Kluber adds 18th win to Cy Young resume
By Jordan Bastian / MLB.com | @MLBastian | September 24th, 2017 + 2 COMMENTS

SEATTLE -- Corey Kluber cares about getting a ring, not another plaque. What the ace has been doing for the Indians this year is being driven by his desire to help the club finish what it could not a year ago. He wants to win the World Series and has been pitching like a man possessed by that mission.

Kluber continued that pursuit on Sunday at Safeco Field, where he surrendered a two-run homer to Ben Gamel, but nothing else in a 4-2 victory for Cleveland. He has powered baseball's best pitching staff and set the tone for the Tribe's incredible run of 29 wins in 31 games. And, while Kluber shrugs off questions about a possible second American League Cy Young Award, his teammates will do the talking for him.

"He's the Cy Young," Jason Kipnis said. "I think he's clearly the Cy Young. That doesn't take anything away from [Red Sox ace] Chris Sale. I think he's clearly the No. 2 and would be the Cy Young any other year that Corey Kluber's not pitching like this."

There is still a debate to be had over whether Kluber or Sale -- Boston's overpowering left-hander -- should walk away with the season-end hardware, but the scale may have tilted in the Tribe ace's favor. Dating back to the All-Star break, the Indians have gone 51-18, clinched the AL Central and are now right behind the Dodgers for baseball's best record.

Kluber has led the charge.

With his seven-inning showing against the Mariners, whose two runs were unearned due to an error, Kluber collected his AL-leading 18th win. That moved him into a tie with Dodgers ace Clayton Kershaw for the most in the Majors. Kluber struck out 10, walked two and lowered his AL-best ERA to 2.27 in 198 2/3 innings.

Kluber did not even feel that great.

"Not quite as sharp," he said. "With the two extra days, I just didn't quite feel as crisp as when you get to go out every fifth day. It's about making adjustments throughout the game."

During the game, Kipnis overheard that Kluber gave a similar assessment.

"Guys like us laugh at that," Kipnis said. "We're like, 'We wish we did that well when we don't feel great.' He's on top of what he's doing right now."

Dating back to June 1, when Kluber returned from a back injury that cost him most of May, the right-hander has gone 15-2 with a 1.62 ERA and 221 strikeouts against 23 walks in 161 1/3 innings.

"Once he gets comfortable and gets his leg under him in a season," Indians manager Terry Francona said, "man, he pitches at such a high level."

What this run has done has eliminated the main argument against Kluber taking home the AL Cy Young Award.

A couple months ago, the time missed put Sale head and shoulders over Kluber statistically. Now, even with three fewer starts than the left-hander, Kluber only trails Sale by 10.2 innings, even with three fewer starts than the left-hander, Kluber only trails Sale by 10 1/3 innings. Kluber has a better ERA than Sale (2.75) and ranks better in ERA+ (51 to 61), opponents' average (.189 to .202) and WHIP (0.86 to 0.95). Sale leads in WAR (8.2 to 7.1, per FanGraphs), strikeouts (300 to 262) and Fielding Independent Pitching (2.22 to 2.51).

The Cy Young race now comes down to the final week.

"I think he should [win the award]," Indians catcher Roberto Perez said. "He's got the numbers. He's got the strikeouts. He's got everything. At the end of the season, we'll see what will happen. He deserves it."

Covering the Bases: Game 156
by Jordan Bastian
FIRST: Corey Kluber has one more start to make this season. That looks like it will fall on Saturday to position him for an American League Division Series Game 1 start on normal rest.

Right now, Chris Sale is down to start on Tuesday against the Blue Jays for what could be his final start of the season. That means this American League Cy Young race is now in its final lap.

Is there any more debate over who should win the award?

"He's the Cy Young. I think he's clearly the Cy Young," Jason Kipnis said of Kluber. "That doesn't take anything away from Chris Sale. I think he's clearly the No. 2 and would be the Cy Young any other year that Corey Kluber's not pitching like this. What he's done is as efficient as you can be."

Now, it's not really a surprise that Kluber's teammates would call him the clear favorite for the Cy Young. They are, after all, his teammates. But, I do agree that Kluber heads into the season's final week as the favorite to take home the accolade, which would make him the first two-time winner in Indians history.

There are, of course, the statistics. The main argument that the Sale backers had was that Kluber missed a month due to injury. That helped the lefty accumulate some counting stats that would be hard to catch. To that end, no, Kluber is not going to surpass 300 strikeouts like Sale did this year.

That said, Kluber is only 10.2 innings behind Sale now, even with three fewer starts. That gap has been closed. The Cy Young voters—for the record, I'm not voting on that award this season—will now have to weigh the bevy of other numbers available.

Here's the rundown of Kluber vs. Sale after the Tribe ace's effort on Sunday. I've highlighted which pitcher leads the various categories, though obviously some stats carry more weight than others. Take a look:
That is still a dead heat.

I wouldn’t say either pitcher is the clear favorite right now, but I do think Kluber has the edge. Why? Voters love narrative and the what-have-you-done-for-me-lately element.

Sunday’s win was Cleveland’s 29th in 31 games. Going back to the All-Star break, the Indians are 51–18. They are 50–13 since starting the second half with a brutal 1–5 trip through Oakland and San Francisco. They won 22 games in a row to set an American League record, won the Central, leapfrogged the Astros for the league’s best record and are now on the Dodgers’ heels for baseball’s best mark.

There is also this: The 2017 Indians now have a 29.9 fWAR as a pitching staff this season. That is the highest single-season mark in MLB history, surpassing the 1996 Braves (29.5).

Pitching has fueled this run, with Kluber’s arm leading the way.

Going back to June 1, when Kluber came back from a back injury that shelved him for a month, he has been the best pitcher on the planet. In 22 starts in that span, the ace is 15–2 with a 1.62 ERA. He has 221 strikeouts against 23 walks in 161.1 innings. Opponents have hit .171/.210/.280 with a swinging-strike rate of 17.8 percent.

On Sunday, “Mr. Roboto” played through Safeco Field while Kluber warmed up before the fifth inning. When The Klubot was done for the day, he has 10 more strikeouts, two walks and a pair of unearned runs allowed in seven innings of work.

“Right after he came back from the back injury, he just settled in,” Indians catcher Roberto Perez said. “He’s been throwing the ball really well for us. Like I always say, he’s our ace. You expect him every fifth day to get the ball and do what he does best.”

SECOND: For the third time this season, Perez was behind the plate for one of Kluber’s starts. Kluber has a strong rapport with both of Cleveland’s catchers, but Yan Gomes has been his main backstop over the year.

Over the past month, though, Perez has quietly emerged as the Tribe’s starter behind the dish.

“Yan and him have good chemistry all year long,” Perez said. “I’m sure he feels good about catching Kluber for so long and he’s done a good job with him. I’m trying to do the same thing when I’m back there. I’m trying to call a really good game.”

In September, Perez has caught 114 innings overall, compared to 98 for Gomes. Dating back to Aug. 24, when Cleveland started this 29–2 stretch, Perez has 151 innings to 134 for Gomes. Prior to Aug. 24, Gomes (700) had far more innings than Perez (407.2) on the season.

