

Carrasco's tank 'not anywhere close to empty'

By Jordan Bastian / MLB.com | [@MLBastian](#) | 2:30 AM ET

OAKLAND -- The slider popped into [Roberto Perez's](#) glove and the catcher gave an emphatic pump of his right fist. The pitch that [Carlos Carrasco](#) released seconds earlier dove under the bat of [Khris Davis](#) for a strikeout, bringing an end to the sixth inning and Oakland's only real threat on Monday night.

In a **1-0 victory** at the Coliseum, Carrasco was in cruise control. The same could be said for more than the big right-hander's performance against the A's, though. Right now, Carrasco appears to be hitting his stride as Cleveland continues to set its sights on the club's first division crown since 2007.

"You can tell his tank is not anywhere close to empty," Indians manager Terry Francona said.

While baseball's best workhorses are only a handful of starts away from 200 innings, Carrasco is sitting on 124 frames for the American League Central-leading Tribe. The Indians weathered the storm that was an early-season stay on the disabled list for the righty, who missed nearly six weeks after sustaining a hamstring injury at the end of April.

The fortunate aspect of Carrasco's stint on the shelf was that his powerful right arm was unaffected. He kept throwing to stay ready until his legs allowed him to return. Now, as other starters around the game are dealing with the late-August fatigue that tests many a pitcher's mettle, Carrasco looks like he is just settling into that mid-summer groove.

"I feel like it's the middle of the season for me right now," Carrasco said.

The A's can attest to that, too.

In the opener of this three-game set, Carrasco struck out nine and issued no walks, giving him 28 strikeouts and zero free passes over his past three turns (21 2/3 innings). Since allowing eight runs in an abbreviated effort on Aug. 2, when Minnesota chased the righty after 3 2/3 innings, Carrasco has posted a 3.14 ERA with a .231 opponents' average and 37:2 strikeout-to-walk ratio in 28 2/3 innings.

As the season has worn on, Carrasco's slider and changeup have improved, too. Against Oakland, the right-hander focused on fastballs and sliders, generating 10 of his 18 swings-and-misses with the latter. The slider that induced the inning-ending swing from Davis in the sixth came with runners on first and second. Oakland did not have a runner advance beyond first in any other frame.

"With the repetition, you're seeing his secondary pitches getting sharper," Francona said.

Oakland's pitching was pristine on Monday -- [Carlos Santana's](#) homer in the eighth being the lone blemish -- but Carrasco was overpowering.

"Carrasco is just so darn good," said lefty [Andrew Miller](#), who struck out three in the ninth to earn the save.

If Carrasco is indeed finding another gear as the summer turns to fall, that would be a great development for Cleveland.

Ace [Corey Kluber](#) has also been strong of late, but [Danny Salazar](#) is only one start removed from a recent DL stint and [Josh Tomlin](#) has dealt with some recent struggles on the hill. Since mid-July, [Trevor Bauer](#) has bounced between hot and cold. If the Indians punch their ticket to the October stage, having a healthy and thriving one-two punch of Kluber and Carrasco would give the Tribe an intimidating foundation.

"He was really crisp tonight," Indians outfielder [Lonnie Chisenhall](#) said. "He's probably about to hit his stride. You saw what he was doing tonight. Maybe, [that DL stint helped] that body. If we're making that run into September and October, I'm sure he's going to be a big part." Francona agreed.

"He's getting into the middle of his season," said the manager. "I think that bodes well for him, which bodes well for us."

Carrasco, Santana keep Indians rolling

By Mark Chiarelli and Jordan Bastian / MLB.com | 2:35 AM ET

OAKLAND -- It was one of those cool nights at the Coliseum on Monday, when one run might just be enough to win. The Indians put that to the test, using a home run by [Carlos Santana](#) and a strong outing by [Carlos Carrasco](#) to pull off a 1-0 victory to overcome a solid start by A's rookie [Andrew Triggs](#).

"Both teams really pitched well," Indians manager Terry Francona said. "We hit a few balls hard, but not a lot. Fortunately, [Santana] ran one out of there, because it looked like that was probably the way someone was going to have to score."

Powered by eight dominant innings from Carrasco, the American League Central-leading Indians pushed their lead over Detroit to 7 1/2 games in the division, matching a season-best margin. The big right-hander struck out nine, scattered four hits and issued no walks en route to his ninth win of the year.

Lefty [Andrew Miller](#) shut the door in the ninth, striking out the side on 13 pitches to collect his second save since joining Cleveland.

"He was awesome," Miller said of Carrasco. "That's as good as you can throw the ball. I know you need a couple things to go your way, but that was no-hit stuff. That was a lot of fun to watch."

Oakland's silver lining came courtesy of Triggs, who notched career highs in innings (six) and pitches (89), while quieting a stout Cleveland lineup. The Indians' lone breakthrough did not arrive until the eighth inning, when Santana launched his shot to the right-field stands against reliever [Ryan Dull](#).

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Santana ends the deadlock: With one out in the eighth inning, Santana pulled a 1-1 fastball from reliever Ryan Dull down the right-field line. Cleveland's first baseman stayed put, leaning over the plate as he watched the ball, waiting to see if it stayed fair. It did, giving him 27 home runs to equal a single-season career best (done three times). The solo blast came with an exit velocity of 108 mph, per [Statcast™](#).

"It was in-between. Is it foul? Will it stay fair?" Santana said. "It was fair. That happened, I got a home run and we won the game. It felt great, especially because [Carrasco] threw eight innings. He had a good slider tonight and the fastball inside. He threw well. It was a good job."

Crisp called out: [Coco Crisp](#) was thrown out at third base attempting to stretch a double into a triple in the sixth inning on a strong relay by right fielder [Lonnie Chisenhall](#) and second baseman [Jason Kipnis](#). The A's challenged, arguing Crisp's head-first slide snuck under third baseman [Jose Ramirez's](#) tag, but the original call stood after a replay review. It ended up proving costly, as Oakland quickly mounted an ensuing threat.

"I thought he was safe," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "I went in there and it still looked to be like he was safe. Now the rule, you have to have evidence that shows you conclusively, and that probably fell under the one where they couldn't say for sure whether he was out or safe, but I might be a little biased and I thought he was safe."

Carrasco's sixth-inning escape: The A's had the makings of a rally in the sixth, when [Jake Smolinski](#) delivered a two-out single and [Stephen Vogt](#) then reached via a fielding error by Kipnis. That set things up for slugger [Khris Davis](#), who swung through a 1-2 slider for his third strikeout of the night. After receiving Carrasco's pitch, catcher [Roberto Perez](#) pumped his fist in celebration.

