

Carmona's struggles continue in loss Indians finally break through against nemesis Baker

By Anthony Castrovine / MLB.com

MINNEAPOLIS -- The good news, where the Indians were concerned Tuesday night, is that they are no longer Scott Baker's personal stat-padder.

But that was of little consolation when Fausto Carmona squandered a two-run lead, and the Indians lost the game, 5-4, to the Twins at the Metrodome.

Carmona got through the first inning, so that was progress. But he nevertheless turned in an outing that served as another bit of evidence that his rough 2008 and '09 seasons are more rule than exception. The exception, it seems, was that 19-win season in 2007 when Carmona and his trusty sinker dominated from coast-to-coast.

These days, Carmona doesn't coast through much. And in this start, he allowed five runs on nine hits with three walks and three strikeouts in 5 1/3 innings.

The Indians didn't demote Carmona (3-11, 6.58 ERA) all the way down to the Arizona desert three months ago just for him to keep turning in these kinds of results. Despite his two-month recalibration in the Minors, the guy once viewed as the eventual heir to CC Sabathia's throne is looking more and more like a potential burden to an already watered-down 2010 rotation.

"It's frustrating for everybody and for him, first and foremost," manager Eric Wedge said. "But you never give into the fight. He'll keep working, and what we really need for him to do is start stringing things together."

That starts with making it out of the first inning, something Carmona was unable to do in a two-thirds of an inning clunker against the Rangers last week.

Carmona improved in that department in this outing, but he needed 27 pitches to do so, and he coughed up the game's first run along the way. On the bright side, he did work his way out of a bases-loaded jam.

A 1-0 lead in Baker's hands would usually prove insurmountable to the Indians this year, as Baker came in with a 0.93 ERA and 4-0 record against them. But surprisingly, a Tribe team that had scored just three earned runs off Baker in 32 previous innings against him this season broke out and doubled that tally in the fourth.

Jamey Carroll led off the fourth with a single, and he swiped second on a hit-and-run in which Asdrubal Cabrera swung and missed.

"You've got to take chances against a pitcher when you haven't done anything against him," Wedge said. "And we haven't done much against [Baker]."

But the Tribe finally did something when Jhonny Peralta scored Carroll from second on a single. Travis Hafner put a pair in scoring position with a double. That set up Andy Marte's sacrifice fly and Matt LaPorta's RBI single to make it 3-1.

It was the lead that would not last.

In the fourth, Carmona walked Brian Buscher and served up an RBI single to Nick Punto. In the fifth, Orlando Cabrera tied the game with a leadoff shot to left. And in the sixth, Carmona fell apart by giving up a leadoff double to Delmon Young, an RBI single to Buscher and a one-out RBI single to Punto to make it 5-3.

Wedge did defend Carmona a bit with regard to Young's double. It was one of those turf-burners that are oh-so-common in this ballpark, and Wedge felt the third baseman Peralta should have at least kept it in the infield.

"I can't say you have to make that play," Wedge said, "but he can't let that ball get in the outfield."

Still, the fact remained that Carmona did not shut down the opposition with a lead in hand and the game on the line.

"He's not a rookie," Wedge said. "It's not about getting him out at the right time. It's about him being able to finish things off."

The Indians, who have now dropped 12 of their last 15 games, were all but finished after the sixth. They pulled within a run in the ninth, when LaPorta took closer Joe Nathan deep on a one-out solo shot, but a true comeback was not to be.

"It's tough," LaPorta said of the Tribe's skid. "But with every loss, it builds a fire within us. Every game counts. It's a chance to get better. It's not about wins and losses, it's about competing."

The Tribe is finding it awfully hard to compete with Carmona on the mound. Although he showed a flash of brilliance in tossing seven strong innings against the Mariners on Aug. 23, he has allowed 19 runs over 17 innings in his last four starts.

Carmona himself hasn't had much to say about the struggles. He blew past the media after the Rangers outing but did stick around to discuss this one. He said he felt more comfortable on the mound but just wasn't getting the results.

The results, by and large, have been ugly for Carmona the last two years.

"I'm never going to feel frustrated," Carmona said through an interpreter. "I know I'm a winner. Things aren't working out right now, but I always look ahead to my next start. No matter what happens, I'm going to move forward."

**Indians say goodbye to Dome's quirks
Cleveland (61-83) at Minnesota (73-72), 1:10 p.m. ET**

Anthony Castrovince / MLB.com

MINNEAPOLIS -- More than 29 years after an Indians team first stepped into the Hubert H. Humphrey Metrodome to take on the Twins, the Tribe will play its final game in the concrete bubble Wednesday afternoon.

The theme of the day will be "good riddance."

Generally speaking, opposing teams despise playing in this building. Fly balls are difficult to discern from the white Teflon roof, the artificial surface turns would-be groundouts into extra-base hits, and the Twins, who will have six games remaining here after the conclusion of this series, have enjoyed one of the greatest home-field advantages in the game because of the crowd noise.

"Twenty thousand [fans] here sounds like 40,000 anywhere else," manager Eric Wedge said. "[The Twins] have had a lot of success here and a lot of success late in games here. You can't deny that."

No one on the Tribe understands the inherent home-field advantage of the Metrodome better than pitching coach Carl Willis, who pitched out of the Twins' bullpen from 1991 to 1995 and was a key member of the '91 team that won it all.

Willis, then, is probably the only member of the Tribe's traveling party who would call Wednesday's finale "bittersweet."

"In my career as a player, this was a very special place to me," Willis said. "If it weren't for the opportunity I had in Minnesota, I certainly never would have had the opportunity to be standing here today as a coach."

But because Willis is an opposing coach, he's happy that the Twins are moving on to the outdoor pastures and up-to-date amenities of Target Field, a 40,000-seat facility that is nearly finished on the city's north end.

"This is a different venue," Willis said. "It's a different type of place. I once saw Rob Deer hit the roof twice in one game here. It's a tough place to play, because it takes a game or two to get acclimated to it."

Willis could neither confirm nor deny the reports that stadium workers use the ventilation system to the Twins' advantage, ensuring the airflow is conducive to Twins' homers.

Former hitting coach Eddie Murray was convinced that the Twins pulled such shenanigans, Willis recalled with a laugh.

The Indians got a taste of the disadvantages to playing in a multi-use facility in 2004, when a game against the Twins here was suspended so that the stadium could be cleared and adjusted in time for a University of Minnesota football game.

And as far as the Metrodome's quirks go, it doesn't get much quirkier than Travis Hafner, the owner of nine career triples, hitting for the cycle here on Aug. 14, 2003.

The Indians played their first game here on May 24, 1982. They won, 9-2, on a four-hitter by Len Barker, with former outfielder and current STO broadcaster Rick Manning going 3-for-4 with a homer.

As the Indians bid the Metrodome a fond farewell Wednesday, they'll obviously be hoping for a similar result.