Kluber said switching to Perez is not a big deal. It helps, obviously, that they teamed for 14 of the pitcher’s starts last season. In those games with Perez behind the plate, Kluber had a 2.52 ERA in 2016.

In his career with Gomes catching, Kluber has a 2.92 ERA in 745.2 innings. The right-hander has a 2.73 ERA in 178 innings with Perez.

“He caught me for a good portion last year,” Kluber said. “I think we’re pretty familiar with each other at this point. I wouldn’t say there’s necessarily an adjustment, just because we’ve had a fair amount of games together.”

Offensively, both Perez and Gomes have been producing lately for the Indians. Gomes belted two homers on Saturday and has a .290/.302/.548 slash line going back to Aug. 24. Perez had a .298/.355/.632 slash in that same time period before his 0-for-4 showing on Sunday.

THIRD: With a little more than a week left until the postseason, it is crunch time right now for Kipnis.

Not only is Kipnis learning center field on the fly, but he is trying to get his legs back under him and his offensive timing down again. When he’s not hitting during batting practice, he’s in center tracking fly balls. When he’s not in the cage or in the outfield, he’s trying to stay on top of his training room routine to guard against the hamstring injury that cost him time in each of the past three months.

“I’m happy with where I am and the progress that’s being made,” Kipnis said. “It’s helping me as a player, because I’m literally trying to get the most out of each day now. There are no real recovery days for me. There’s no days off where maybe I’m just going to stay in for BP.

“I have to be out there for BP tracking balls for my own personal benefit. So, there’s a lot of stuff that goes into each day. We’re getting low on time, but I also think we’re getting better on where we need to be.”

In Sunday’s win, Kipnis went 2-for-3 with an RBI double and a sacrifice fly, making him 5-for-10 over his past three games. That’s a good sign for the Tribe. In recent games, he’s also been playing a few more steps in and out in center, showing that he’s gaining more confidence at the position.

“You’re going to see me get more comfortable every single game,” Kipnis said, “with positioning, with reading hitters, reading swings and balls off the bat. I think you’re going to start seeing a lot more efficient routes, direct lines and being where I’m supposed to be on the field.”
HOME: While Kluber was continuing his Cy Young candidacy, Jose Ramirez added a few more numbers to his bid for the AL Most Valuable Player Award. Ramirez is clearly a Top 5 candidate right now, and I’d peg him for second, third or fourth as things stand right now.

Against the Mariners, Ramirez singled, stole a base, homered and scored a pair of runs for Cleveland. He is now batting .317/.370/.583 with 16 steals, 29 homers, 51 doubles, 81 RBI and 101 runs scored.

Here is the complete list of Indians players with 15+ steals, 50+ doubles and 100+ runs in a single season:

Jose Ramirez, 2017
Grady Sizemore, 2006

That’s it.

In baseball history, those marks have been hit in a season only 19 times since at least 1913. The last was Brian Roberts, who did so in back-to-back years in 2008–09. Players on that list with at least as many homers (29) as Ramirez are Derrek Lee (2005), Alfonso Soriano (2002), Alex Rodriguez (1996), Frank Robinson (1962) and Chuck Klein (1932).

Ramirez has joined Sizemore (2006), Albert Belle (1995), Odell Hale (1936) and Tris Speaker (1920, 1921 and 1923) as the only players in Cleveland history with 50+ doubles and 100+ runs in one season.

“He’s a good hitter,” Indians manager Terry Francona said in the understatement of the year. “We like him coming up any time.”

Sept. 24: Tito’s pregame minutiae
by Jordan Bastian

Q: Bruce Maxwell took a knee during the national anthem on Saturday. Did any of your players alert you that they may follow suit here today?

“No, I talked to a couple guys, and I’ve talked to them before. My point to them was, one, I wanted to listen. But, I just kind of wanted to express that I wasn’t talking to them to dissuade somebody. I just think, if somebody felt strong enough about it, there would be a way as a team to show support, because we do things together. It’s easy for me to sit here and say, ‘Well, I think this is the greatest country in the world,’ because I do. But, I also haven’t walked in other peoples’ shoes. So, until I think, not just our country, but our world, until we realize that, hey, people are actually equal—it shouldn’t be a revelation—and the different doesn’t mean less. It’s just different. We’ve got work to do. So, I just wanted to make sure that they understood, like if they felt pressure or whatever was on their minds, that as a team we can support each other. That was kind of all it was.”

Q: Your son served in the military. What’s your thoughts on players kneeling?

“You know what? I think we all have thoughts. I don’t know enough, you know what I mean? … I’m happy to stand for the anthem. I think it’s an honorable thing to do. I also know that things aren’t perfect, so other than that, I don’t know if I’m deep enough. I don’t ever want to turn being the manager of the Indians into something that I’m not qualified [to speak on]. I think I’m qualified to care about people. Other than that, I don’t think I’m going to be the next selection at an embassy or something like that.”

Q: Wasn’t this issue part of the inspiration behind creating the Larry Doby Fund a year ago?

“Right. I felt like that was our way, as a team, to show our maybe support for other things, other people who are less fortunate, or however you want to say it. I always feel like trying to turn something that could be a negative into a positive is a good way to do it. But, I also see that people are trying to spur conversation. I get that. Sometimes, the only way to spur it is to do something that maybe gets under peoples’ skin. And I don’t have hardly any answers—let alone all the answers. I just know how I feel about things.”

Q: You have a really diverse group in the clubhouse. How proud were you that they came together to form the Larry Doby Fund so quickly last year?

“That was one of the proudest moments of my life. I’ll always feel that way. I think politicians would do well to come into a Major League clubhouse, because you have people from everywhere. You talk about diverse backgrounds. Yet, if you have our uniform on, it’s ‘we.’ I think people could learn a lot.”

Q: We do have some baseball questions, too…

“Yeah, before my head explodes.” [laughing]

Q: Did the X-ray on Carlos Santana’s left shoulder come back OK?

“He’s good. He showed up today. He is stiff, which we expected, but he tested out really well. Good strength. He’ll get treatment all day today. He’ll come in tomorrow and get treated, but my guess is he’ll probably play on Tuesday. He’s doing fine. We made him go up and swing in the cage before we let him hit and, you saw it, his swings were pretty aggressive. So, that was good. That’s a scary-looking play. You’re kind of vulnerable there when you’re open like that.”
Q: What have you thought of Santana’s turnaround in the second half?

“And his defense has been like—he’s taken it to another level. And he’s proud of it. And he should be. I say it all the time, but I don’t think people realize how athletic he is. As things have progressed and he’s played more, he has taken a lot of pride in it and it’s made a big difference. He’s been really good over there.”

Q: How proud would you be to see him up for a Gold Glove?

“Ohh. On so many fronts, he has made so many gains. The guys love him. They should. He plays every day—except for today. He’s worked hard and it shows.”

Q: Even after the collision at first base, Santana stayed in the game...