"[Carrasco] was terrific," Francona said. "Command of his fastball and then off of that, the breaking ball. And he had to be good, because their guy was every bit as good." [More >>](#)

Tribe can't solve Triggs-onometry: Triggs ran into trouble only once, facing [Francisco Lindor](#) with two outs in the sixth inning and runners standing on second and third. Triggs wiggled his way out, getting Lindor out in front of a curveball to fly out to right field. He was otherwise spotless, facing just one batter more than the minimum through the first five innings. Triggs scattered three hits and struck out a season-high six batters

"Very impressed," Vogt said of Triggs. "From a guy who doesn't have a whole lot of experience starting, especially at the big league level. He's done such a great job for us. His changeup has come a long way." [More >>](#)

QUOTABLE

"You're just coming up and getting the ball in quickly. I think the play stood, so there might not have been enough evidence either way to call it. It was a good play. [Crisp] made the right play, trying to get to three with one out. It was a good baseball play all around." --*Chisenhall, on the relay play in the sixth inning*

"Everything you do good in your last start you're trying to carry over into your next start. Sometimes I try to think too much about getting a lot of strikeouts. What's more important now is put a zero on the board." --*Carrasco*

SOUND SMART WITH YOUR FRIENDS

Miller notched his 11th outing of the year consisting of exactly one inning and three strikeouts. That is the most such appearances in the AL and Carrasco has looked more like himself since allowing eight runs in 3 2/3 innings during an Aug. 2 loss to the Twins. In his four starts since that uncharacteristic outing, Carrasco has piled up 37 strikeouts against two walks in 28 2/3 innings.

WHAT'S NEXT

Indians: Right-hander [Danny Salazar](#) (11-4, 3.57 ERA) is scheduled to take the mound for the Tribe in a 10:05 p.m. ET clash with the A's on Tuesday. In his first outing off the disabled list, Salazar struggled with his command and lasted only one inning on Thursday. The righty continued throwing in the bullpen and built up to around 70 pitches, though. That should put Salazar on target for a more typical workload in Oakland.

Athletics: [Sean Manaea](#) (4-8, 4.73) takes the mound at 7:05 pm. PT Tuesday for the A's at the Coliseum. Manaea struggled in his last start, giving up five runs on nine hits over six innings in a loss to the Rangers. Manaea's biggest issue has been keeping the ball in the park, as opponents have 18 homers against him in 110 1/3 innings. Still, Manaea owns a 3.69 ERA over his last 10 games.

Gomes aims to return for postseason push

OAKLAND -- [Yan Gomes](#) has no hard feelings over the Indians' attempt to trade for catcher [Jonathan Lucroy](#) last month. Right now, all Gomes is worried about is getting ready to potentially help Cleveland down the stretch and maybe in October

In the hours leading up to Monday's game against the A's, Gomes went through a workout in right field at the Coliseum, continuing his comeback from a separated right shoulder. The catcher did agility drills and then played catch up to 105 feet while a handful of teammates looked on.

If the Indians hold steady and reach the postseason, Gomes wants to be available.

"Absolutely," Gomes said. "I'm trying to get there before [that] and get that last push in."

Gomes sustained his shoulder injury on July 17 during a fall at first base in a game against the Twins and was shelved the following day. Prior to the Aug. 1 non-waiver Trade Deadline, Cleveland attempted to improve its catching situation by acquiring Lucroy, going as far as reaching an agreement with the Brewers on a multi-player package.

But Lucroy exercised his no-trade clause, blocked the deal and was later dealt to Texas. Gomes, who is under contract through 2019 with a pair of team options that could keep him in Cleveland through 2021, shrugged off the whole ordeal.

"That had no effect on me at all," Gomes said. "How much can you say when you're a guy on the DL? We had talked about it. I respect the fact the guy is a great player. He's a two-time All-Star, so why not go after a guy like that? Especially for a team that's making a playoff push, [getting a high] caliber guy would have helped. But, I guess he didn't want to come here."

Gomes, however, does want to get back as soon as he can.

He has been playing catch for the past week and has advanced to hitting live pitching in the batting cage. Indians manager Terry Francona noted that Gomes will likely be cleared to transition to hitting on the field soon, and a Minor League rehab assignment could also be in the near future. The Minor League regular season ends on Sept. 5, but Gomes could get some at-bats as a designated hitter before he is cleared to catch.

"I don't want to get too far ahead," Francona said, "but just talking to [head athletic trainer James Quinlan], he's going to be able to DH probably well ahead of when he could catch. So, that's where we would probably try to use that to our advantage, where he could get some games under his belt."

Francona said the Indians are optimistic that Gomes will be ready to return next month.

"I hope so," said the manager. "It gives him something to shoot for, which is good. And then, if it works, good. And if not, he'll certainly be in good shape for going into the offseason."

Andrew Miller makes Khris Davis look silly on final K

[Khris Davis](#) is a good hitter. He has a career high 32 home runs and 79 RBIs already this season. He hits walk-off home runs and finishes them off with [silky smooth jump shots](#).

But at the end of the A's [1-0 loss](#) to the Indians on Monday, Davis had to face Cleveland reliever/hitter's walking nightmare Andrew Miller. After having already struck out Jake Smolinski and Danny Valencia, Davis came up and then, well, Davis went down:

Salazar out for his 12th win against the A's

By Mark Chiarelli / MLB.com | 12:37 AM ET

Indians starter Danny Salazar makes his second start since coming off the 15-day disabled list with right elbow inflammation Tuesday against the A's at the Coliseum.

The Indians hope it goes more conventionally than his first.

Salazar threw 34 pitches Thursday against the White Sox, giving up three runs while lasting just one inning. It was the shortest start of his career, and the righty later went to the bullpen and threw three more simulated innings, building stamina after missing most of August. In total, he threw about 70 pitches.

"That was a little bit unique," Indians manager Terry Francona said. "It wasn't ideal, but we didn't want to just have it be a wasted start, so we tried to get a little creative."

Salazar won't be on a strict pitch count but Cleveland will keep a watchful eye on their All-Star, who has dealt with elbow discomfort dating back to mid-July. He struggled with his control against Chicago, walking three and throwing more balls (18) than strikes (16), and hasn't thrown more than 85 pitches in a start since July 19 against the Royals.

Salazar, 26, posted a 6.14 ERA in four July starts after finishing June 5-0 with a sparkling 1.91 ERA.

"He feels pretty good now about moving forward," said Francona, noting his most recent bullpen session between starts went fine.

Oakland counters with lefty Sean Manaea in his 19th start. Manaea struggled in August, going 1-3 with a 5.32 ERA, and is 4-8 with a 4.73 ERA overall. He's been much better since coming off the disabled list June 29 following left forearm tightness, posting a 3.69 ERA in 10 games.

Manaea lost to the Rangers Wednesday, giving up five runs on nine hits over six innings. He's allowed 18 homers in 110 1/3 innings.

Things to know about this game

- Salazar faced the A's twice last year, completing 19 2/3 innings without allowing an earned run in two wins. He allowed just six hits with 12 strikeouts.
- Oakland shortstop Marcus Semien is 2-for-13 against Salazar with four strikeouts. Semien wasn't in the A's lineup Monday, joining his wife at a Bay Area hospital as they await the birth of their first child, and it's unclear whether he'll play Tuesday.
- A's manager Bob Melvin expects to have Danny Valencia in the lineup Tuesday. Valencia wasn't in the lineup Monday, the same day he was fined and disciplined by the team for his role in a clubhouse fight with Billy Butler, which left Butler with a concussion and on the 7-day disabled list.

Aiken among top prospect performers Monday

- For a second straight outing, **No. 72 overall prospect** Brady Aiken (**Indians' No. 2**) allowed exactly one earned run on three hits with six strikeouts in five innings for Class A Short Season Mahoning Valley. The 20-year-old lefty is 2-4 with a 5.48 ERA on the season, but he's accrued 48 strikeouts and allowed just three homers in 37 innings.

Covering the Bases: Game 123

by Jordan Bastian

FIRST: How about we start where this one ended?