Pitching matchup

CLE: LHP Aaron Laffey (7-5, 3.79 ERA)

Laffey had a rare off night on Sept. 8. He has been the Indians' best pitcher of late and had given up three earned runs or fewer in his last six starts. But the Rangers hit him hard and often. He pitched just 3 1/3 innings, giving up seven runs -- six earned -- and 12 hits with a walk and a strikeout. It was his worst start of the season. He'll try to rebound against the Twins, against whom he's 4-1 with a 4.05 ERA in his career.

MIN: RHP Nick Blackburn (9-11, 4.39 ERA)

After two quality starts in a row, Blackburn's second-half troubles returned in his last outing against the A's. The right-hander allowed six runs on six hits in three innings. Blackburn said after the start that he couldn't find his location during the outing and struggled to get his offspeed pitches working. In four starts vs. Cleveland this season, Blackburn is 1-3 with a 4.84 ERA.

Tidbits

Double-A Akron got a leg up on Connecticut in the opener of the best-of-five Eastern League finals Tuesday night. The Aeros won, 7-2, behind a strong start from Josh Tomlin (2 ER, 5 H, 7 K, 7 IP) and home runs from first baseman Beau Mills and designated hitter Matt McBride. Game 2 is set for 6:35 p.m. ET Wednesday at Connecticut. ... The Indians entered Tuesday averaging 5.4 runs per game on the road and 4.6 runs per game at home.

**Tribe's 2010 schedule starts off favorably
Fewer home dates in April works out to Indians' advantage**

By Anthony Castrovince / MLB.com

CLEVELAND -- The scheduling gods finally appear to be smiling on the Indians.

How else do you explain a 2010 schedule that mercifully includes just seven home dates in the often cold and cruel month of April and summer dates for the arrival of the ever-popular Red Sox and Yankees?

One would assume these features of the '10 schedule, which was officially released Tuesday, should help the Indians from a business perspective. After all, this is the same club that saw four April home games snowed out and three others played in Milwaukee in 2007.

As far as how the schedule could help the Indians from a competitive standpoint, the Tribe will not be lacking opportunities to impact the American League Central race down the stretch. Of the last 44 games, 31 will take place against Central opponents, including each of the final 16.

Speaking of Central opponents, the Tribe will open the 2010 season on the road in Chicago against the White Sox. Perhaps that sounds familiar, as the Indians also opened at U.S. Cellular Field in 2005, '06 and '07. The season-opening six-game road trip will also take them to Detroit before heading home to Progressive Field.

The Indians' home opener will take place Monday, April 12, against the Rangers. A specific game time has not yet been announced, but tickets to the home opener and the popular Six Packs ticket packages will go on sale a little earlier than usual. Rather than going on sale the day after Thanksgiving, they will be up for grabs the Monday before the holiday.

Detailed information on 2010 special events and promotions will be released before the Nov. 23 on-sale date, which will begin at 10 a.m. ET. Single-game tickets for all 81 home games will go on sale March 5, 2010, also at 10 a.m.

On the Interleague Play slate next season will be home games against the Nationals (June 11-13) and Mets (June 15-17). A chance exists that the Indians will face former ace Cliff Lee when they travel to Philadelphia to face the Phillies on June 22-24.

But the Interleague schedule isn't limited to NL East opponents. Interestingly, Major League Baseball finally adhered to the Pirates' long-running request to play the Indians more often.

Though the Indians will maintain their home-and-home "Ohio Cup" series with the Reds (May 21-23 at Progressive Field and June 25-27 at Great American Ball Park), they will also travel to PNC Park to face the Pirates for the second straight year. That three-game set takes place June 18-20. The Pirates view it as a natural pairing, building off the Browns-Steelers rivalry in the NFL.

As far as those aforementioned marquee home opponents are concerned, the Indians have a pair of four-game sets against the beasts of the AL East. The Tribe will play host to the Red Sox from June 7-10, and the Yankees will come to town from July 26-29.

All told, the Indians will have seven home games in April, 16 in May, 13 in June, 14 in July, 17 in August and 14 in September.

Also of note, the Indians will spend Memorial Day weekend at the new Yankee Stadium, the \$1.6 billion palace they helped christen this year.

The 2010 regular-season schedule will end where it began. The Indians will close out the season Oct. 1-3 at Chicago's U.S. Cellular Field.

Tribe's All-Time 9 has crowded outfield

Vote to help decide which Indians player had best year

By Anthony Castrovince / MLB.com

Imagine filling out a lineup card and having the 1948 vintage Lou Boudreau or the 1999 version of Omar Vizquel at your disposal for shortstop.

Imagine plotting out an outfield in which you must decipher between the likes of Albert Belle in '95, Rocky Colavito in '58, Manny Ramirez in '99 and Grady Sizemore in 2006.

Not even Mike Hargrove in the '90s had it this good.

Well, imagine no more, because MLB.com is offering Tribe fans a chance to fill out their dream lineup with a few agonizing moments of deliberation followed by a few clicks of the mouse.

More than 2.6 million votes have already been cast since the 9/9/09 debut of the "All-Time 9s," a platform for fans to debate the greatest single-season performances for all 30 Major League franchises. Running through Sept. 23, the voting marks the start of the MLB.com/Lineup Card campaign, a gathering place for the posting and never-ending discussion of the greatest past and present lineups.

Here's a look at how the Tribe's closest races are shaping up:

Catcher: Sandy Alomar Jr. was inducted into the Indians' team Hall of Fame the same day Victor Martinez was traded to the Red Sox. Both players carried a captain-like presence in the Tribe clubhouse at one time, and now they are neck-and-neck in the fan voting. At last check, Martinez's 2007 season (.301 average, 25 homers, 114 RBIs) was just barely edging Alomar's 1997 campaign (.324 average, 21 homers, 83 RBIs).

Outfield: Ramirez (.333 average, 44 homers, 165 RBIs in '99) and Belle (.317 average, 50 homers, 126 RBIs in '95) seem to have a foothold on the first two outfield spots. But can legends such as Joe Jackson (.408 average in 1911) or Tris Speaker (.380 average, 17 homers and 130 RBIs in 1923) overtake Kenny Lofton (.349 average, 60 stolen bases in '94) for the third spot? At last check, Speaker and Lofton were within 10 votes of each other, with Jackson not far behind.

Shortstop: The most intriguing debate of the bunch might be at short, where, at last count, Vizquel's 1999 season (.333 average, 66 RBIs, 42 stolen bases) was just barely edging Boudreau's player-manager heroics from the championship season in '48 (.355 average, 19 homers, 106 RBIs).

got dirt on my hands, but I'm building me a new home

By Anthony Castrovince/MLB.com

Target Field is on-target for an April 12 opening next season, as the Twins move from the Metrodome, their home for the last three decades, to the greener pastures of natural grass and outdoor baseball.