“He wanted to. The one thing that you can piss him off is by not playing him, which, in my book, that’s OK. He likes to play. He’s not even really that big on coming out in blowouts. He likes to play. In Spring Training, you always give those guys, ‘Hey, one or two?’ [He’ll say], ‘Three.’ He wants to play.”

Q: Jay Bruce said he’s dealt with this heel issue for a long time?

“He’s had it on and off for a while. At times, it bothers him more. We could have kept him in the game, I just don’t think at this point in the year it made much sense.”

Q: With three off-days before the ALDS, how challenging is this for your pitching staff?

“We’ve done a lot of thinking about it. We did it last year. You’ll probably see a lot of the relievers pitch on Sunday, because that’s the last game action. Then we’ll have Monday off—we’ll probably have an optional [workout]. Tuesday, we’ll have some pitchers throwing and we’ll have hitters hitting off of them. And then Wednesday we’ll have a workout at whatever time our game is.”

Q: Would you do a bullpen day on final home game on Sunday to make sure certain guys pitch?

“No, that’ll be Tomlin’s day, and he needs to pitch. But he’s not going to go—we’ll make sure we cover what we want to.”

Q: Would you look to tape off Corey Kluber’s workload in his last start?

“If he wants to. When he gets in a rhythm, he feels pretty good about that, so we’ll keep an eye on him. He’ll get an extra day [for his first playoff start], but he doesn’t want any more than that.”

Q: Have you been impressed with Greg Allen’s maturity level?

“Beyond his years. Yes. He’s just a wonderful kid. Talk about his hitting or whatever, but he’s just a great kid. Hard not to like him.”

Q: How much do you think it helped that he played for Tony Gwynn in college?

“As a hitter? Yeah. I didn’t know Tony great, I just played against him a lot and watched him a lot. If you wanted to get pointers from a hitter, it seems like a pretty good way to go.”

Tribe stays in control behind Ramirez, Kluber
By Jordan Bastian and Josh Horton / MLB.com | 12:57 AM ET + 148 COMMENTS

SEATTLE -- Jose Ramirez slugged a home run to right-center field to lead off the sixth inning and Corey Kluber struck out 10 over seven innings, his 15th double-digit strikeout game of the season, becoming the American League's first 18-game winner as the Indians edged the Mariners, 4-2, at Safeco Field on Sunday.

While Seattle was eliminated from postseason contention, Cleveland remains in the driver's seat for the AL's best record, leading Houston by two and a half games after the Astros' 7-5 loss to the Angels on Sunday night. The Indians still trail the Dodgers by one game for the best mark in the Majors, as Los Angeles also won on Sunday.

"Everybody is excited to get back to the playoffs," Indians catcher Roberto Perez said. "We didn't accomplish what we wanted last year. I think everybody is on the same page and everybody is hungry. We're playing the game the right way. The veterans are doing their job. It's nice to see everyone come along. Hopefully, we can carry that into the playoffs."

With the win, the Indians' ended their road slate with a 53-28 record away from Progressive Field. That is not only the most road wins in the Majors this year, but the most in a single season in franchise history.

After Edwin Encarnacion and Jason Kipnis ripped RBI doubles in the fourth to give the Indians a 2-0 lead, Ben Gamel tied the game with a two-out, two-run homer to right-center in the fifth, his 11th of the season.

Ramirez, who finished 2-for-4 with two runs scored, ripped his 29th home run a Statcast™-projected 401-feet off Mariners' starter Mike Leake to break the 2-2 tie in the sixth.
"You have to be on your game, especially when you're facing their guy," Leake said. "It's just unfortunate that I got behind in a couple of at-bats and put a couple of pitches where they can hit it."

Gamel's homer was all the Mariners could muster off Kluber, who allowed two runs (both unearned) on six hits while fanning 10 batters and issuing two walks over seven innings. Kluber's 18th win set a career high and tied Dodgers ace Clayton Kershaw for the MLB lead. His 15 double-digit strikeout performances is the second most in the MLB this season -- the Red Sox's Chris Sale leads with 18.

"I don't know if I would consider it a run," said Indians manager Terry Francona, referring to Kluber's 2-2 start stretch with a 1.62 ERA, dating back to June 1. "I think he's just that good. Once he gets comfortable and gets his leg under him in a season, man, he pitches at such a high level."

Leake allowed three runs on seven hits while striking out five and walking none over 6 2/3 innings. He's posted a quality start in each of his five outings since the Mariners acquired him on Aug. 30 in a waiver trade with the Cardinals. He owns a 2.53 ERA during that stretch.

"I thought he threw the ball outstanding, just like he has every time out there," Mariners manager Scott Servais said. "Very competitive, kept us right in the ballgame. Just made a couple of mistakes."

MOMENTS THAT MATTERED

Jackson's great grab: With one out and runners on first and second in the fourth, Yonder Alonso sliced a pitch from Kluber deep into the left-center gap. Left fielder Austin Jackson ran it down for a three-star catch (58-percent catch probability, per Statcast™), and was able to initiate an inning-ending double play. With Kyle Seager far off first, Jackson quickly fired to shortstop Francisco Lindor, who got the ball to Encarnacion just in time for a rally-killing relay.

"The turning play in the game was the ball Jackson went back and caught," Servais said. "Change of momentum. Kind of changed everything there. ... It was a great play. [Seager] was trying to be aggressive, knowing he was the tying run there if the ball gets over his head. Maybe got a step or two farther than he should. I mean, he was only out by a step, and it had to take absolutely the perfect relay throw to get him. He was reading the ball good, trying to be aggressive."

Kipnis buys insurance: The Indians gave closer Cody Allen a little extra breathing room for the ninth via an add-on run in the eighth.

Encarnacion doubled, moved to third on a Jay Bruce single and then scored on a sacrifice fly from Kipnis. With the season winding down, Encarnacion has not only been learning a new position (center field), but is trying to get his offensive timing back after a stint on the disabled list. In his past three games, Kipnis has gone 5-for-10 with a pair of doubles.

"I think he's getting closer and closer," Francona said. "The more at-bats he gets, the better off he's going to be. By the time we get through next week, he's got a chance for maybe 30 more at-bats. That'll be really helpful for him."

QUOTABLE

"It was a great play on both ends. Obviously, it was a big point in the game. If that gets by [Jackson], it's potentially a tie game at that point. If not, they have two guys in scoring position. A great catch, first of all, and then a really good relay throw, too. Two big outs." -- Kluber, on Jackson's catch in the fourth

"He's the Cy Young. I think he's clearly the Cy Young. That doesn't take anything away from Chris Sale. I think he's clearly the No. 2 and would be the Cy Young any other year that Corey Kluber's not pitching like this." -- Kipnis, on Kluber

UPON FURTHER REVIEW

Crew chief Sam Holbrook, at Indians manager Terry Francona's request, reviewed a foul-ball call in the second inning on Encarnacion's line drive into the second deck down the left-field line. The call was confirmed, as it was determined that the ball hooked left of the foul pole.