Andrew Miller fired an 86-mph slider low and inside to slugger Khris Davis, who is in the midst of a memorable season (32 homers and 79 RBIs), but struggled through a forgettable night. Davis' donned the golden sombrero in this one, culminating in an embarrassingly feeble attempt at a check swing, which ended with him crumpling to the dirt for a game-ending strikeout.

Just take a look at this filth from Miller:

Really, though, Digital Davis should be collapsed in the batter's box there.

Miller's save consisted of 13 pitches and three strikeouts. It marked his Major League-leading fifth outing consisting of three punchouts and only three batters faced. His nine such outings over the past two seasons combined also lead MLB. Miller is first in the American League this year with 11 games of three strikeouts in one inning, and his 17 such games over 2015-16 are tops in the big leagues.

During the recent series against Toronto, Miller didn't see the mound, so he was fresh for his outing against the A's. Cody Allen, meanwhile, logged 30 pitches on Sunday and had worked four games in a five-day span, with the final in that series of appearances being the draining, five-run blown save on Wednesday.

Needless to say, when Cleveland headed to the ninth with a one-run lead Monday, it made sense to send Miller out for the save.

"It's the coldest weather I've pitched in probably since April or May, but it felt pretty good," said Miller, referring to the sub-60-degree temps in Oakland. "When you have a layoff like that, you want to go out and be sharp and, fortunately, I was. I went out there and put the ball where I wanted to for a little while. That gave me confidence."

Confidence shouldn't be an issue at this point.

Heading into the outing, Miller ranked first in the Majors in K-BB% with a mark of 39.8. His left-on-base percentage was 99.4. He was second among MLB relievers in WPA (3.58), K% (43.7) and K/9 (14.7). Miller also ranked second in the Majors with a 41-percent O-swing%, meaning hitters chase pitches outside the zone at that rate. Davis can attest to that, too.

"It was a good sequence," Miller said of the knee-buckling slider. "I executed some pitches early. [Catcher Roberto Perez] came out and asked what we wanted to do. I put a breaking ball in the dirt and, fortunately, it worked out."

Since joining the Indians, Miller has racked up 16 strikeouts against one walk in 10 2/3 innings, holding batters to a 4-for-36 showing. He has entered into the game in the sixth (once), seventh (three times), eighth (twice) and ninth (three times) for manager Terry Francona.

So far, Miller has liked the look of the Tribe's bullpen, and how Francona has utilized the group.

"It seems like we're all going to be flexible, and I think that's good for us," Miller said. "I think we've got a good group of guys and, as a unit, I think we've pitched really well top to bottom since I've been here. If we can give Tito as many options as possible, I think we're better for it."

SECOND: This one began with Carlos Carrasco.

"The key was just the start," Miller said. "Carrasco is just so darn good."

Against the A's, Cookie collected nine strikeouts with no walks, giving him 28 whiffs and zero free passes in his past three outings. He has a 37:2 strikeout-to-walk ration over his past four turns for the Tribe. That quartet of starts comes after Carrasco allowed eight runs in 3 2/3 innings on Aug. 2. Needless to say, he has bounced back.

"He was terrific," Francona said. "Command of his fastball and then off of that, the breaking ball. And he had to be good, because their guy was every bit as good."

Indeed, A's rookie Andrew Triggs was handcuffing the Indians' bats all evening, too. In only his fourth Major League start, the righty blanked Cleveland for six frames. Carrasco matched him zero for zero, though, and added two more for good measure.

The potentially great news for Cleveland is this: Carrasco looks like he's in mid-season form. He missed all of May due to a hamstring injury, but kept his arm in shape while sidelined. At 124 innings, Carrasco doesn't have the same season mileage as many of the game's top workhorses.

Should Cleveland keep its reservation for the October stage, having Carrasco feeling stronger than some other starters could be an advantage.

"Everybody has probably 40 more innings than him — somewhere around there," Francona said. "But, you can tell his tank is not anywhere close to empty. I think with the repetition, you're seeing his secondary pitches getting sharper."

Carrasco agreed that his slider and changeup have continued to improve as the season has worn on.

"Right now, I feel fresh," Carrasco said. "When I was on the DL, Kluber, Tomlin, Bauer and Danny were trying to do their best. Now that I took six weeks on the DL, it's like the middle of the season for me. The more important thing is to work really hard and get on the same level as everyone else."

THIRD: It was a cool night at the Coliseum, so much so that reporter Andre Knott (@DreKnott) took plenty of heat on Twitter for the coat he was wearing. Check his feed and mentions for a few laughs.

Fly balls were dying, giving an edge to Carrasco and Triggs, who can generate grounders. It was either going to take a pitcher losing command, a string of line-drive or ground-ball hits, or someone to get a hold of one down one of the lines to win this one. In the middle of the game, a local reporter quipped: "First one to zero wins."

It certainly felt like one was probably going to do it.

"[Hits] were certainly hard to come by," Francona said. "Both teams really pitched well."

The one arrived in the eighth inning.

Oakland reliever Ryan Dull threw a 1-1 fastball and Carlos Santana pounced. He yanked the pitch down the right-field line, but stayed put at the plate. As the ball carried towards the stands, Santana leaned over the dish, cringing a little as he tried to will it to stay fair.

"It was in-between," Santana said. "Is it foul? Will it stay fair?"

It stayed fair. The shot rocketed out with an exit velocity of 108 mph, per Statcast, and represented Santana's 27th home run of the year. That ties his career high for one season, set in 2011 and again in '14. He had 658 and 660 plate appearances, respectively, in those campaigns. Santana has 522 PAs right now.

"He's been good all year," Francona said. "He plays first. He DHs. He hits first. He hits cleanup. He's been good for us all year."

HOME: Oakland's best shot at breaking through against the Indians came in the sixth, when Carrasco faced a two-out situation with runners on first and second base. He escaped by striking out Davis with hard slider.

Where the inning really went south for the A's, however, was with one out. Coco Crisp stepped up to the plate and roped a pitch into the right-field corner. Crisp had a chance at a triple and, given the way the game was going, sprinted around second with his sights set on third.

"It was a good play," Indians right fielder Lonnie Chisenhall said. "He made the right play, trying to get to three with one out. It was a good baseball play all around."

Of course, Chisenhall probably felt a little better about that last statement, given that Cleveland's defense cut down Crisp at third on the play.

Chisenhall grabbed the ball in the corner and fired it to second baseman Jason Kipnis, who made a quick relay to third baseman Jose Ramirez.

"It got to third in a hurry," Francona said. "Lonnie fielded it cleanly and when Kip got it, that was a perfect throw. It was as bang-bang as you can get."

The A's challenged the call, which stood after a quick replay review.

"It was probably one of those where, if they call him safe, they probably don't overturn either way," Francona said.

"There might not have been enough evidence either way to call it," Chisenhall added.

Asked about the play, Carrasco smirked.

"He was out," said the pitcher, still smiling.

Santana homers, Carrasco pitches Indians over A's 1-0

MICHAEL WAGAMAN (Associated Press)•Aug 23, 2016, 1:51 AM

OAKLAND, Calif. (AP) -- A well-rested [Carlos Carrasco](#) and one big swing from [Carlos Santana](#) was all it took to get the Indians off to a good start on their road trip.

It's a combination manager Terry Francona expects to be a big part of Cleveland's postseason push.