Kevin Smith, the Twins' executive director of public affairs, and Mike Herman, the club's director of media relations, were gracious enough to take the members of the Tribe media horde on a tour of the new ballpark this morning, and it is a beauty.

The 40,000-seat facility is on the opposite end of the Minneapolis downtown area, next to the Target Center (all that \$100 furniture you've been buying at Target has left the company with plenty of scratch for sporting venue naming rights). Its limestone exterior comes from a local quarry and adds a little Minnesotan flair, as will the walleye sandwiches that will be served in the concessions. And a new light rail stop will take passengers 30 feet from one of the ballpark's five entrances.

Inside, the swells will sit in the "Champions Club" seats that are right on top of the action behind home plate. They'll go from \$175 to \$275 per game, and that includes access to the club, which will house the Twins' two World Series trophies. When Joe Mauer was recently given a tour of that area, he asked if there will be room to add a new spot for a new trophy. Smith told him, "If you stay, there will."

On the suite level are dining areas with huge images of Rod Carew and Kirby Puckett on laser-fired pine. Should go nice with the wood-fired pizza.

As for the "regular" seats, some of the best in the house are the left-field bleachers, which will go for about 18 bucks. The short, eight-foot wall in left ensures that those in the bleachers will feel like a fourth outfielder.

In right field, it's a 23-foot-high wall, on top of which rests another bleacher section that is backed by a standing-room porch area where many a Justin Morneau fly ball will no doubt be deposited.

But if you ask me, the best place in the ballpark to take in the action might be on the Budweiser Party Deck in left. And it's way in left, elevated high above the action. A gas fire pit will keep the patrons warm on those harsh April nights.

Speaking of keeping things warm, the field will be kept at an appropriate temperature thanks to coils installed underneath the soil. And the field, by the way, is already in place and looks ready for play. The stadium itself is about 90 percent complete, Smith said.

All in all, the Twins, who have already sold 16,500 season tickets for next season, did this one right. They added some local touches that make it unique to the region, and they pay proper tribute to the team's history (a flag pole from old Metropolitan Stadium was unearthed and will be installed on the right-field porch). What's more, they won't have to share this new home with the Vikings, the Gophers or the annual monster truck rally that comes to the Metrodome (Herman said the fumes from the truck rehearsals trickle into the Twins' offices and force an evacuation).

The \$425 million Target Field looks like a winner to me (and what a bargain, compared with the Yankee Stadium costs). But with the Indians scheduled to visit in the third week of April next season, I'm still holding out hope for the last-minute addition of a retractable roof...

EXCRUCIATING MINUTIAE OF THE DAY...

- How do I know the Indians will be at Target Field the third week of April? Because I've read the 2010 schedule, of course. It was released this afternoon.
- The Indians had no official word on how Jason Knapp's shoulder surgery went today in New York.
- If you didn't already know Kelly Shoppach's future with this club looks bleak, look to the lineups. Shoppach has started just five of 14 games in September. Lou Marson is getting a great opportunity to show whether he's ready for this level. "He's a young kid, and we want to take a good look at him," Wedge said, "and pick our spots with [Wyatt] Torgas and Shoppach."
- Trevor Crowe hit his first Major League homer last night, which is always nice. But he hit it from the left-hand side, which the Indians found encouraging, considering he's worked his way back from a right oblique strain. "It's good to have him available from both sides," Wedge said.
- It was only one game, of course, but Matt LaPorta looked solid at first base last night, picking an Asdrubal Cabrera throw out of the dirt and ranging to his right to make a nice play. As for where LaPorta, who is back in the outfield tonight, can expect to play next year, as Wedge said, "a lot depends on the supporting cast." And the guy filling out the lineups, of course.
- Michael Brantley was caught stealing for the second time in five tries last night. He still has the green light to run on his own, as Wedge is going to allow him to get comfortable running at this level and learn from his mistakes. He was thrown out once with a right-hander on the mound and once with a lefty pitching.
- Mahoning Valley lost the first game of the New York-Penn League finals against Staten Island last night. Double-A Akron's Eastern League finals against Connecticut began tonight.
- The Indians are averaging 5.4 runs per game on the road and 4.6 runs per game at home.

Indians release 2010 schedule

By the Associated Press

The Cleveland Indians will start and finish the 2010 season in Chicago.

The Indians will play the White Sox in their season opener on April 5 and play six road games before playing their home opener at Progressive Field on April 12 against the Texas Rangers.

Cleveland's home schedule will include one visit each by AL East powers Boston and New York. The Red Sox will visit Cleveland for a four-game series from June 7-10, and the Yankees' will be in for four games from July 26-29.

The Indians will play 31 of their final 44 games next season against AL Central teams, including their final 16 games.

The Indians will end the season with a three-game road series against the White Sox from Oct. 1

Twins top Indians, gain on Tigers in AL Central

MINNEAPOLIS (AP)—Joe Nathan's 40th save was what the rest of the Minnesota Twins' season promises to be without Justin Morneau—a grind.

But Nathan bounced back from allowing a ninth-inning home run and the Twins fought back from a two-run deficit for a 5-4 victory over the Cleveland Indians on Tuesday night.

Minnesota improved to 2-0 since losing first baseman Justin Morneau for the season and pulled within 4 1/2 games of first-place Detroit in the AL Central.

Nick Punto had three hits and two RBIs for the Twins, who still have a daunting task to catch Detroit with only 18 games left—seven against the Tigers—without Morneau, a former AL MVP who has a stress fracture in his back.

“Morneau is a luxury, he’s as good as they get, but we can’t just lay down,” Minnesota manager Ron Gardenhire said. “We know that we have to do other things. When you lose a power guy like that you have to figure out other ways to get it done, that’s all.”

The Twins got four hits, three RBIs and two runs from the bottom third of their order and 2 2-3 scoreless innings of relief from their bullpen before Nathan gave up the solo homer to LaPorta with one out in the ninth. Nathan walked Trevor Crowe with two outs, but got Michael Brantley to fly out for his 40th save in 45 chances.

Nathan reached 40 saves for the third time in his career and for the first time since recording 43 in 2005.

“It’s been a while, but it feels good,” Nathan said. “But we still know we’ve got some work to do. We still know if we’re 4 1/2 back we’re going to have to do something special. We’ve got to win probably more than four games against (the Tigers), probably five to have even a glimpse of hope.”

The deficit had been 5 1/2 games for six straight days, but the Twins beat Fausto Carmona (3-11) for the third time this season to finally trim the margin.

Carmona, coming off a season-low outing in which he allowed five runs while only getting two outs against Texas on Sept. 9, had some tough luck to start the decisive sixth inning.

Delmon Young’s leadoff chopper off the Metrodome turf stayed high enough to tip off Jhonny Peralta’s glove and slowly rolled to the outfield for a double.