WHAT'S NEXT

Indians: After a team off-day on Monday, right-hander Josh Tomlin (9-9, 4.98 ERA) is scheduled to take the ball for the Tribe in a 7:10 p.m. ET tilt against the Twins on Tuesday at Progressive Field. Tomlin has gone 5-0 with a 2.74 ERA in his last eight outings.

Mariners: Felix Hernandez (5-5, 4.57 ERA) will receive the ball at 7:05 p.m. PT Monday as the Mariners begin a three-game series against the A's in Oakland. Hernandez will make his third start since being activated from the disabled list on Sept. 13. He missed 38 games with right shoulder bursitis.

Francona proud that Tribe stands together

By Jordan Bastian / MLB.com | @MLBastian | September 24th, 2017 + 13 COMMENTS

SEATTLE -- Indians manager Terry Francona knows that the personnel inside his team's clubhouse have varying beliefs and backgrounds, but he also stresses the importance of pulling on the same rope together.

Prior to Sunday's game against the Mariners, Francona called a few players into his office to discuss whether anyone on the team was feeling compelled to kneel during the national anthem. Francona wanted to listen to their feedback and the manager did not want to get in the way. But, when the Star Spangled Banner was sung, everyone with the Tribe remained standing.

"I just kind of wanted to express that I wasn't talking to them to dissuade somebody," Francona said. "I just think, if somebody felt strong enough about it, there would be a way as a team to show support, because we do things together. It's easy for me to sit here and say, 'Well, I think this is the greatest country in the world,' because I do. But, I also haven't walked in other people's shoes."

A's rookie catcher Bruce Maxwell took a knee during the national anthem on Saturday and again Sunday, as many players in the NFL have done, in an attempt to raise awareness about brutality and injustice at the hands of authorities.

Former 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick started the anthem protest last year, and when that situation stirred national debate, Francona wanted to find a way to do something more tangible to help others. Francona, members of the Indians' front office and coaching staffs, along with the team's players, joined together to create the Larry Doby Youth Fund. The team raised $1 million and the grants were distributed in April to 18 charitable organizations.

"I felt like that was our way, as a team, to show our support for other things, other people who are less fortunate," said Francona, whose son, Nick, served with the Marines in Afghanistan. "I always feel like trying to turn something that could be a negative into a positive is a good way to do it. But, I also see that people are trying to spur conversation. I get that."

Francona was moved by how swiftly so many people came together to create the Larry Doby fund.
"That was one of the proudest moments of my life. I'll always feel that way," Francona said. "I think politicians would do well to come into a Major League clubhouse, because you have people from everywhere. You talk about diverse backgrounds. Yet, if you have our uniform on, it's 'we.' I think people could learn a lot."

Tomlin aiming to keep Twins at bay in opener
By Rhett Bollinger / MLB.com | 12:42 AM ET + 9 COMMENTS
After getting swept by the Yankees in New York, the Twins bounced back with a four-game sweep over the Tigers, and they're riding high into a three-game series against the historically hot Indians that begins on Tuesday at Progressive Field. Cleveland will start right-hander Josh Tomlin (9-9, 4.98 ERA) in the series opener, while Minnesota will counter with veteran Bartolo Colon (6-14, 6.63 ERA).

The Twins, who have a 4 1/2-game lead on the Angels and a 5 1/2-game lead on the Rangers and Royals for the second AL Wild Card spot (9-9, 4.98 ERA) in the series opener, while Minnesota will counter with veteran Bartolo Colon (6-14, 6.63 ERA).

The Twins have played the Indians tough over the last two seasons, going 15-20 against them despite losing 103 games in 2016. Minnesota could become the first team to go from losing 100 games to the postseason the following year, but they're trying not to focus on that until it happens.

"I think part of your job as manager is guarding against being comfortable," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "You don't want to add pressure or anything like that. Comfortable is when you don a T-shirt and a cap and say you're going to play next week. That's the moment we're trying to get to, but we're not there yet."

Three things to know about this game
- Tomlin has been solid in September, going 2-0 with a 2.91 ERA in four starts. But he hasn't been pitching deep into games, unable to last six innings since July 24. He held the Angels to two runs over 5 1/3 innings last time out. Tomlin is 1-2 with a 3.66 ERA in three starts against Minnesota this season.
- Colon has struggled this month, going 0-4 with a 9.17 ERA in four starts. He was hit hard by the Yankees on Wednesday, allowing six runs over 3 1/3 innings. He faced Cleveland on Aug. 15, allowing three runs over five innings in a loss at Target Field. Colon pitched with the Indians from 1997-2002.
- Twins right fielder Max Kepler was held out of the lineup on Sunday with a left hip bruise suffered on Saturday, but is likely to return to the lineup on Tuesday. Kepler is 2-for-12 with a homer against Tomlin.

Santana gets 2-day break after scary collision
By Jordan Bastian / MLB.com | @MLBastian | September 24th, 2017 + 4 COMMENTS
SEATTLE -- Indians manager Terry Francona did the one thing that he said makes Carlos Santana mad on Sunday. Francona kept the first baseman out of the starting lineup.

"He likes to play," Francona said. "He's not even really that big on coming out in blowouts."

For Sunday's game against Seattle, though, Santana was given the day off after a scare at first base in the fifth inning of Saturday's 11-4 win over the Mariners. While catching a throw from third baseman Giovanny Urshela, Santana had his right arm bent back in a minor collision with Seattle's Jean Segura. Francona noted that Santana felt stiffness in his shoulder on Sunday morning, but X-rays came back clean.

With a team off-day on Monday, Francona felt it was best to give Santana the two-day break, especially after the first baseman remained in Saturday's game until being lifted for a pinch-hitter in the ninth inning.

"He's good," Francona said. "He tested out really well. Good strength. He'll get treatment all day [Sunday]. He'll come in tomorrow and get treated, but my guess is he'll probably play on Tuesday. He's doing fine. We made him go up and swing in the cage before we let him hit and, you saw it, his swings were pretty aggressive. So, that was good."

In discussing Santana's status, Francona made a point to also praise the first baseman's defense this year.

Heading into Sunday's game, Santana led American League first basemen in Defensive Runs Saved (nine) and double plays started (15), and was tied for first in assists (90). His 4.8 UZR/150 ranked third among his AL positional peers. Those are the type of defensive statistics that could make Santana an unexpected contender for a Gold Glove this year.

"His defense has been [great]. He's taken it to another level," Francona said. "He's proud of it, and he should be. I say it all the time, but I don't think people realize how athletic he is. As things have progressed and he's played more, he has taken a lot of pride in it and it's made a big difference. He's been really good over there."

Worth noting
- Outfielder Jay Bruce returned to the lineup on Sunday as the designated hitter after exiting Saturday's game in Seattle in the fifth inning due to left heel soreness. Bruce said he has dealt with the issue off and on throughout his career. Said Francona: "We could've kept him in the game. I just don't think at this point in the year it made much sense."

- Francona said the Indians have started to map out their pitching strategy for the three off-days prior to the AL Division Series, which starts Oct. 5. The team will likely have an optional workout on Oct. 2, followed by pitchers throwing to hitters in a practice on Oct. 3. Cleveland will then hold another workout on Oct. 4.

