estimated to have only a 2 percent chance of making the playoffs. So it's incredible they're now in this position. But in fact, this isn't even the greatest comeback in *Rockies* history. Two years ago -- [on June 1, 2007](http://on.June.1.2007) -- they had a 1 percent chance to make the postseason. And, of course, they did. But even that was only the 17th-greatest comeback in history, according to Coolstandings. Want to check the 16 that rank higher? They're on [this list](http://this.list).

And now, in other news ...

- The Astros lost a game Wednesday in Cincinnati in which they hit *five* home runs. And if you think that's tough, here's something tougher: It's the second five-homer game the Astros have lost this year. (They also pulled it off April 8 against the Cubs.) They're the first team to lose two five-homer games in one season since the 2001 Indians, and only the second NL team to do it in the last 45 years. The other: the '95 Giants.
- Think the Phillies will miss the Nationals? The Phillies hit five grand slams against the Nationals alone this season -- tying the all-time record for most slams in one season against one team. The others to do that, according to the Elias Sports Bureau: the 1954 Tigers (against the A's) and the '38 Tigers (against the Browns).
- And here's to the big league debut of the week -- by power-challenged Padres rookie [Luis Durango](http://Luis.Durango). Loyal reader Jeff Praught reports that the first six plate appearances of Durango's career (Tuesday and Wednesday) went: bunt to the pitcher, bunt single, sac bunt to the pitcher, bunt single, strikeout, infield single. So that's zero balls out of the infield, four bunts and (somehow) three hits. Hard to do, friends, hard to do.

And now, the Sandwich Awards envelopes, please:

## THE ON-A-ROLL AWARD

### Joe Mauer and Michael Cuddyer

If this were a logical world or a logical sport, the [Minnesota Twins](http://Minnesota.Twins) would be deader than King Tut about now.

They've lost [Justin Morneau](http://Justin.Morneau) for the year. They've gotten three wins since Aug. 1 from the non-[Scott Baker](http://Scott.Baker) portion of their rotation. And they've spent more than twice as many days under .500 this season (86) as they've spent above .500 (41). But hey, they're the Twins, the most resilient and resourceful franchise of modern times. So of course, they're still breathing as the Tigers come to the Metrodome for the final time this weekend. This is a team you just can't kill.

So here's a tip of the Sandwich Award Committee's bread knife to two of the men performing the latest dose of CPR on this team -- [Joe Mauer](http://Joe.Mauer) and [Michael Cuddyer](http://Michael.Cuddyer).

If you were one of those people who thought Morneau's back injury (and 7-for-70 finish) would kill Mauer's MVP candidacy, uh, think again. Over the last week, all Mauer has done is hit .632 (12-for-19), with a .696 on-base percentage and only one strikeout (versus 16 times reaching base) in 23 trips to the plate. So is this guy ridiculous or what?

For the season, he's hitting .374, with a .441 on-base percentage, a .610 slugging percentage and 27 homers. And if you're handicapping the MVP race, you should write this down right now:

The only American Leaguers in history to finish a season with numbers that high in all those departments were Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Joe DiMaggio, Ted Williams and Earl Averill -- and only Williams has done it since the '30s.

But Mauer can't carry those Twins alone. And that's where Cuddyer comes in. Since Morneau went down, Cuddyer is 8-for-16, with two homers, two doubles and eight RBIs. Only two players in the American League -- [Jason Bay](http://Jason.Bay) and [Carlos Pena](http://Carlos.Pena) -- have more homers since Aug. 9 than the nine

Cuddyer has launched. And in the 17 games in which he's had to fill in for Morneau at first base this season, he's hitting .353 and slugging .750, with seven home runs. You can't get much more Morneau-esque than that.

"Must be something over there in the dirt, huh?" Cuddyer quipped to the Minneapolis Star-Tribune's Joe Christensen.

Nah, it's something over there in the magical city of Minneapolis, clearly. This team never dies. So it might as well get a couple of sandwiches out of it, right?

## THE COLD-CUTS AWARD

### Didn't You Used To Be the Rays?

Every year is different. That's one of the fundamental laws of baseball. And no team has learned that lesson better -- and less enjoyably -- than the [Tampa Bay Rays](#).