“That shouldn’t have been a double,” Cleveland manager Eric Wedge said. “At the very least, he has to catch that ball. Ideally he catches it and makes a throw and it’s going to probably be a close play.”

Buscher followed with a single to score Young, and Buscher scored two batters later on Punto’s second RBI single that chased Carmona.

The right-hander fell to 1-5 since he was recalled from Triple-A Columbus on July 31. He allowed five runs, nine hits and three walks in 5 1-3 innings.

“I’m never going to feel frustrated,” Carmona said through an interpreter. “I know I’m a winner. Things are not working out good right now, but I’m never going to put my head down. I’m always going to look forward to my next start. Whatever happens, I’m going to continue to go forward.”

Punto drove in Buscher in the fourth to cut what had been a 3-1 deficit to one run, and Orlando Cabrera’s solo homer leading off the fifth tied the score.

Cleveland had a three-run fourth inning off Twins starter Scott Baker—who entered the game 4-0 with a 0.93 ERA in four starts against the Indians in 2009. Peralta and LaPorta both singled home a run in the inning and Andy Marte added a sacrifice fly. Baker would allow no more runs, striking out five in 5 1-3 innings.

Ron Mahay, Jon Rauch (3-1), Jose Mijares and Matt Guerrier combined to keep Cleveland off the board through the eighth inning.

“We need everyone,” Rauch said. “That’s the kind of guys and kind of character that’s on this team, guys are going to step up and do what they need to do. Buscher, Punto, all these guys who have been scrappy players and are getting opportunities and doing their best and doing their job.”

NOTES: Along with Morneau, third-baseman Joe Crede is likely out for the season with back problems, and recent call-up Justin Huber is day to day with a strained oblique. But Gardenhire said his desire to call up reinforcements was “squelched” by the front office. Gardenhire would like to see one of the organization’s top infielders promoted, but Luke Hughes and Trevor Plouffe are playing in the World Cup in Europe, while Danny Valencia and Brock Peterson are not on the 40-man roster. ... Baker finished with a 1.57 ERA against Cleveland in five starts this season. ... Carmona fell to 0-3 with a 7.91 ERA in four starts against the Twins in 2009.

Lots of home games in hot weather months by Sheldon Ocker on September 15, 2009

MINNEAPOLIS: Northeast Ohio fans won’t see the best of the National League East, even though the Indians will be matched up against that division on next year’s interleague schedule. ¶

On the other hand, the Tribe got a break in the schedule with Progressive Field playing host to only seven games in April. ¶

All 30 major-league teams announced their tentative schedules Tuesday, and as always there were elements favorable and unfavorable to Tribe partisans. ¶

In addition to six games with designated rival Cincinnati, the Indians will play three teams from the NL East plus the Pirates, who play in the NL Central but have requested a series with Cleveland, which they regard as a natural rival. ¶

Interleague play kicks off with a weekend series against the Reds May 21-23 at Progressive Field. The Nationals play a weekend series at Progressive Field June 11-13, and the Mets play three midweek games in Cleveland June 15-17. ¶

Unfortunately for local fans, the defending World Series champion Phillies, led by former Tribe manager Charlie Manuel, will not come to Progressive Field. The Indians travel to Philadelphia for a three-game set June 22-24, sandwiched between a weekend trip to Pittsburgh June 18-20 and a weekend series in Cincinnati June 25-27. ¶

The Yankees and Red Sox, traditionally the opponents who draw the largest crowds in Cleveland, play only once at Progressive Field, which has been the norm for a decade. Boston visits the Tribe for four weekday games June 7-10. The Indians will play host to the Yankees for four weekday games July 26-29. ¶

For a franchise that depends on luring fans to the ballpark in warm weather months and on weekends, the Tribe did relatively well with the schedule maker. In June, July and August, the Indians will play 44 games at home and 38 on the road. During this three-month span, the Tribe will play at Progressive Field seven weekends and be on the road for six. ¶

Weekend opponents in the three best drawing months of the season include Washington, Oakland, Detroit, Tampa Bay, Minnesota, Seattle and Kansas City. ¶

The season will open with a six-game trip. Opening Day will be April 5 in Chicago against the White Sox, after which the Tribe visits Comerica Park to play the Tigers. The home opener is April 12 against the Rangers. ¶

Of the three summer holidays, the Indians will be home only on July 4 against the Athletics. ¶

Although the Tribe is not expected to contend for the Central Division championship in 2010, should the club make a run at the playoffs, from August 27 to the end of the season Oct. 3, the schedule includes 25 games against division rivals, including 16 at home. ¶

Carmona, Tribe fall short again

By Sheldon Ocker

MINNEAPOLIS: In baseball, the operative phrase often is, "What have you done for us lately?" In the case of Fausto Carmona, the Indians' answer would be "Absolutely nothing."

It isn't saying much, but Carmona certainly has had worse games than his start Tuesday night, a game in which he gave up five runs and nine hits in 51/3 innings.

Of course, the Indians fell to the Twins 5-4 in the Metrodome. Why of course? Because the Tribe is in the midst of a serious run of losing, 12 of the past 15 games.

Carmona has done his part to contribute to this sorry record, though it's been a team effort. In his past four starts, Carmona is 0-3 with a 10.06 earned-run average. But in five starts before that, he was 1-2 with a 2.79 ERA.

And before that? Carmona (3-11, 6.58 ERA) was working his way up through the Tribe's minor-league system, trying to correct the flaws in his delivery and his thinking. It has been another fitful year for Carmona, who just two seasons ago won 19 games and posted a 3.06 ERA. That was followed by an 8-7 record and 5.44 ERA in 2008.

If the end of the season weren't so near, General Manager Mark Shapiro and manager Eric Wedge would be wondering what their next move should be in regard to Carmona's immediate future. As it is, they probably will let him finish out the season in the rotation and hope against hope that something clicks.

Tuesday night, Carmona gave up hits to the first three batters he faced, giving Minnesota a 1-0 lead. After that, he began getting batters out regularly. Even in the fourth, when he let in another run on a walk, a ground out and an RBI single, it was hardly as if the sky had fallen.

Carmona allowed a leadoff home run to Orlando Cabrera in the fifth but retired the next three batters to reach the sixth, when the sky did fall. A weird double by Delmon Young, on a ball that skipped off the turf in front of the plate and bounced off the outstretched glove of Jhonny Peralta at third, started the trouble.

Brian Buscher followed with an RBI single, and one out later, Nick Punto delivered an RBI single, chasing Carmona from the game. This is no way for a pitcher with a golden arm to allow himself to be treated.

Carmona was only half the Indians' problem. The Twins' starter was Scott Baker, which usually means the Indians might as well not waste time unpacking their bats. Coming into Tuesday night's game, Baker was 4-0 with an 0.93 ERA against the Tribe this year. Against everyone else, Baker was carrying a 5.01 ERA.