Cleveland Indians Carlos Santana sore, but OK after collision at first base
By Paul Hoynes, cleveland.com phoynes@cleveland.com
SEATTLE -- Manager Terry Francona said Carlos Santana was sore, but OK after a collision at first base in Saturday's 11-4 win over the Mariners at Safeco Field.
Santana did not play Sunday, but Francona said he could be in the lineup on Tuesday when the Indians open their last homestand of the regular season with a three-game series against the Twins.

"Carlos is good," said Francona, on Sunday morning. "He's stiff, which we expected. He tested out really well...good strength. He'll get treatment all day today and he'll come in Monday and get treated.

"My guess is he'll probably play on Tuesday."

In the fifth inning on Saturday, third baseman Giovanny Urshela grabbed Jean Segura -- the ball was foul and Urshela didn't have to make the throw, but he did anyway. The ball tailed back into Segura as he neared first base. Santana reached back into Segura's path to try and catch the ball, but Segura collided with him.

Trainer Jeff Desjardins checked on Santana and he finished the game. He did have x-rays on his shoulder after the game.

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Does Cleveland Indians’ Jason Kipnis have time to get ahead of center-field learning curve?

By Paul Hoynes, cleveland.com phoynes@cleveland.com

SEATTLE - Jason Kipnis has seen Corey Kluber's work from second base. Now he's seeing him from center field. Like being the second dog in a sled team, the view doesn't change.

Kluber throws strikes, gets people out and wins.

"He's the Cy Young winner," said Kipnis, with all the finesse of a punch in the nose after Kluber struck out 10 on Sunday in a 4-2 win over the Mariners.

But what of Kluber's view of Kipnis? Who knows? He works with his back to second base and center field, which has become Kipnis new position.

Kipnis, however, is getting more comfortable with the move. He better be. There are six games left in the regular season. The postseason is stomping and snorting and just around the corner.

So Kipnis better get the hang of this center field in a hurry.

He looked better on Sunday. His comfort in the outfield showed at the plate, where only the bat matters. He had two hits, a sacrifice fly and two RBI. On defense, he came in a few steps to catch a soft liner by Nelson Cruz in the sixth.

"You're going to see me get more comfortable every single game with positioning, reading hitters, reading swings and balls of the bat," said Kipnis. "I think you're going to start seeing a lot more efficient routes, direct lines and being where I'm supposed to be on the field."

Kipnis still isn't busting it down the first baseline on ground balls. Manager Terry Francona has always complimented him on the way he hustles, saying, "Kip runs to first base like his pants are on fire."

The last time he did that, Kipnis ended up on the disabled list for the second time with a strained right hamstring. So he's still being cautious and that has to come into play sometime in center field at one point.

"My legs are feeling better," he said.

Terry Francona on Corey Kluber, Austin Jackson, Jason Kipnis, Cody Allen

The Indians are throwing a lot of stuff at Kipnis. Every day he gets treatment on his hamstring, works on his swing and works on his outfield play. It's what happens when a season is interrupted by three stays on the disabled list and Jose Ramirez, and MVP candidate, moves from third to second base and claims squatter's rights.

"It's a lot of starting and stopping," said Kipnis. "You're down for a month at a time each time and then it's kind of like another spring training every time you're coming off the disabled list. So, it's hard to ever get in that real good groove, but that's not to say that can't happen at all here down the stretch. Today was a good start. Hopefully it keeps going."

This week Kipnis is expected to go the distance in center field at least once. He hasn't played a full game out there yet, which will play a part in the how the Indians pick their postseason roster. Do they bring along a defensive caddy to replace Kipnis late in the game? Rookie Greg Allen has been doing that in September with the expanded roster.

Will the Indians use a roster spot to fill that job or could someone like Austin Jackson, Abraham Almonte or Tyler Naquin do it when the ALDS starts on Oct. 5?

"We're getting low on time," said Kipnis, "but I still think we're getting better on where we need to be."

While Kipnis continues to immerse himself in center field, something new may have been added to Team Kluber. Roberto Perez caught Kluber for the second straight start on Sunday. It was the third time Perez has caught Kluber this year. Yan Gomes has been behind the plate for his 25 other starts.

Perez opened the season as Gomes' backup, but he's been getting more playing time since Aug. 24, the start of the Tribe's 22-game winning streak. From Aug. 24 through Sunday, Perez has caught 151 innings to Gomes' 134. Perez was behind the plate Sunday despite Gomes hitting two homers on Saturday.

In the postseason last year, Perez caught all 15 games because Gomes was dealing for a broken hand.

"It's fun to catch him," said Perez.

But who is going to be catching Kluber on Oct. 5 for Game 1 of the ALDS? And will it matter?
Corey Kluber wins No. 18 as Cleveland Indians beat Seattle Mariners, 4-2

By Paul Hoynes, cleveland.com phoynes@cleveland.com

SEATTLE - Corey Kluber reached 18 wins for the third time in his last four years Sunday afternoon as the Indians ended their final road game of the regular season like they've ended just about every other game in the last month.

In other words, yeah, they the Indians won again.

Kluber struck out 10 or more batters for the 15th time this season and Jose Ramirez hit a tie-breaking homer run as the Indians beat Seattle, 4-2. It was their 98th win over the season. The Indians, with six games to play, have won 29 of their last 31 games.

The Indians ended the contest 1 1/2 games ahead of Houston for the American League's best record, and 1 1/2 games behind the Dodgers for the best record in the majors.

The numbers keep accumulating for Kluber in his quest to win his second Cy Young Award in the last four years. He is 6-0 in his last six starts and 11-1 in his last 13. He is 15-2 since coming off the disabled list on June 1.

"He's the Cy Young (winner)," said Jason Kipnis. "I think he's clearly the Cy Young. That doesn't take anything away from Chris Sale. I think he's clearly the No.2 and would be the Cy Young any other year that Corey Kluber's not pitch like this."

Kluber (18-4, 2.27) allowed two unearned runs with 10 strikeouts Sunday. He walked two and allowed six hits. This season he's struck out 262 batters in 198 2/3 innings.

Strikeouts, to Kluber, are the product of making good pitches. He doesn't make a big deal about them, but Sunday was the 39th game in his career where he's reached double digits in strikeouts.

The Indians took a 2-0 lead in the fourth off Mike Leake (10-13, 3.92).

Ramirez almost gave the long-haired Leake a haircut with a liner right over his head into center field. He stole second and scored on Edwin Encarnacion's double to left. It was Ramirez's 100th run and Encarnacion's 99th RBI.

Leake struck out his old Cincinnati teammate, Jay Bruce, but Kipnis doubled to right to make it 2-0. It was a good day for Kipnis, who had two hits, two RBI and played well in center field.

The Mariners, playing their final home game of the regular season, tied the score in the fifth on a two-run homer by Ben Gamel. Mark Zunino opened the inning by reaching on an error by third baseman Giovanny Urshela, making both runs unearned.

The runs were the first Kluber allowed in 26 straight innings.