Carrasco and [Andrew Miller](#) combined on a four-hitter, Santana homered in the eighth inning and the Indians beat the [Oakland Athletics](#) 1-0 on Monday night.

"Right now I feel fresh," said Carrasco, who spent more than five weeks on the disabled list with a strained left hamstring. "It's going to be really important that I get back on the same level everyone else is. These last five, six weeks are going to be important for us."

Carrasco (9-6) was masterful while limiting the A's to four hits over eight innings. The right-hander had nine strikeouts, retired the side in order five times and allowed only one runner to reach second base.

Carrasco has had at least eight strikeouts in his last four starts, the longest active streak in the majors.

"He was terrific," Francona said. "Everybody else probably has 40 more innings than him but you can tell his tank is not anywhere close to empty."

Miller struck out the side in the ninth for his 11th save.

Neither team did much offensively until Santana's one-out home run off reliever Ryan Dull (5-4), his 27th of the season to match a career high.

"I hit a fastball," Santana said. "He tried to throw middle away and the fastball stayed in the middle."

A's starter Andrew Triggs matched Carrasco in his fourth career start but did not factor in the decision. Triggs allowed three hits over six scoreless innings and matched his career high of six strikeouts.

Oakland is 1-21 when Triggs pitches this season, including 0-4 in four starts. Triggs is 0-1 with a 4.38 ERA.

"You feel for him because he's such a good soldier about going up and down and appreciates the opportunity he gets," A's manager Bob Melvin said. "You can't help but pull for a guy who's a great team guy and he performed. He's performing even better in the rotation right now." The loss dropped the A's a season-high 19 games under .500 at 53-72. It's the team's worst record after 125 games since 1997.

Earlier in the day, Oakland announced it had fined Danny Valencia and Billy Butler after they engaged in a clubhouse fight last week.

OH SO CLOSE

Oakland missed a chance to end the shutout when Coco Crisp was thrown out at third trying to extend a double in the sixth. That was costly, as the A's next two batters reached base on a single and an error.

"It's probably one of those where if they call him safe they don't overturn it either way," Francona said.

STREAK OVER

Jose Ramirez went hitless in four at-bats, ending his streak of successfully reaching base at 27 games. It was the longest active streak in the majors.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Indians: Yan Gomes (separated right shoulder) played catch from 105 feet before the game and is taking batting practice in the cage. The team is hopeful the catcher can return before the end of the regular season and confident he'll be available for the postseason if the Indians make it that far.

Athletics: Butler was placed on the seven-day concussion list. Valencia struck out looking as a pinch-hitter in the ninth. ... Shortstop Marcus Semien was not with the team after leaving to be with his wife for their birth of their child. It marked only the fourth game this season that Semien hasn't been in the starting lineup. ... Infielder Arismendy Alcantara was called up from Triple-A Nashville.

UP NEXT

Indians: RHP Danny Salazar (11-4) faces Oakland on Tuesday in his second start since coming off the disabled list. Salazar won in both of his previous two starts against the A's.

Athletics: LHP Sean Manaea (4-8) makes his first career appearance against the Indians. Manaea leads all AL rookie pitchers with 92 strikeouts.

Marla Ridenour: No need to panic over struggles of Indians' starting rotation

By Marla Ridenour

CLEVELAND: At first glance, it appears that the wheels are falling off the best starting pitching staff in the American League.

At least where the Indians' Josh Tomlin and Danny Salazar are concerned.

August has been miserable for Tomlin, 0-4 with a 10.02 ERA in four starts. Salazar lasted only one inning when he returned from the disabled list on Thursday. That left the Tribe open to second-guessing for its decision not to send him on a rehab start after he missed two weeks with right elbow tendinitis.

The Indians' starters have a 13-11 record and 4.82 ERA since the All-Star break, as compared to 39-23 and 3.70 before it.

But there is no need to panic.

Consider that when Tomlin's troubles began with an Aug. 5 loss to the New York Yankees, the Indians held a two-game lead in the American League Central. After Sunday's victory over the Toronto Blue Jays, the advantage had been boosted to seven.

Part of that can be attributed to the rollercoaster season of the second-place Detroit Tigers. But there is no reason to consider drastic measures. There is no reason to doubt Salazar's stuff. There is no reason for fans' confidence to waver, not when — in terms of merit and current performance — the Indians' top three are Corey Kluber, Carlos Carrasco and Trevor Bauer.

Especially not when the Tribe has pitching coach Mickey Callaway, who has more of a track record of success with starters than Browns coach Hue Jackson has with quarterbacks.

Tomlin continued to struggle Saturday night in a loss to the Blue Jays and has given up an AL-high 32 home runs this season. That makes some question manager Terry Francona's loyalty to his fifth starter. But Francona is not going to dump a pitcher who opened the season 11-3 with a 3.43 ERA. It is going to take more than one bad month for Francona to become disillusioned with a player he believes in, who knows how to pitch and how to get the most out of his abilities, even with rookie Mike Clevinger tucked away in the bullpen.

Nor is it time to start freaking out over Salazar. The 26-year-old might be one of those players prone to streaks, just like hitters. He's already had one elbow surgery, in August 2010, and may need time to reassure himself that he's healthy.

The Indians have the depth in their rotation to survive slumps. In July, Bauer lost three consecutive starts on both sides of the All-Star break and they never fell out of first place. They have the chemistry to pick each other up.

"If everybody pitches the way they can, that allows a guy to struggle for an outing or two without showing up so much," Callaway said Sunday. "The problem was Carrasco struggled, Salazar struggled, Bauer had a rough patch, Tomlin had a rough patch and it all came at one time."

Callaway remains upbeat, saying, "The body of work as a whole has been really good."

He conceded that the starters' routines were messed up coming out of the All-Star break and the issue has lingered in the second half. He said the Indians always worry about pitchers wearing down.

"We'll continue to battle some of those battles, but overall I'm very confident," he said. "We've always been a staff that's finished strong and once we get rolling here ..."

The track record for strong finishes is relatively short. The Indians' rotation has a combined 81 career starts in September/October — Carrasco 23, Kluber 21, Salazar 16, Tomlin 12, Bauer 9 — and Salazar has the best career ERA (3.80).

But Kluber has returned to his 2014 Cy Young form. Bauer struck out a career-high 13 in a no-decision against the Blue Jays Friday. Carrasco, who compiled a 2.22 ERA in July, carried a 6.66 ERA in August into Monday night's game at Oakland, but had averaged 7.25 strikeouts.

The Indians' rotation is deep and talented, led by Kluber and one of the best pitching coaches in the game. With Francona pushing the right buttons, the Indians seem equipped to handle the physical and mental challenges the stretch run will bring. If he deems it's an automatic loss every time he sends Tomlin to the mound, something will be done.

Now is not the time for that. It is time to have faith in the best rotation in the American League and the strong support staff behind it.

Akron Beacon Journal LOADED: 08.23.2016

Cleveland Indians' Tyler Naquin and timelessness: Bill Livingston

Bill Livingston, on August 22, 2016 at 11:00 AM, updated August 22, 2016 at 11:04 AM

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Some baseball games seem endless, which is why rule changes to speed up the game might be in the works.

The eternal appeal of the game, however, is that it can also seem timeless. A moment in the ninth inning at Progressive Field on Friday night can take us on a time trip, back-back-back to when streetcars and trolleys threaded their way through downtown streets and suffragettes marched for the right to vote, when Woodrow Wilson was in the White House and Kaiser Bill was the enemy in "The War to End War."