For whatever reason, it has not been a fair fight between the Tribe and Baker. But this time out, Baker was less than dominating, slightly less, giving up three runs in 51/3 innings, as many runs as he had allowed the Indians all season (29 innings) before Tuesday night.

It was a one-bad-inning kind of game for Baker. Jamey Carroll got the Tribe's first hit of the game, a single leading off the fourth inning. One out later, after Carroll had stolen second, Peralta singled him to the plate.

Travis Hafner followed with a ringing double to right to put runners on second and third, and Andy Marte drove in Peralta with a sacrifice fly. Matt LaPorta delivered an RBI single to score Hafner to give the Tribe a short-lived 3-1 lead.

With one out in the ninth, Matt LaPorta gave the Indians hope with a soaring drive over the fence in right-center field off closer Joe Nathan for his fifth home run of the season. But Nathan finished the inning without further damage to earn his 40th save.

Crowe has ball hitting first homer

By Sheldon Ocker

Trevor Crowe is thinking about what to do with the ball he hit for his first big-league home run Monday night at the Metrodome.

"It probably will go somewhere in my house," Crowe said. "It was awesome."

"But I'm just trying to have quality at-bats."

You would think that a rookie who had never gone deep off a major-league pitcher would watch the ball sail out of the park.

"No, I didn't follow it," Crowe said. "I knew I hit it good, and after I got around first I peeked to make sure it was out."

ONE STEP AT A TIME — Michael Brantley still has the green light to steal, even though he has been caught twice in five attempts.

"For one thing, I think he's run into a couple of howitzers," manager Eric Wedge said, referring to Joe Mauer of the Minnesota Twins and Gerald Laird of the Detroit Tigers. "I think he will become a real good baserunner, and sometimes you learn more from being thrown out."

The coaching staff is not overloading Brantley with advice, preferring for now to leave him alone and see what areas need to improve in the future.

MARSON THE MAN? — Lou Marson has started three of the Tribe's past five games behind the plate and apparently will catch at least half the games the rest of the season.

"We're trying to get him in there more," Wedge said. "He's a young player we want to get a good look at. We'll also pick spots for Wyatt [Toregas] and Kelly [Shoppach]."

HITTING MACHINE — Twins catcher Joe Mauer began Tuesday night's game with a .520 average against the Indians. He also is leading the American League with a .371 average.

"He's one of those guys where you think you've won if he only got three singles off you," Jeremy Sowers said.

PLAYOFF UPDATE — Brett Brach gave up two runs and five hits in four innings, as Mahoning Valley lost 3-0 to Staten Island in the opener of the best-of-three New York-Penn League finals. Ben Carlson had three hits, including two doubles.

Aeros take 1-0 lead in finals

By Stephanie Storm Beacon Journal staff writer

Make it 12 and counting.

Consecutive wins, that is, as the Aeros continued to roll through the playoffs with a 7-2 victory in the opening game of the Eastern League Championship Series on Tuesday night at Connecticut's Dodd Stadium in Norwich.

The Aeros won eight consecutive games to close out the regular season, then swept Reading in three games in the Southern Division Series. With the first two games of the finals in Connecticut, one might figure the Aeros' streak would be on the line.

But with offensive contributions throughout Akron's lineup and another solid outing on the mound by Josh Tomlin, the club continued its dominating run by taking an early 5-0 lead on the road.

"That's what it takes when you get to this point in the season — a team effort," Aeros manager Mike Sarbaugh said. "And we've been fortunate to get it consistently from both our offense and pitching staff."

The Aeros collected five runs on nine hits against Connecticut's big lefty, Ben Snyder, the younger brother of former Indians No. 1 pick Brad Snyder (18th overall in 2003).

The Aeros got on the board in the second inning with a Jose Constanza sacrifice fly that scored Carlos Rivero. Then they piled on with two runs in both the third and fourth innings as Rivero and John Drennen pushed the advantage to 3-0 with RBI singles.

In the fourth, a two-run home run by Beau Mills put an abrupt end to Snyder's outing, chasing him from the mound after just 32/3 innings.

"Beau's home run was huge there," Sarbaugh said. "It was good to see him come back with a good at-bat after struggling his first few times at the plate."

While the offense went about building the lead, Aeros starting pitcher Josh Tomlin continued his postseason success. He notched his second postseason win by striking out seven through seven strong innings.

"Josh has such a good feel for pitching and attacking hitters," Sarbaugh said. "He'll make [mental] notes as he goes along of things he's seen or notices that he can use next time around the lineup."

It wasn't until the fifth inning that the Defenders managed to break up Tomlin's shutout bid, as Jackson Williams' single down the right-field line scored Brandon Crawford. But with runners in scoring position at second and third bases, Tomlin rebounded to strike out the league's top hitter in Brock Bond to end the threat.

The Aeros added an insurance run in the seventh inning, when Rivero scored on a play that saw the speedy Constanza reach first safely on a throwing error.

Connecticut got the run back in the bottom of the inning, when Eddy Martinez-Estevé cleared the fence with a solo shot to left field. But Akron's Matt McBride pushed the deficit back to five runs with his own solo homer in the eighth inning.

Stark

Three Strikes: Who needs an offense edition

Tuesday, September 15, 2009 | [Print Entry](#)

STRIKE ONE -- OFF-BASE CONTENDER DEPT.

I spent Monday night in AT&T Park, watching the Giants do something they seem to have forgotten is actually legal:

Cross home plate more than twice. Yessir, the Giants scored nine runs Monday -- *nine* -- for the first time in any home game since July 9, for just the sixth time in a home game all season and for only the second time in any of [Tim Lincecum's](#) last 45 starts. They even had two innings of three runs or more Monday. Before that, they'd had four all month -- in 106 innings.

But now here's what's really interesting:

As regular readers of this blog know, from time to time this month, Three Strikes will be looking in on September's hidden dramas -- the quest for historic feats that don't quite rank up there with [Derek Jeter's](#) pursuit of Lou Gehrig. And the Giants are on the road to an all-timer:

They currently rank dead last in the major leagues -- that's No. 30 out of 30 teams -- in on-base percentage. Their OBP of .308 is more than 50 points lower than the Yankees' OBP (.362) -- and even 35 points lower than the Nationals' (.343).

Yet this team could still make it to the postseason. And that, friends, would be a truly historic development.

Just to put that .308 OBP in some recent perspective, if that number holds, it would be the fifth lowest, over a whole season, of any team in either league since the "age of offense" kicked in back in 1993. Three of the four teams to beat it -- the 2002 Tigers, 2003 Tigers and 1993 Mets -- lost 106, 119 and 103 games, respectively.

But *this* team could make the postseason. And even if it doesn't, it would need to go only 12-6 in its last 18 games to win 90 this season. And that's incredible.