Ramirez put the Indians back on top with a leadoff homer in the sixth. He hit a 3-2 pitch over the center field fence for 3-2 lead. It was Ramirez's 29th homer and 81st RBI of the season.

The Indians pushed the lead to 4-2 on a sacrifice fly by Kipnis in the eighth. Encarnacion started the rally with his second double of the game and 19th of the season. Bruce moved him to third with a single and Kipnis delivered him with a sacrifice fly.

Cody Allen, rocked on Friday night by a two-run, game-winning homer by Nelson Cruz in the ninth inning, worked a perfect ninth on Sunday for his 29th save.

The play of the game came in the fourth with the Tribe leading, 2-0. Seattle had Cruz on second and Kyle Seager on first with one out when Yonder Alonzo sent a drive to the gap in left center. Austin Jackson, almost at the fence, made a over the shoulder catch, spun and threw to Francisco Lindor, the cutoff man. Lindor's throw to first was just in time to get Seager and complete the double play.

"That won the game for us right there," said manager Terry Francona.

Said Kluber, "It was a great play on both ends. Obviously, it was a big point in the game. If that gets by him, it's potentially a tie game at that point. If not, they have two guys in scoring position. A great catch, first of all, and then a really good relay throw, too. Two big outs."

The Indians, with the best road record in the big leagues at 53-28, have won 16 of their last 17 games away from Progressive Field. The 53 road wins are a club record.

Kluber threw pitches 109, 72 (66 percent) for strikes. Leake threw 106 pitches, 74 (70 percent) for strikes.

Encarnacion just missed hitting his 38th homer of the season in the second inning. His drive down the left field line curled just outside the left field foul pole. A crew chief review by Sam Holbrook confirmed the call by third base umpire Greg Gibson.

The Tribe's DH has 10 RBI in his last eight games.

The Indians and Mariners drew 23,695 to Safeco Field on Sunday. First pitch was at 4:10 p.m. with a temperature of 61 degrees.

The three-game series drew 82,722.

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Cleveland Indians manager Terry Francona talks team unity when it comes to protests

By Paul Hoynes, cleveland.com phoynes@cleveland.com

SEATTLE -- Oakland's Bruce Maxwell became the first MLB player to kneel during the national anthem before his team's game on Saturday following President Trump's comments criticizing NFL players who have been kneeling during the national anthem to protest police treatment of African Americans.

Manager Terry Francona talked to some of his players - including African Americans Austin Jackson and Greg Allen - before Sunday's game against the Mariners at Safeco Field to see if they planned on protesting.
"I talked to a couple guys, and I've talked to them before," said Francona. "My point to them was, one, I wanted to listen. But, I just kind of wanted to express that I wasn't talking to them to dissuade somebody. I just think, if somebody felt strong enough about it, there would be a way as a team to show support, because we do things together.

"It's easy for me to sit here and say, 'Well, I think this is the greatest country in the world,' because I do. But, I also haven't walked in other peoples' shoes. So, until I think, not just our country, but our world, until we realize that, hey, people are actually equal -- it shouldn't be a revelation -- and that different doesn't mean less. It's just different. We've got work to do.

"So, I just wanted to make sure that they understood, like if they felt pressure or whatever was on their minds, that as a team we can support each other. That was kind of all it was."

No player from the Indians are Mariners knelt during the national anthem.

During the postseason last year, when NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick started this form of protest, Francona met with various players to see if there was a way address the problem from a different direction.

The Indians formed the Larry Doby Youth Fund and raised $1 million in a matter of days within the organization to help disadvantaged youths in the Cleveland area. Francona called it one of the proudest moments in his life.

"I felt like that was our way, as a team, to show our support for other things, other people who are less fortunate," said Francona. "I always feel like trying to turn something that could be a negative into a positive is a good way to do it. But, I also see that people are trying to spur conversation. I get that. Sometimes, the only way to do something that maybe gets under peoples' skin. And I don't have hardly any answers -- let alone all the answers. I just know how I feel about things."

Francona did say that politicians and people from all walks of life could learn a lot by witnessing what goes on a big-league clubhouse.

"You have people from everywhere," he said. "You talk about diverse backgrounds. Yet, if you have our uniform on, it's 'we.' I think people could learn a lot from that."

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**14 Cleveland Indians streaks from 2017 that might get overshadowed by the team's epic 22-game run**

Cleveland Indians streaks from 2017 that might get overshadowed by the team's epic 22-game run

CLEVELAND, Ohio — When it comes to streaks, the Cleveland Indians' epic 22-game stretch of victories earlier this month casts a pretty big shadow over anything else the club has done this season.

But 22 isn't the only number of significance to the 2017 Indians. There are plenty of streaks manager Terry Francona's team has put together in a variety of statistical categories since opening weekend that have had a huge impact thus far.

Maybe you're aware that at one point the Indians were slugging home runs every game for more than two weeks. Or that Francisco Lindor was clubbing extra-base hits at an unprecedented pace.

And Corey Kluber's strikeout statistics? Where do you even begin?

Sure, 22 straight wins is a ridiculous number. One that should be celebrated for years to come. Heck, maybe Hollywood will make a movie about it some day.

In the meantime, here is a look back at some of the other streaks that the Tribe posted in 2017 — the ones that might get overlooked, but are no less worthy just because they're not 22.

Michael Brantley's 14 straight games with a hit


Notable: Brantley's streak was the longest by an Indians player in 2017, and tied for the fifth-longest in the American League this season.

Meanwhile, teammate Francisco Lindor registered hitting streaks of 13, 12 and 12 games at different points during the season, becoming the only player in the big leagues this season with three such streaks.

Streak: Sep. 7-16.

Notable: Lindor's franchise record run of consecutive games with an extra-base hit started with a triple and home run against Chicago's Mike Pelfrey and ended with a double off KC's Jason Hammel. Along the way, Lindor registered a .463/.511/.1.000 slash line with a 1.511 OPS, including 4 HR, 6 doubles, 2 triples and 11 RBI. Probably his most notable XBH in that stretch was the two-out, two-strike double off the wall in left field in the bottom of the ninth inning against Kansas City on Sep. 14 that set the stage for Jay Bruce's 10th inning walk-off double to extend Cleveland's winning streak to 22 games.

Corey Kluber,Yan Gomes


Notable: Corey Kluber's dominant second half of the 2017 was highlighted by back-to-back scoreless outings against Detroit and Kansas City. The streak started after Kluber allowed two home runs in the first inning at Chicago on Sep. 7 and ended on a two-run blast by Ben Gamel in the fifth inning of Sunday's 4-2 Indians win. At the time it was snapped, Kluber's streak was the third-longest in the American League for the 2017 season.

30 straight scoreless innings (team)
Notable: Early on during the team’s American League-record winning streak, Cleveland posted three consecutive shutout victories against the Kansas City Royals that encompassed a 30-inning streak. That run ended in New York, when Chase Headley homered off Corey Kluber in the bottom of the third inning of a 6-2 Tribe win. It marked the longest Indians shutout streak since a 31-inning run in 2008, and stands as the longest shutout streak in Major League Baseball this season.