Specifically, rookie Tyler Naquin's game-winning inside-the-park home run against the Toronto Blue Jays set the Wayback Machine for August 13, 1916, the afternoon of the unlikely charge around the Dunn Field bases of Robert Frank Roth, a.k.a., "Braggo" because of his heightened sense of his own ability, against the St. Louis Browns. Well-traveled in baseball circles because of his irritating arrogance, he was also known as "The Globetrotter."

Baseball isn't played by a clock, not yet, but it is by a calendar.

You didn't need a DeLorean -- auto designer John DeLorean wasn't born until 1925, by the way -- and you didn't have to work out the flux capacitor problem as in "Back to the Future" to make this trip through time. It just took a baseball game in 2016 which, for all its subtle changes, would have been instantly recognizable to Roth in 1916.

It wasn't a "walk-off"

The silly and inaccurate term, "walk-off victory" hadn't been coined in 1916, but unless it's a case of ball four with the bases loaded, it's not a walk-off win, anyway. There's no walk involved in an inside-the-park homer as the winning run. Until Naquin, it hadn't been done by an Indians player in 100 years and six days.

No Braggo. Just fact.

In Naquin's case it was a "lung searing sprint around the base and head-first slide into home-off" win, and in Roth's case, when he scored standing up, it was at worst a "scamper-off" win.

"Bobby Roth earned a niche in the hall of baseball fame yesterday," wrote The Plain Dealer's Henry P. Edwards,

It was a mythical concept at the time. The real Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, N.Y., would not be founded until 1939.

Cleveland.com's Zack Meisel recounted the particular's of Roth's drive-and-dash heroics Saturday.

No, not Tyler Naquin. We're talking about Braggo Roth, the party responsible for Cleveland's last walk-off inside-the-park home run prior to Naquin's mad dash around the bases on Friday night.

Traded for Shoeless Joe

Described in an article on the Society for American Baseball Research website (SABR.org) as "an often insufferable self-promoter," Roth was popular with Indians fans despite the fact that he and two other Chicago White Sox players, along with \$30,000 in cash, had gone to the Tribe on August 21, 1915 in return for the legendary "Shoeless Joe" Jackson.

An outfielder, Roth, said the SABR story, "delighted fans with flashy, though often unnecessary, diving catches."

"Home Run" Roth

Roth also hit three home runs in the last week of the 1915 season, enabling him to edge the New York Yankees' Rube Oldring, 7-6, for the home run title in that really most sincerely deadball era.

What would one of the scorecards be worth on eBay?

On the day he became an answer to a baseball trivia question a century later, Roth batted second in the bottom of the ninth.

Naquin rounded third and headed for 1916.

Leadoff man Tris Speaker had been walked three times in the game, but reliever Earl Hamilton induced, as Edwards wrote, "Spoke, the great Cleveland batter," to pop up.

Roth then lashed a 1-0 pitch over the head of Browns' center fielder Armando Marsans and off the scoreboard. Roth raced around the bases to score easily for a 4-3 Indians' victory.

Edwards said of the 18,000 fans in attendance: "All they did was cheer themselves hoarse, tear up their scorecards, toss their hats in the air, and then go away, forgetting canes, wraps etc in their excitement."

Shabbily clad and unaware of the value of such a scorecard as an item of sports memorabilia 100 years in the future, the crowd headed home.

The mellow light of the past

Such moments have always seemed like the light of a distant galaxy, falling on the Hubble telescope and imprinting the present with an image of the way it was in the faraway world the light had left behind on its long journey.

It is, admittedly, a romantic vision, but one that can be summoned by the crack of a bat, making 100 years fly off the calendar as Naquin rounded third and headed for 1916, reminding us that baseball is an ageless and uniquely fascinating endeavor.

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 08.23.2016

Cleveland Indians in first place? It's agony, it's awesome! -- Terry Pluto

By Terry Pluto, The Plain Dealer

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- This was a week for everyone who loves the Cleveland Indians, who finished their homestand with an 8-3 record.

But that tells so little about what happened at Progressive Field.

Six of the last eight games have been decided by one run.

Think about that as your heart seems to pound away every night when it's Tribe time.

The Indians are 4-2 in those six games.

A seventh game was a 10-7 loss, a ninth-inning torch job by Cody Allen.

The "easiest" victory in the last eight games? It was a 3-1 verdict over the White Sox.

Welcome to the pennant race.

Tribe manager Terry Francona sounded like many of the fans when discussing the weekend series against Toronto with the media: "There's no feeling like it. Your heart is in your throat, but you like it. It's agony. It's awesome."

I love that comment: "It's agony. It's awesome."

It's games that mean so much. It's a team that is overachieving. It's a team that seems to be building toward something very special.

I thought about that while watching rookie Mike Clevinger come out of the bullpen and deliver a knockout performance Sunday. His long hair was flowing, his fastball was sizzling. He recorded four outs, three of them were strikeouts.

Then there's 23-year-old Jose Ramirez, who is batting .381 with runners in scoring position. In two of the last three games, he has smashed late-inning homers.

"Our young players have never flinched," added Francona. "It looks like they are having the time of their lives -- and they should."

Meanwhile, Francona is chewing his way through enough pieces of bubblegum to fill the Grand Canyon.

Yes, it's agony...

It's awesome...

The Indians are now 71-51, leading Detroit in the Central Division by seven games.

But look out ... here comes Kansas City! The World Champion Royals have won eight in a row, and they are eight games back.

The last eight games are just a taste of what's coming.

A SWING AND A DRIVE

These games also have been made for Tribe radio broadcaster Tom Hamilton. How many times lately have we heard:

"A SWING AND A DRIVE...

"TO DEEP LEFT...

"A WAY BACK...

"GONE!!!!!!!!!"

That was how Hamilton described the eighth inning homer by Ramirez in Sunday's game, taking the Tribe from a 2-1 deficit to a 3-2 lead.

"I mean, Jose..." said Francona, pausing. "It happened so fast."

Just like Friday night.

It was the bottom of the ninth inning. The Indians were behind, 2-1. Then Ramirez homered.

Next batter was Tyler Naquin ... another home run.

Only this wasn't a walk-off, it was a dash around the bases, a belly-flop slide into home plate.

It was a game-winning inside-the-park homer.

In the name of Bobby "Braggo" Roth, who could believe it?

Roth was the last Tribe player to end a game with an inside-the-park homer until Naquin. "Braggo" as he was called, did it in 1917 ... against the St. Louis Browns.

HITTING THE ROAD

The Tribe now plays in Oakland and Texas.

They leave town having won 2-of-3 games from Toronto, a playoff caliber team in the Eastern Division.

"We won 2-of-3, and it feels like we had the lead for about 10 minutes," said Francona.

There have been some recent victories where you sit back and wonder, "Exactly how did the Indians win that game?"

They are winning games with no Michael Brantley and no Yan Gomes, both injured.

Since the All-Star break, Danny Salazar and Josh Tomlin are a combined 3-6 with a 7.38 ERA. The catchers don't hit ... at all.

This is not a season where everything has gone right.

Yet, the Tribe is in first place ... and that's awesome.

Even if sometimes it feels like agony.