So how many teams in history, you ask, have finished last in the major leagues in on-base percentage and still A) lived to play a postseason game, B) won 90 games or C) did both?

Exactly one, according to the Elias Sports Bureau. The answer in all those cases is Chad Fonville's 1996 Dodgers. That team won 90 games, and a wild-card berth, despite a .316 on-base percentage that was seven points lower than the OBP of a Tigers team that lost 109 times that year.

So can the Giants join those Dodgers in this exclusive club of playoff teams that considered offense to be merely optional? If they keep beating the Rockies, it could happen. And gang, September dramas don't get much better than that, do they?

STRIKE TWO -- ONE INNING TOO LONG DEPT.

Then you have another team trying to complete this postseason journey the hard way -- the Phillies.

As you may have noticed, they appear to be in complete control of the NL East, with a seven-game lead over Florida and a 7½-game lead over Atlanta.

As you also may have noticed, though, many of these games they've been playing this year have been lasting approximately one inning too long.

The two guys they've used to close out games this year -- [Brad Lidge](#) and [Ryan Madson](#) -- have now blown 14 saves in the ninth inning or later. Yep, 14.

That's not to be confused, you understand, with the team blown-saves total you see on our handy-dandy [ESPN.com stats page](#), the one that shows four contenders (Tigers, Dodgers, Mariners, Rays) have had more blown saves by their bullpens this year than the Phillies. That list includes all blown saves, no matter what the inning and who the perpetrator was. So it's not the same thing.

When a set-up man blows a save in the sixth or seventh inning, that's a bad thing. No doubt about it. But when the closer -- or closers -- is coughing up 14 saves *in the ninth inning*, that's a disastrous thing.

Or it's supposed to be, anyway.

If the Phillies win their division despite all those ninth-inning debacles, they're also heading for historic territory.

The Elias Sports Bureau has been tracking blown saves for 20 years now. So if you're wondering how many teams in that time have let that many saves get away in the ninth inning or later and still finished first, now we know.

That answer is: Zero. None. Nada.

The current record is 10, by Byung-Hyun Kim's 1999 Diamondbacks and Mike Henneman's 1996 Rangers. You'll notice that neither of those teams won the World Series. In fact, they won one postseason game apiece in those years.

But that's a stat we'll worry about when it comes time to start previewing October. For now, let's just remain astonished that a team that challenged to get the last three outs is in first place at all.

STRIKE THREE -- UNCORKED DEPT.

Somebody in baseball has to be the anti-Ichiro. And Three Strikes is here to reveal the name of that lucky guy right now.

He's the one, the only [Corky Miller](#), who is currently hitting a lusty .135 in his latest incarnation as a Cincinnati Red.

Now you probably haven't followed the offensive exploits of Corky Miller, I'm guessing, since there haven't been a whole heck of a lot of them. But as the decade of the '00s roars to a close, the Corkster has just about clinched the honor of having the lowest batting average of any non-pitcher in baseball.

Thanks to a rough little 1-for-55 stretch in 2004-05-06, Miller's average for the decade stands at .175 -- in 411 at-bats. And friends, it's tough to have an average that low if you make it to home plate that many times. Trust us. Three Strikes has done the math.

In the entire live-ball era, just two position players who got that many at-bats in *any* decade had a lower average than that:

John Vukovich in the 1970s (80 for 496, .161).

And Dave Duncan in the '60s (91 for 527, .173).

The good news for Corky, though, is this: He's clearly going to have a tremendous future in baseball. Just not as a player.

Vukovich and Duncan are two of the great coaches and teachers in modern times. So obviously, a man can learn a lot by being that good at not hitting. Or something like that.

Finally, for your reading pleasure, Three Strikes now presents the leading non-hitters in every decade since the '20s (minimum 400 AB):

2000s: Corky Miller, .175
1990s: [Juan Castro](#)/J.R. Phillips, .188
1980s: Houston Jimenez, .185
1970s: John Vukovich, .161
1960s: Dave Duncan, .173
1950s: Dick Schofield, .195
1940s: Chuck Klein, .192
1930s: Clyde Manion, .200
1920s: Leo Dizon/Ossie Vitt, .206

It's quite a list. So don't underestimate what it takes to hit .175 for an entire decade. Not just anybody could do it. Obviously

Matsuzaka's surprising return to form

By Gordon Edes, Yahoo! Sports

BOSTON – Afterward, Daisuke Matsuzaka wore an enormous silver watch on his left wrist, a dazzling piece of bling that looked straight out of the David Ortiz collection. So big it looked like it could have measured time not in hours and minutes, but in the weeks and months that Matsuzaka had been absent from the Red Sox.

With only days left in what for him has been a lost season, Matsuzaka knew what was at stake Tuesday night, when he triumphantly returned with six scoreless innings in a 4-1 win over the Los Angeles Angels.

"On the road back I've been a burden on my teammates more than anything and I feel that I owe them," Matsuzaka said through interpreter Masa Hoshino. "There's not much time left in the season, but in the limited time, the limited opportunity I do have, I want to show my appreciation to my teammates and the fans by contributing as much as I can."

When Matsuzaka walked Chone Figgins, the first batter of the game, there was a sense that perhaps little had changed, even though the pitcher on the mound appeared to be 15 to 20 pounds lighter than he'd been when placed on the disabled list June 20. But Figgins didn't advance beyond first, the Angels would not have a hit until Kendry Morales' leadoff single in the fifth, and there would be only two more walks, including the one to Morales that opened the seventh and prompted Boston manager Terry Francona to go to his bullpen.

There was little trickery involved for Matsuzaka, who came billed as a Japanese magician with at least six pitches when he first arrived in Boston before the 2007 season. He relied primarily on his fastball and cutter, and was at his best when the Angels had two on and one out in the fifth, striking out Jeff Mathis and Figgins to strand runners on second and third.

The drastic measures taken by the Red Sox, stung by the disruptive effect the World Baseball Classic had on both Matsuzaka's shoulder and overall conditioning, appear at first blush to have paid off. Matsuzaka, made to essentially repeat spring training in Fort Myers, Fla., gave every indication he will factor into Boston's postseason pitching plans.

"I've never had to take time in the middle of a season to try to get myself back, to try to build up strength," Matsuzaka said. "Even though I got a win, when I was doing my training, I was not sure I would ever come back, even though I tried to believe I would come back."

"I think the pitcher you saw today was completely different from the pitcher you saw at the beginning of the season. ... I've never struggled as much as I have this year, so in that sense, [Tuesday night's win] was a little special, but I'll probably forget about it."

Clearly, the experience has been humbling for Matsuzaka, a two-time MVP in the WBC, the first Japanese pitcher to start and win a World Series game, and an 18-game winner last season. But if the Red Sox salvage operation is successful, the best guess is that he could start a potential Game 4 for the Red Sox in Fenway Park in a first-round matchup with the Angels, which took on an air of inevitability when the Texas Rangers lost again to Oakland to drop 5½ games behind the Red Sox with 19 left.