Last year was a special journey, filled with miracle wins and a shocking World Series visit to celebrate. And this year? This was the year the Ray got reacquainted with reality. And let's just say those special World Series journeys are a lot more upbeat.

It's easy to forget now that as recently as two weeks ago, this team was still hanging in there, 12 games over .500, 18 over since the last day of April and still within five games of Boston in the wild-card derby.

But then came 14 games right out of their 1998 lowlight video -- the 14 games that would earn them this Sandwich Award.

They went 1-13 in those games. And that disaster included all this fun stuff:

- An 11-game losing streak -- tied for the longest in history by a team that had been to the World Series the previous year.
- A complete meltdown of their entire bullpen, which somehow coughed up 44 hits and nine homers in just 30 1/3 innings and made it possible for this team to lose *eight* games in the eighth inning or later in a span of 12 days.
- And a 1-9 start to a road trip to New York, Boston and Baltimore -- with more than seven hours of entertaining rain delays mixed in there.

Until [Wade Davis](#) shut out the Orioles to end that trip, the Rays were in danger of actually falling below .500. And while they're still in jeopardy of becoming only the second AL World Series participant in the wild-card era to finish with a losing record the next year (joining the 2003 Angels), there are two pieces of good news:

1) They at least got a Sandwich Award of their very own.

And 2) that road trip from hell is finally over.

"It's always good to go home," manager Joe Maddon told the St. Petersburg Times' Marc Topkin, "in spite of what Thomas Wolfe may have said."

## THE HERO-SANDWICH AWARD

### Hal McCoy

You have your heroes. I have mine. But my heroes aren't baseball players. My heroes are the giants of my business -- men who have inspired me with their words, their class and the way they went about covering a sport they love.

And in the time I've been covering baseball, I can't think of anyone who fits that description more than Hal McCoy.

Maybe you know his story. Maybe you don't. But this is Hal's final year covering the Reds for the Dayton Daily News, a job he's held, embraced and defined for the last 37 years. He now holds a place in the writers' wing of the Baseball Hall of Fame, and he thoroughly deserves that place -- because he's covered baseball as well as anyone in America.

Hal has taught all of us in the baseball media many lessons -- about how you treat the people around you, how to write stories that make us laugh and make us think, how to be tough when you need to be and yet still remember that you're covering human beings.

But the biggest lesson he taught us came in the spring of 2003. He'd lost so much of his vision in both eyes that he was legally blind. But he kept finding a way to cover baseball with a whole different kind of vision -- the most important kind of vision, the vision to keep helping us understand this sport and the people who play it.

Hal has always had a special ability to connect with those people. And that's why something happened this week that was straight out of a schlocky Hollywood movie -- except it happened in real life.

Wednesday was the day the Reds honored McCoy in a special on-field ceremony before their game with Houston. As he was waiting for that ceremony to begin, Reds outfielder [Jonny Gomes](#) approached him.

"He said, 'Hal, I'm going to try and hit one for you tonight,'" McCoy told the Sandwich Awards. "Well, if you know Jonny Gomes, you know he tries to hit one every time up. So I just kind of laughed. But then up he comes in the first inning, and he hits one in the upper deck. And I said to my wife, 'He hit that one for me.' And everyone laughed, because no one knew the story.

"So the next day, I walk into the clubhouse before the game. And I have the ball I used to throw out the first pitch, because I'm going to ask him to sign it. But before I can approach him, he comes over and hands me his bat. And it's the actual bat he used in the game. It's got the pine tar and the dents on the barrel and everything. And he's written on the bat: 'To Hal. Thanks for your support. HR 20 on Hal McCoy Day.'"

I asked McCoy whether, when he watched that ball come down in the upper deck, he felt as if he'd just found himself living out a scene from "The Babe Ruth Story." He replied:

"It's funny you should say that, because I was carrying the bat he gave me, and when all the writers heard the story, they went running right over to Jonny Gomes. And when they asked him whether he'd really hit that home run for Hal McCoy, he said: 'Who do you think I am -- Babe Ruth?'"

Well, he may be no Babe Ruth, that Jonny Gomes. But at least he knew what the Babe Ruth of *my* business looked like.

It was a special moment for a special man. And heck, the great Hal McCoy even got a Sandwich Award out of it. So now his career is *really* complete.