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 08.23.2016

Catcher Yan Gomes understands why Cleveland Indians pursued Jonathan Lucroy

Paul Hoynes,

OAKLAND – Catcher Yan Gomes doesn't blame the Indians for trying to acquire All-Star catcher Jonathan Lucroy from Milwaukee before the Aug. 1 trading deadline.

"That had no effect on me at all," said Gomes, who is traveling with the Indians on this trip. "How much can you say when you're a guy on the DL? "For a moment the Indians thought they had a deal with Lucroy and the Brewers. They were ready to send four prospects to Milwaukee, including catcher Francisco Mejia, but Lucroy vetoed the trade because the Indians were on his no-trade list.

"We had talked about it, " said Gomes. "I respect the fact the guy is a great player. He's a two-time All-Star so why not go after a guy like that? Especially for a team that's making a playoff push -- any kind of good caliber guy would have helped. But I guess he didn't want to come here."

Milwaukee did trade Lucroy to Texas and if there is no big change among division leaders in the American League, the Indians and Rangers could meet in the postseason. If that happens, Gomes is confident he'll be able to help the Indians.

Gomes separated his right shoulder on July 17 on a bad tumble at first base against the Twins. He's been making steady progress on his rehab.

Monday afternoon, before the Indians opened a three-game series against Oakland, Gomes played catch with strength coach Joe Kessler, maxing out at 105 feet. He's already been hitting in the cage and could take batting practice on the field with the rest of the team on this current trip.

The tricky part of this equation is finding a way to get Gomes enough at-bats to get him game ready. Time is of the essence because the Indians minor league affiliates end their regular seasons Sept. 5.

"I don't want to get too far ahead, but from talking to James (Quinlan, Indians' head athletic trainer), Gomes is going to be able to DH probably well ahead of when he could catch," said manager Terry Francona. "So, that's where we would probably try to use that to our advantage. He he could get some games under his belt, and just try to make sure we getting his arm (in shape)."

It appears a rehab assignment is in the near future for Gomes.

"That part of it is not a problem," said Gomes, when asked about hitting. "After the first five swings or so, and getting the shoulders loose, it feels really good."

Gomes said he was initially hesitant to test his shoulder when it came to throwing.

"When you're on the DL, any kind of progress is big," said Gomes. "If one day you're able to use weights, it helps the mental part of it. When I heard I was throwing, as much as I wanted to feel perfect, you know you're going to hesitate. But after five or 10 throws I was fine. Now it's just a matter of building strength and go from there."

Gomes said he wasn't just "flicking the ball" Monday.

"I actually had to put something behind it," he said. "It felt pretty good. I'm making some progress."

Gomes, since his injury, has been at Progressive Field for all the home games. He's watched the road games, until this trip, on TV and did not enjoy the experience.

"I don't think I'm ready to be a fan just yet," he said. "I try not to yell at the TV. I know exactly how that feels like when people are yelling at me."

When the Indians are on the road, Gomes said it's hard to feel a connection with his teammates. It's better when the Indians are at home, but Gomes is smart enough not to feel too connected until he's 100 percent.

When Tyler Naquin hit his game-winning inside-the-park-homer in the ninth inning against Toronto, Gomes threw both arms up in celebration. He said his shoulder felt fine. But when his teammates started piling on Naquin at the plate, he stayed on the outside.

"I said maybe I should stay out of that," said Gomes.

Testing, testing: Francona said Danny Salazar is in a better spot than he was Thursday when he lasted just one inning against the White Sox in his return from the disabled list.

Salazar will start against the A's on Tuesday night.

"He feels pretty good about moving forward," said Francona.

How worried is the Tribe about Salazar, Tomlin?

Salazar, who will be on a pitch count Tuesday, hopefully doesn't have to repeat his performance from Thursday. After getting knocked out of the game in the first inning, he went to the bullpen and threw three more innings.

"That was a little bit unique," said Francona. "It wasn't ideal, but we didn't want to just have it be a wasted start. We tried to be a little creative."

Finally: The Indians have told right-hander Tommy Hunter that he won't join the club from his rehab assignment at Class AAA Columbus until the rosters expand on Sept. 1.

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 08.23.2016

Cleveland Indians beat A's, 1-0; Carlos Santana homers, Carlos Carrasco strikes out nine

Paul Hoynes,

OAKLAND -- The Indians do their best work late.

Late at night or late in the game, it doesn't really matter. When the clock or the game flirts with the bewitching hour, watch out for the Indians.

After being held scoreless for seven innings by rookie Andrew Triggs and two relievers Monday night, Carlos Santana homered just inside the right field foul pole with one out in the eighth to give the Indians a 1-0 victory over Oakland on a chilly night at O.co Coliseum.

The Indians have won nine of their last 12 games and are 4-0 against the A's this season. The homer was Santana's 27th of the season.

Triggs has bounced between Class AAA Nashville and Oakland eight times this season. Monday was his fourth start and 22nd appearance for the A's. The A's won exactly one of those games.

That percentage did not improve Monday night despite the Triggs throwing six scoreless innings. The main reason is that Carlos Carrasco (9-6, 3.12 ERA) was pitching for the Tribe.

In his last start, Carrasco struck out 11 White Sox in 6 2/3 innings. He did not leave his swing-and-miss stuff in Cleveland.

Carrasco struck out nine in eight innings to give him 20 in his last two starts. He allowed four hits and no walks.

Andrew Miller pitched the ninth for his second save with the Indians and his 11th overall. Miller struck out the side in order to give him 93 strikeouts in 56 innings this season.

"Carrasco was terrific," said manager Terry Francona. "Command of his fastball and then off of that, the breaking ball. And he had to be good, because their guy was every bit as good. Fortunately, Carlos hits one out and we make it stand, because there was a lot of good pitching going on tonight."

Carlos Carrasco in midseason form

The Indians mounted one scoring threat against Triggs. Santana walked with two out in the sixth and went to third on a double by Jason Kipnis. Triggs retired Francisco Lindor on a fly ball to right to end the inning.

The A's answered with their first scoring threat in the sixth.

Coco Crisp doubled into the right field corner with one out, but was thrown out trying for third on good relays by Lonnie Chisenhall and Kipnis. The A's challenged, but call on the field stood.

"That was a good baseball play all the way around," said Chisenhall.

Said Carrasco, "I put a change up in the wrong spot. He got a double, but we got him out at third. That was good."

Jake Smolinski followed with a single to center. If Crisp would have stayed at second, the A's would have had a 1-0 lead.

Stephen Vogt sent a liner up the middle that Kipnis, ranging behind second, gloved, but dropped for an error. Carrasco, with runners on first and second, ended the threat by striking out Khris Davis for the third time in the game.

Davis came into the game ranked third in the AL with 32 homers, but had never faced Carrasco.

The Indians had a better opportunity in the seventh. Mike Napoli singled with one out and went to third on Chisenhall's double. Liam Hendriks, who started the inning in relief of Triggs, struck out Tyler Naquin and Abraham Almonte to end the inning.

The Indians have seven walk-off wins at home. Over the weekend, they took two out of three games from Toronto. They won one in the ninth and one in the eighth inning.

"That's the way we're playing," said Carrasco. "We think we're going to win every game."

Santana supplied the only run of the game with one out in the eighth. He hit a 1-1 pitch by Ryan Dull (5-4) to tie his career high in homers. Santana hit 27 homers in 2014.