Matsuzaka's next start is tentatively scheduled for Sunday in Baltimore. If he continues to progress, he figures to have the edge over the hobbled Tim Lincecum for the fourth spot in the postseason rotation.

"I thought he was terrific," Francona said. "He stayed in his delivery the entire night."

"He went down to Florida, we thought there were some things that needed to be taken care of. He came back in very good shape. His shoulder was stronger. Long-term, obviously, this was very important, but in the short term, it was a shot in the arm, too."

Brave beginnings: How does Braves rookie Tommy Hanson compare to the illustrious arms that preceded him in Atlanta's rich pitching history? Well, Greg Maddux was 6-14 with a 5.61 ERA as a rookie (with the Cubs), John Smoltz was 2-7 with a 5.48 ERA, Tom Glavine was 7-17 with a 4.56 ERA, and Steve Avery was 3-11 with a 5.64 ERA.

After beating the New York Mets 6-0 Tuesday night, Hanson is 10-3 in 18 starts, and has thrust himself into serious consideration for the National League Rookie of the Year Award. His 10 wins have drawn him even with Phillies lefty J.A. Happ and Cubs surprise Randy Wells for most wins by an NL rookie. He gave up six runs in his big league debut, but allowed three or more earned runs just four more times in his next 17 starts. He held the Astros scoreless over eight innings in his last start before facing the Mets, then tacked on another seven zeroes on just three hits Tuesday night.

His earned run average dropped to 2.65, lower than that of Happ or Wells.

"It just makes it that much more humbling a little bit, growing up with those guys, now wearing the same uniform," Hanson said of any comparisons to Maddux, et al.

But did he emulate anyone?

"Never," he said. "I never tried to act like a certain player, be like a certain player. I've always done my own thing. My whole thing growing up was just going out there and having fun."

Foot off the pedal: Bob Gibson posed the proposition himself in his running conversation with Reggie Jackson that comprises the book "Sixty Feet, Six Inches," a lively and enlightening look at the game by a Hall of Fame pitcher and hitter, written with Lonnie Wheeler.

"You have your choice tonight: Give up five miles an hour of velocity or three inches of control, I think I'd hold onto my speed," Gibson says. "Don't get me wrong: I believe in spotting the ball, but throwing 95 [mph] is a gift. You can't teach somebody to do that, and there's no substitute for it. I'll take my chances at 95, if I miss my location. That doesn't mean you can miss your spots all night long, but it means you might get away with it, if you don't push your luck."

Red Sox ace Josh Beckett, like Gibson, a hard thrower, was offered the same proposition, and took the opposite tack.

"I'd give up the five miles of velocity," Beckett said. "I think spotting the ball is also a gift, and so important, especially nowadays. Hitters may have been a little different then. Velocity is huge, but there isn't anybody in the big leagues who has been here two months who can't hit a 95 mph fastball."

Short and sweet: In breaking the record for consecutive 200-hit seasons held by Wee Willie Keeler, set in the twilight of the 19th century, Ichiro Suzuki, very much a 21st-century creation, demonstrated a mastery of an art that worked for the wee one then and the slender Japanese star today. Suzuki is far and away the major league leader this season in infield hits, according to a study by Ari Kaplan, the Cal Tech-trained statistical analyst and webmaster of ariball.com.

Utilizing spray charts he keeps on every hitter, Kaplan said that entering the week Ichiro had 54 infield hits, more than 25 percent of his 200 hits total. Luis Castillo of the Mets was second with 39, with Michael Bourn of the Astros third with 38. Denard Span of the Twins (34), Emilio Bonifacio of the Marlins (32) and Scott Podsednik of the White Sox (31) rounded out the top six.

Of his infield hits, Kaplan calculated that Ichiro had eight bunt singles. Bourn and Bonifacio each had 15.

Ichiro, who has had 200-plus hits in each of his nine major league seasons, is one season away from tying Pete Rose for most 200-hit seasons. Rose's 10 did not come consecutively.

Folks are busting with pride in Japan.

"Only Ichiro can break a 100-year-old major league record," Shigeo Nagashima, who ranks with Sadaharu Oh as Japan's most revered players, told Kyodo News. "He respects the game and has strengthened mentally and physically. I hope he continues to improve and brings more dreams to children – future baseball players."

Fungo hitting: On the same day Cliff Lee was pitching his first shutout for the Phillies to run his record to 7-2 since his trade from the Indians, 19-year-old pitcher Jason Knapp, the central player in the package that went back to Cleveland, was having arthroscopic surgery to remove what was described as loose bodies in his right shoulder. Knapp was on the DL with biceps tendinitis when the trade was made, but the Phillies had not taken an MRI and the Indians were unaware of the loose tissue in the shoulder. Cleveland medical officials said the loose tissue caused the tendinitis, but the Indians say they have no intention of filing a grievance. ... Circle the date: Mannypalooza is scheduled for the weekend of June 18-20 next season, when the Los Angeles Dodgers are scheduled to visit Boston to play Manny Ramirez's former team, the Red Sox, in interleague play. The expectation is that Manny won't spoil the occasion by tweaking his hamstring, but he is expected to exercise his player's option for \$20 million and remain with the Dodgers. ... The Minnesota Twins are scheduled to play their first game in their new park, Target Field, on April 12, against Boston. Target Field is an open-air facility; average temperatures in Minneapolis for that date are a high of 55 degrees and a low of 35. Exhibitions against the Cardinals are scheduled for April 2 and 3; parkas are optional. ... And congratulations to Hal McCoy, the eminent baseball writer who will be honored by the Cincinnati Reds in pregame ceremonies Wednesday night. McCoy is "retiring" after 37 years, to employ the euphemism that sadly appears too often in the newspaper business these days.

David Sabino > DIAMOND DIGITS

Phillies are spotless with Pedro, Tulowitzki's historic season, more Story Highlights

Pedro Martinez is tied for MLB lead with five victories since joining the Phillies

Colorado's Troy Tulowitzki is poised for a record year for a shortstop

Billy Butler is the first player in AL history with four games with three doubles

The season is in its twilight, but the stars of Diamond Digits shine on. This week an all-time great hurler continues his improbable comeback run, a young star shortstop is unprecedentedly good in the field. At the plate, we have a Royal who puts up triple-doubles like Oscar Robertson, and for the second consecutive week, Ichiro hits a huge milestone.

7-0

Phillies' record in starts by Pedro Martinez.