Notable: Jose Ramirez accomplished something only seen 13 times in major league history when he clubbed a pair of home runs and three doubles in an 11-1 Indians win against Detroit. His five consecutive at-bats with an extra-base hit tied an MLB and club record. The Cubs' Kris Bryant was the last player to do it on June 27, 2016. Kelly Shoppach was the last Indians player to do it as he collected five extra-base hits on July 30, 2008 against the Tigers.

Notable: Rookie Tyler Olson joined the big league club in late July when Andrew Miller went down with a knee injury, and has not looked back. All 27 major league appearances by Olson this year have been scoreless. That's the longest MLB streak to begin a season since Brad Ziegler in 2008 (29 starting with Ziegler's May 31 debut).

Notable: The Indians got what they paid for when they signed the veteran slugger in December as Encarnacion went more than a month getting on base in every game he played. Encarnacion posted a .266/.416/.615 slash line in 137 plate appearances with 12 home runs, two doubles and 24 RBI during the streak. His On base-plus-slugging percentage was a healthy 1.031 and he drew 27 walks. And, oh yeah, the Tribe won 25 of the 32 games.

14 consecutive road wins (team)

Notable: The team’s franchise-record road winning streak eclipsed the previous mark of 12 games from July 8-21 in 1922. The streak had been the longest single-season road winning streak in the American League since Detroit started the 1984 season a 17-0 run on the road that was part of a bigger 21-game road streak that started in 1983.

Corey Kluber’s 5 straight outings with at least 10 strikeouts

Notable: Kluber’s return from the disabled list in early June led to an unprecedented stretch where he broke the franchise record for consecutive starts with double-digit strikeouts. His highest strikeout total in that stretch, ironically, came when he fanned 13 in a 4-2 loss to Minnesota on June 24. That streak was part of a larger stretch of 14 consecutive starts where Kluber notched eight or more strikeouts (June 1-Aug. 13). Kluber became one of just three pitchers in MLB history to record a streak of 14 or more starts with eight-plus strikeouts, joining Randy Johnson (3x) and Pedro Martinez (2x). It also marked the 3rd-longest single-season streak in MLB history.

9 straight series wins (team)

Notable: Miller's unblemished stretch was snapped by Tampa Bay when Corey Dickerson scored on a sacrifice fly in the eighth inning of a game the Indians went on to win, 8-7. It was the longest streak by an Indians pitcher to begin a season since Doug Jones went 20 innings in 1990, and it snapped a 26-straight scoreless outing run that stretched back to Sep. 5, 2016 (a span of 30.1 innings).

16 straight games with a home run (team)

Notable: Allen opened the season by collecting 13 saves in his first 19 appearances before suffering his first blown save May 24 against Cincinnati. Ironically, Allen would have had his 14th save locked up if Reds manager Bryan Price had not challenged the double play groundout of speedster Billy Hamilton. After a reversal, Zack Cozart's two-run single gave Cincinnati a 4-3 lead.

Notable: The Indians only went 9-7 during this late-May home run binge. But nine different hitters contributed to the cause, including Jason Kipnis, who hit six of his 11 home runs for the year during this span. Kipnis and Edwin Encarnacion were the only Indians with multi-homer games during the more than two-week run that included four dingers by Lonnie Chisenhall and three each by Francisco Lindor and Carlos Santana. The streak survived on May 17 thanks to Bradley Zimmer’s first major league homer.

Streak: April 3-May 23.

Notable: Allen opened the season by collecting 13 saves in his first 19 appearances before suffering his first blown save May 24 against Cincinnati. Ironically, Allen would have had his 14th save locked up if Reds manager Bryan Price had not challenged the double play groundout of speedster Billy Hamilton. After a reversal, Zack Cozart’s two-run single gave Cincinnati a 4-3 lead.

Streak: Aug. 3-8.

Notable: Granted this is the shortest streak on the list, but the accomplishment is no less impressive. Kluber worked back-to-back complete games on Aug. 3 against the Yankees and Aug. 8 against Colorado. He struck out 10+ batters in both games, becoming the first Indians pitcher to throw back-to-back complete games with 10 or more strikeouts since John Farrell did so on August 11 & 17, 1989.
Corey Kluber gets 18th win as Indians beat Mariners 4-2

SEATTLE (AP) -- At this point, there is not much Corey Kluber can do to strengthen his case for the American League Cy Young Award. Another win, another quality start, another 10 strikeouts has become what is expected from Cleveland's ace.

"He's the Cy Young. I think he's clearly the Cy Young," Indians teammate Jason Kipnis said. "That doesn't take away anything from Chris Sale. I think he's clearly the No. 2 and would be the Cy Young in any other year Corey Kluber is not pitching like this. What he's done has just been efficient as you can be."

Kluber threw seven strong innings to become the first 18-game winner in the AL, Jose Ramirez's 29th home run snapped a 2-all tie, and the Indians beat the Seattle Mariners 4-2 on Sunday.

Kluber (18-4) made only one mistake in winning his sixth straight start, striking out 10 and allowing six hits. It was his 15th start this season with at least 10 strikeouts. And Kluber didn't feel at his best after getting extra rest before this turn in the rotation.

"Just didn't quite feel as crisp as when you get to go every fifth day, but it's about making adjustments," Kluber said.

Ben Gamel had a two-run homer with two outs in the fifth inning to pull Seattle even and snap a string of 26 2/3 scoreless innings by Kluber. Both of the runs were unearned after an error by Giovanny Urshela. But it was the only offense the Mariners could produce against Cleveland's ace.

The Indians won for the 29th time in 31 games, won their ninth straight series and have not lost consecutive games since Aug. 22-23.

The loss eliminated the Mariners from contention for the second AL wild card. Seattle is seven games behind Minnesota with six games left. The Mariners have not made the postseason since 2001.

"We faced some really good pitching the last couple weeks," Seattle manager Scott Servais said. "I'm proud of our guys and the way they fought all year. It's disappointing with the expectations we had on ourselves and this ballclub."

Ramirez put Cleveland in front leading off the sixth with a solo shot off Seattle starter Mike Leake (3-1) and put Kluber in line for the victory.

Cleveland also got RBI doubles from Edwin Encarnacion and Jason Kipnis in the fourth. Encarnacion later doubled in the eighth off reliever Shea Simmons and scored on a sacrifice fly from Kipnis.

Brian Shaw pitched a clean eighth, and Cody Allen worked the ninth for his 29th save. Allen allowed a game-ending home run to Nelson Cruz in Friday's loss but struck out two of three batters in the ninth on Sunday.

"We knew (Allen) was fine or he wouldn't be pitching," Indians manager Terry Francona said.

STARTING OFF
Leake was lifted after 6 2/3 innings, the third time in five starts since being acquired by Seattle that he pitched into the seventh. The right-hander pitched into the seventh just twice in his final 10 starts with St. Louis.

The three earned runs were the most allowed by Leake since his addition to the Mariners rotation.