"I'm not trying to hit a home run there," said Santana. "I'm leading off. I'm just trying to get on base."

What it means

The Indians stretched their lead over idle Detroit in the AL Central to a season-high 7 1/2 games. The last time they had that big of a lead was July 7 when Carrasco beat the Tigers.

The pitches

Carrasco threw 99 pitches, 66 or 67 percent for strikes. Triggs threw 89 pitches, 54 or 61 percent for strikes.

Thanks for coming

The Indians and A's drew 10,114 fans to O.co Coliseum on Monday night. First pitch was at 10:07 p.m. with a temperature of 58 degrees.

What's next?

Indians RHP Danny Salazar (11-4, 3.57) will face rookie left-hander Sean Manaea (4-8, 4.98) on Tuesday at 10:05 p.m. Sportstime Ohio, WTAM-1300

This will be Salazar's second start since coming off the disabled list. He's 2-0 and has not allowed an earned run in 16 2/3 innings against the A's in his career.

Manaea is 1-3 in his last four starts. He ranks second among AL rookies with 92 strikeouts and 110 1/3 innings pitched. He's never faced the Indians.

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 08.23.2016

RubberDucks 5, Fightin Phils 2

RubberDucks 5, Fightin Phils 2

Story lines: D.J. Brown held the best-hitting team in the Eastern League to five hits and two runs and struck out four in 7½ innings to extend the winning streak for the Ducks (66-60) to eight. The RubberDucks are now up 2½ games for the final spot in the Western Division playoffs.

Duckbills: RubberDucks groundskeeper Chris Walsh was named Eastern League Field Manager of the Year. The Cuyahoga Falls resident has been the lead man at Canal Park for the last six seasons.

Next: Today at 7:05 p.m. at Canal Park. Ducks right-hander Michael Peoples (9-6, 3.89 ERA) and Phils righty Mark Leiter (6-2, 3.51) are the scheduled pitchers.

RubberDucks: Late-season push has once-struggling Ducks in driver's seat for playoff berth

There was a little more scruff on David Wallace's face Monday. The RubberDucks manager hasn't lost his razor and the water works just fine at his house.

But with the Ducks on a seven-game winning streak and winners of nine of their last 10 heading into a three-game set with the Reading Fightin' Phils, he was a little more superstitious.

That's a stark change from just two weeks ago when the RubberDucks were on the tail end of a skid in which they had won two of 16 games. A team that once held the best record in all of baseball was 5½ games out of the playoff scene.

Fast forward to Monday and that same Ducks squad sits 1½ games ahead of the Harrisburg Senators in second place of the Eastern League Western Division.

That means if the playoffs were to start today, the RubberDucks would be playing postseason baseball.

"It's a lot of hard work in the cages and in the bullpens all starting to come together," Wallace said. "They're starting to see the fruits of their labors. It's guys getting more comfortable as we add different pieces from different areas."

That shows in the numbers. The Ducks are finding success as a team, and the month of August has been fantastic across the board.

Eric Haase (.379, 4 home runs, 8 RBI), Nellie Rodriguez (.321, 4, 16), Jordan Smith (.309, 2, 13) and Greg Allen (.300, 1, 4) have found the sticks in the nick of time.

As good as those numbers are, pitching is even better.

Rob Kaminsky (3-0, 1.50, 14 strikeouts), D.J. Brown (2-0, 2.84, 4) and Julian Merryweather (1-1, 2.37, 13) have been solid. Relievers Louis Head (0.00 ERA in six appearances, 10 strikeouts), Grant Sides (0.00, 5, 12) and Colt Hynes (2.57, 6, 6) have picked up where those starters left off.

"I think every player feeds off success," Head said. "When we see a guy do well, we're not the type of team that is like, 'Oh, well he's doing good, he's going to take my spot.'

"When we see someone do well, it makes us want to do better. It's a little competition within the team. We're kind of competing against each other."

At 65-60, the RubberDucks have sustained the blows of call-ups and trades and have learned to come together.

"It's great to see," Smith said. "We're just going out and having fun every day. A lot of us have played together before, but things just weren't quite clicking before. I think we finally found our groove and we're going to try to carry that into the playoffs."

The fact that's even a scenario is a testament to the hard work the team has put in. With 16 games remaining — the Ducks have a suspended game on Sept. 2 left with the Bowie Baysox in which they're leading 6-3 with one out in the top of the fifth — the magic number to clinch is 16. While Harrisburg, which came into Monday with 15 games left, holds the tiebreaker, the RubberDucks will play one less game, meaning they need to only tie the Senators in the win column.

"They're pretty excited about it," Wallace said. "Never once did I think guys would coast to the end. It's something that guys that have played playoff baseball before know how much fun it is."

Clippers 7, Indians 5 | Winning streak reaches seven

Shawn Haviland pitched six strong innings, the Clippers manufactured five runs in the sixth inning, then hung on to defeat host Indianapolis 7-5 on Monday night before 6,397 at Victory Field.

Columbus has won seven straight games, leads second-place Indianapolis by 12 games with 14 left and its magic number to clinch the division is three.

The Clippers sent 10 batters to the plate in the sixth and took a 7-1 lead. They had five singles, two walks and a sacrifice fly, and former Indians pitcher Justin Masterson was charged with all five runs on four hits and two walks in two-thirds of an inning.

Haviland (1-1) allowed one run on three hits, with seven strikeouts and one walk. The Indians rallied with two runs in the seventh and two in the ninth. Austin Meadows had a two-out, two-run double in the ninth off Austin Adams, but Adams got Willy Garcia to pop out to end the game.

Cleveland Indians: Classic Park to host Fall Development Program

By **David Glasier**, *The News-Herald*

The Indians are bringing their Fall Development Program to Classic Park.

Captains general manager Neil Stein confirmed Aug. 23 the annual gathering of the team's top minor-league prospects for on-field and classroom work will start at Progressive Field on Sept. 19, then move to Classic Park for sessions on Sept. 20-23.

Among the 32 invitees to last year's Fall Development Program were outfielders Clint Frazier, Bradley Zimmer and Greg Allen, infielders Bobby Bradley, Nelson Rodriguez, Yu-Cheng Chang and Yandy Diaz, pitchers Adam Plutko, Justus Sheffield and Mike Clevinger and catchers Eric Haase and Francisco Mejia.

Frazier and Sheffield have since left the organization in the July 31 trade with the Yankees that brought relief pitcher Andrew Miller to the Indians.

The Indians typically do not announce invitees to the Fall Development until early September, near the end of minor-league seasons.

This year's Fall Development Program runs concurrent with a potentially pivotal Indians homestand that has them playing the Royals (Aug. 20-22) and White Sox (Sept. 23-25).

Bowling Green Hot Rods down Lake County Captains to open series

By **David Glasier**, *The News-Herald*

A pivotal homestand for the Captains got off to a downbeat start Aug. 22 with a 4-1 loss to the Bowling Green (Ky.) Hot Rods.

The setback in the opener of a five-game series cost the Captains some ground in their quest to secure the second of two second-half playoff berths up for grabs in the Midwest League's Eastern Division.

Lake County (26-30, second half) is 1 1/2 games behind the Lansing (Mich.) Lugnuts, currently holding the coveted spot, and one game behind the Great Lakes (Mich.). Loons.

On Aug. 22, Lansing suffered an 11-10 road loss at Dayton. Great Lakes posted a 4-3 victory at home over Fort Wayne.