The major-league active leader with a .688 career winning percentage has been unbeatable since his first start with Philadelphia on August 12, tying with Chris Carpenter, Scott Feldman, CC Sabathia and Adam Wainwright for the MLB lead with five victories, while holding opposing offenses to a 2.87 ERA and .245 batting average. The sweetest outing of his comeback had to be on Sunday when he kept the Mets off the scoreboard for eight innings, surrendering just six hits and two walks in the process. New York didn't offer its former ace a contract over the winter but sure could've used him, especially recently. Since Martinez's return, no Mets hurler has won more than two games, and only one of them, Mike Pelfrey, is a starter.

25

Home runs for the year by Rockies shortstop and team leader Troy Tulowitzki.

Colorado has continued its late-season roll, and Tulowitzki is a main reason why. In Saturday night's extra-innings loss to the Padres, Tulowitzki clubbed his 25th home run, setting a personal career-high and extending his own team mark for a shortstop. Tulowitzki also flashes a great glove, as seen by his .990 fielding percentage, second in the majors to Jimmy Rollins' .991. Taken together, those two achievements are quite impressive, but when you put them together like Tulowitzki has, it's downright unbelievable. In fact, he's poised to be the first shortstop in baseball history to have a fielding percentage of over .990 during a 25-home run season. Alex Rodriguez didn't do it. Miguel Tejada hasn't done it. Even Cal Ripken, who achieved both individually, never had a single season in which he was so effective with the bat and the glove.

4

Games with at three doubles this season by Royals first baseman Billy Butler, the first AL player in history to ever accomplish the feat in a single year, and, according to the Elias Sports Bureau, the only one in either league since the AL came into existence in 1901.

To help better put this into perspective, consider that over the last half-century, just 27 players have more three-double games over their entire careers. Some of the players who never even had three three-double games include Manny Ramirez, Albert Pujols, Barry Bonds, Todd Helton, Carl Yastrzemski, Tony Perez, and the list goes on and on. In fact, among active players, only Mike Lowell (2006) and Aaron Rowand (2007) have a trio of three-double games in a single season.

200

Hits in each of nine major-league seasons for Ichiro Suzuki, subject of the top spot in last week's Diamond Digits.

By hitting safely in both ends of a Sunday doubleheader split against the Rangers on Saturday, Ichiro moved ahead of Willie Keeler alone atop the all-time consecutive 200-hit seasons list. Keeler, best known for his motto "I hit 'em where they ain't," totaled 200 hits or more each season from 1894 to 1901 for the Baltimore Orioles and Brooklyn Superbas. Next up is the all-time record for 200-hit seasons, consecutive or not, currently held by Pete Rose at 10 and well within Ichiro's reach in 2010.

Best Stats of the Week

Juan Uribe, Giants: The 20 home runs the former White Sox shortstop averaged from 2004 to 2007 seemed like a distant memory until the last six weeks when he's pushed his homer total from just four to 13, including a pair against the Padres (along with five RBIs) last Monday. Switching between second, third and shortstop, Uribe has been one of the Giants' most pleasant surprises and one of the most productive members of a generally weak offense. Last week he was the top power man in baseball, slugging at a rate of .955 while batting .409 and reaching base at a .435 clip. He even hit .545 on balls in play, also best in the game.

Honorable Mention: David Ortiz, Raul Ibañez, Billy Butler, Marlon Byrd, Brian Roberts, Esteban German, Miguel Montero, Derrek Lee, Kyle Davies, Rafael Betancourt, Ted Lilly, Pedro Martinez, Javier Vazquez, Brad Penny, Vicente Padilla, Clay Buchholz and Felix Hernandez.

Worst Stats of the Week

Jermaine Dye, White Sox: Rumored to have been shopped around at the trade deadline, Dye stayed with the White Sox, but the way he's hit recently, GM Kenny Williams should've tried harder to find a taker. A .300 hitter in the first half, the veteran right fielder has tanked in the second half, batting just .166 since the All Star break, the lowest of any player with at least 100 at-bats. Last week was especially tough, as Dye managed just one hit in 20 at-bats, including five straight games against the A's and Angels in which he went hitless. His .050 was the worst for anybody over that span and he extended his streak of games without an RBI to 10. His solo shot against the Yankees on Aug. 30 accounts for his only home run since Aug 2 and his only RBI since Aug 14.

Dishonorable Mention: Pat Burrell, Alex Rios, John Baker, Mark Teahen, Lyle Overbay, Milton Bradley, Mike Pelfrey, Scott Richmond, Wade Davis, Andy Sonnastine and Roy Oswalt.

Florida offer for Cubs a 'serious threat,' mayor says

By Jim Walsh

Mesa Mayor Scott Smith considers Naples, Fla., a "serious threat" to lure away the Chicago Cubs, but not everyone in Naples even wants the team.

Smith and a delegation from Mesa met Monday and Tuesday in Chicago with Cubs officials, including new owner Tom Ricketts, and concluded the city needs to match Naples' bid by building a new stadium and training complex.

"This is the marketplace. Our competition is very serious. I think it's a serious threat," Smith said after the meetings. "We need to match the competition."

He said Naples officials already have met with the Cubs, but Murray Hendel, a member of Collier County's Tourist Development Council in Florida, disputes that.

Hendel said Collier County doesn't have a formal proposal yet, and the effort is very preliminary.

"What I plan on doing is to have the governor (Charlie Crist) call Mr. Ricketts and invite him to Naples," Hendel said. "We're ready to go, but we want the signal" that the Cubs are interested.

But two Collier County commissioners, Fred Coyle and Jim Coletta, don't seem overly excited about bringing the Cubs to southwest Florida.

Dave Moulton, a Naples newspaper columnist and radio talk-show host, has been spearheading the effort and says he has a billionaire lined up to help pay for a new facility.

On Aug. 24, Moulton made a presentation to the tourism board, which will revisit the issue Sept. 28. The matter hasn't come before the county commission yet.

Coyle said he'd rather attract high-tech and medical companies, not a baseball team.

"There are people in town who are serious, but they're not necessarily the people who make the decisions," he said. "I'm not a fan of spending the money these clubs demand, with the uncertainty of retaining them."

Coletta said the Cubs may be using Naples as a bargaining chip to get more out of Mesa. He would support only a voter initiative to put the issue on a ballot in Collier County.

"They're trying to drive up the price on the boys there in Mesa," Coletta said. "I hope you guys aren't going to pay one penny more than you have to, to keep them."

Mesa would like to build a new stadium and training complex near the former General Motors Proving Grounds but would need a private-public partnership to finance a \$70 million to \$80 million facility. The Cubs want Mesa to match the Cleveland Indians' new training complex in Goodyear, and they consider Mesa's Fitch Park antiquated.

The stakes are high for Mesa and the Valley. A study states that Cubs fans contribute \$31.1 million in direct Cactus League spending and \$52.2 million to the state economy.

Mesa's 25-year lease with the Cubs expires in 2016, but the team can pay \$4.2 million next spring to opt out early and leave in 2012.

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