The Hot Rods (35-21) have all but locked down one of the second-half playoff spots.

Notwithstanding the loss, only their second in the last eight games, the mood is bullish in the Captains' clubhouse.

"This team plays like a true team," Captains relief pitcher Argenis Angulo said before the game. "It's a family inside the locker room and outside on the field. All the guys want to make the playoffs, for sure."

Another relief pitcher, Erick Algarin, picked up on the family theme.

"Whether it's the Latin guys or the English guys, everybody gets treated the same," Algarin said. "Everybody wants to win and do the work it takes to win."

Hard-throwing reliever Kieran Lovegrove cited the submersion of individual egos and cohesion as factors in the late-season playoff push.

"We're there for each other," Lovegrove said. "Guys are aware of what's going on with the playoff race, but they're focusing on one inning at a time, one game at a time. With the way we're playing, getting to the playoffs is very much in the realm of possibility."

The Captains managed four hits against three Bowling Green pitchers, including starter and eventual winner Blake Bivens (7-4, 2.67 ERA). Lake County starter Micah Miniard (0-2, 4.71) took the loss.

While the Captains aren't scoring runs in bunches in the season's late stages, hitting coach Kevin Howard is generally pleased with the situational hitting.

"It's not so much the number of runs we're scoring as getting runs at the right times," Howard said. "We've played a lot of close games, and we're learning how to win them."

Captains manager Tony Mansolino remembers how the Captains spent long stretches of the first half in first place before losing five of seven games down the stretch to finish a half-game behind second-place West Michigan.

"I'm a little cautious after what we went through in the first half, but I like our preparation. I can't wait to see how this plays over the next couple of weeks," Mansolino said.

After finishing the series against Bowling Green, the Captains play four games against Lansing at Classic Park. The regular season ends with the Captains playing three road games in Dayton before hosting Lansing in another three-game series.

"This will be a real test for us," Mansolino said. "If we win three of the five games against Bowling Green, we put ourselves in a great position to control our destiny."

The Captains have finished their season series with Great Lakes, so they'll need to keep winning and get help to overtake the Loons.

Butler-Valencia fight in A's clubhouse exposes chemistry issues

By John Shea and Susan Slusser

Oakland Athletics' Billy Butler returns to the dug out after lining out during the fourth inning of the second game of the Battle of the Bay Series against the San Francisco Giants on Friday, April 1, 2016 in ... more

Danny Valencia and the A's say they're trying to move forward from his clubhouse fight with Billy Butler in Chicago that landed Butler on the seven-day concussion disabled list.

"We've handled it internally, and we're going to move on from this point," Valencia said Monday. "There's really not much else to it."

Oh, but there is.

The A's have had several recent off-field controversies. Team chemistry was a problem last year and, despite massive roster turnover, is an issue again this season.

Asked to describe his relationship with Butler, Valencia said, "He's just my teammate. I have respect for him. I hope he has respect for me."

Butler's thoughts weren't known. Through a team spokesman, he declined to be interviewed.

General manager David Forst, who announced the A's were fining both players an undisclosed amount but suspending neither, admitted team chemistry is "not great."

"Look," he said, "it's something we're constantly addressing. Again, there's a little bit of a chicken-and-egg thing. Winning and good chemistry and losing and bad chemistry. But it's something we're always talking with Bob (Melvin) about and will constantly address."

The A's had two other recent unflattering off-field episodes that made national headlines, including their suspension of health and conditioning coach Mike Henriques for hiding a camera in the players' weight room and Coco Crisp's accusations that the team has benched him to prevent his \$13 million option for 2017 from being exercised.

Now, a clubhouse fight.

"It's not the first time guys have gotten in a fight in the clubhouse," Forst said. "Unfortunately, when we're having the kind of season we're having, it's a big story. If we were winning, it would be colorful, but we're not."

It's a far cry from two years ago when the A's were a playoff team. They are a season-high 19 games under .500 following a 1-5 trip through Texas and Chicago and a 1-0 loss against Cleveland at home Monday.

Amid one of the worst stretches in one of Oakland's worst seasons, Valencia clocked Butler over an endorsement contract issue, sources told The Chronicle.

Two players who witnessed the incident and helped break up the fight spoke to The Chronicle on condition of anonymity because they didn't want to appear to be taking sides. One said both Valencia and Butler played roles in the incident, Valencia for punching Butler and Butler for provoking Valencia by potentially costing him an endorsement contract.

According to the witnesses, the incident occurred before batting practice Friday when an equipment representative quizzed Valencia about a pair of off-brand spikes in Valencia's locker. Valencia previously had been told not to wear those shoes in games.

Valencia told the representative he uses the non-issue spikes only during pregame workouts. According to multiple sources, Butler, who has an equipment endorsement with a different company, jumped in to tell the equipment rep that Valencia was lying and regularly uses the non-standard spikes.

Butler allegedly told the representative that the company should drop Valencia's endorsement deal. (Endorsement deals are typically worth between \$10,000 and \$20,000, sometimes more.)

After the rep departed, the witnesses said, Valencia confronted Butler and told him, "Don't you ever loud-talk me in front of a rep. That was wrong," and walked aggressively toward Butler, who turned, took a couple of steps toward Valencia and, according to both witnesses, said, "I can say whatever I want and your bitch ass isn't going to do anything about it."

One player said that the men leaned in, bumped heads and started pushing each other, then Valencia started swinging and hit Butler in the temple.

Melvin didn't deny there's a chemistry issue.

"Certainly we had this incident, but when you have losing seasons and you're not playing well, it's not going to go as well as when you're winning," he said. "And we've had two tough seasons. So in that respect, you don't expect everything to be warm and fuzzy all the time."

Was Melvin OK with the players being fined and not suspended?

"Yeah," he said. "I think this is the easiest way to move forward."

Butler hasn't played since the fight. He took part in batting practice afterward but wasn't scheduled to play that night against right-hander James Shields. He missed the next two games against left-handed starters with what Melvin described as nausea and vomiting.

Crisp and Yonder Alonso tweeted in support of Valencia, as did Royals first baseman Eric Hosmer, a former teammate of both combatants.

Butler and Valencia have a long-standing, loud, joking, back-and-forth relationship that dates to their time in Kansas City.

"Those two go at it every day, so in that way, it was pretty normal," one player said. "If Bill had dropped it, Danny never would have done anything. But he kind of kept egging him on. I think it's fair to say he was verbally provoked, very much so. I'm worried about what might happen to Danny now, but at the same time, you don't want to see anyone get hurt."

Valencia was asked if he had regrets and said, "You'd like to handle things differently, but we're handling it in here. ... As with anyone in the game, you have to overcome obstacles. We all have to persevere in here."

Forst said team trainers told him Sunday that Butler would be out five to seven days and that Butler told him and Melvin that he's improving.

Valencia didn't start Monday but will Tuesday, Melvin said. Valencia said he hasn't spoken with Butler since the incident. Neither addressed the full team to apologize.

Can they co-exist?

"Yeah," Melvin said, "there's never been a clubhouse I've been in where everyone got along swimmingly."

Nevertheless, Butler's locker was relocated, further from Valencia's. A No. 32 jersey hung in Butler's old locker.

That's Jesse Hahn's number.

San Francisco Chronicle LOADED: 08.23.2016