POSTSEASON DROUGHT
Seattle has the longest postseason drought in baseball at 16 years and counting. The Mariners were in the middle of the wild card race until the past 10 days, when they were swept by the Astros in Houston and swept at home by Texas. Seattle has dropped eight of nine.

"It says a lot for our guys to keep it up like that for as long as we did," Servais said. "I think when you battle so long like that ... you kind of run out of gas. You can only go so far."

TRAINER'S ROOM
Indians: 1B Carlos Santana was out of the lineup a day after having his right arm bent awkwardly in a collision at first base with Seattle's Jean Segura running down the line. ... RF Jay Bruce was back in the lineup after leaving Saturday's game early with left heel soreness.

Mariners: Seattle was without starting SS Jean Segura on Sunday, and he may miss a few more games with a sprained middle finger on his right hand. Segura was hurt in Saturday's game. Servais said it would probably be a few days before Segura will be back in the lineup.

UP NEXT
Indians: Cleveland has Monday off before opening a three-game series at home against Minnesota. Josh Tomlin (9-9) will start the opener.

Mariners: Seattle goes on the road for its final six games, beginning with three against Oakland. Felix Hernandez (5-5) will start the opener against the A's.
Has Corey Kluber solidified his standing as the Cy Young Award favorite? His teammates think so
by Zack Meisel

SEATTLE — Terry Francona peeked his head around the corner and held up his navy cap as he peered into the clubhouse.

“Hey, Klubes!”

The manager shouted to Corey Kluber, his starting pitcher, and asked if he had the proper headwear for the Indians’ Sunday matinee at Safeco Field. The starter selects that day’s wardrobe, and Kluber opted for the navy jerseys. So, Francona ditched his Block C cap and grabbed one with a Chief Wahoo logo.

For Kluber, the uniform color doesn’t really matter. Neither does the ballpark, the opponent, the weather, the day of the week, the umpiring crew, the defense behind him or the catcher (Roberto Perez served as his backstop Sunday instead of Yan Gomes).

Kluber can’t seem to pitch poorly in any situation. He said he wasn’t particularly sharp Sunday — he did allow a home run (oh, the horror!) — a condition he tied to having two extra days of rest between outings. Yet, he still lowered his ERA to an American League-best 2.27 after another sterling, seven-inning performance.

His body of work since his return from the disabled list June 1 has made these sort of outings as routine and easy to predict as the plot to a children’s movie. For Kluber, it’s a run-of-the-mill result. For just about anyone else, it’s a you-had-to-see-it masterpiece.

We often frame statistics in a certain way to better support our points. We search for arbitrary endpoints and categories to enhance our arguments. It’s a natural practice. It’s also not a difficult task when it comes to Kluber.

Consider his 22 starts since June 1, when he put his balky back on the back burner.

Does it sound impressive that he has limited the opposition to zero or one run in 14 of those 22 outings?

Does it sound more impressive that he has limited the opposition to two runs or fewer in 18 of those 22 outings?

Does it sound more impressive that he has limited the opposition to three runs or fewer in 21 of those 22 outings?

Does it sound more impressive that he has limited the opposition to four runs or fewer in each of those 22 outings?

Frame it any way you want, say his teammates.

“I think he’s clearly the Cy Young,” said Jason Kipnis, the Indians’ second-baseman-turned-center-fielder. “That doesn’t take anything away from Chris Sale. I think he’s clearly the No. 2 and would be the Cy Young any other year that Corey Kluber’s not pitching like this.

“What he’s done is as efficient as you can be. I think we always look at it like, any run scored on him is always a surprise to us, with how good he’s been. That’s how we look at it. That’s the mark of a good pitcher.”

Voters have until the first pitch of the AL Wild Card Game on Oct. 3 to submit their ballots for the Cy Young Award. They might not need that long to finalize their decisions.

It’s certainly not a runaway, but one would think Kluber will benefit from the Indians’ torrid stretch and the separation in the ERA column.

Seattle’s Ben Gamels snapped Kluber’s string of 26 scoreless innings with a two-run homer in the fifth inning Sunday. He only stepped into the batter’s box at that time because Giovanny Urshela booted a grounder to start the inning.

Otherwise, Kluber’s scoreless streak might have persisted until the next eclipse.

“He’s our ace,” Perez said. “You expect him every fifth day to get the ball and do what he does best.”

In the past four months, he has done that better than any other person who has held a baseball.

Since he recovered from his lower back strain, Kluber has produced a 1.62 ERA in 22 starts, with 221 strikeouts and 23 walks. He has limited the opposition to a .490 OPS during that span. For reference, the worst qualified hitter in the majors this season, Alex Gordon, sports a .612 OPS. Michael Martinez owns a career OPS of .504.

So, since the start of June, Kluber has turned every hitter into a poor man’s Martinez.

“I overheard him that he didn’t feel that great today,” Kipnis said. “Guys like us laugh at that. We’re like, ‘We wish we did that well when we don’t feel great.’”

Kluber will never concede, especially during a season, to concerning himself with any personal hardware or superlatives. But his teammates have no issue with campaigning on his behalf.
“I think he should,” Perez said. “He’s got the numbers. He’s got the strikeouts. He’s got everything. At the end of the season, we’ll see what happens. He deserves it.”

Terry Francona transcript: On the Indians’ national anthem conversations and the pitching plan
by Zack Meisel
SEATTLE — It was a typical Sunday morning on the road for the Indians.

Zach McAllister marveled at a Buffalo Bills touchdown in which the football caromed off of one player’s hands into a teammate’s grasp. Bryan Shaw sat at his locker, watching an NFL game on his iPad. Giovanny Urshela and Greg Allen took hacks in the batting cage.

At the same time, Tribe manager Terry Francona met with a handful of players about their thoughts on kneeling for the national anthem. Oakland Athletics catcher Bruce Maxwell took a knee before his club’s game on Saturday. Groups of NFL players around the country did the same prior to kickoff on Sunday.

So, perhaps it wasn’t a typical Sunday morning on the road.

Here’s a transcript from Francona’s session with reporters before Sunday’s series finale at Safeco Field.

Question: Bruce Maxwell in Oakland took a knee. There’s been a lot of talk about that. Have any players alerted you that they might (follow suit) today?

Francona: No, I talked to a couple guys and I’ve talked to them before. My point to them was, one, I wanted to listen. But, I just kind of wanted to express that I wasn’t talking to them to dissuade somebody. I just think, if somebody felt strong enough about it, there would be a way as a team to show support, because we do things together. It’s easy for me to sit here and say, ‘Well, I think this is the greatest country in the world,’ because I do. But I also haven’t walked in other people’s shoes. So, until, I think, not just our country, but our world, until we realize that, hey, people are actually equal — it shouldn’t be a revelation — and that different doesn’t mean less. It’s just different. We’ve got work to do. So, I just wanted to make sure that they understood, like if they felt pressure or whatever was on their minds, that as a team, we can support each other — that was all it was.

Question: Your son is military. Do you have thoughts on when guys take a knee?

Francona: I think we all have thoughts. I don’t know enough, you know what I mean? I’m happy to stand for the anthem. I think it’s an honorable thing to do. I also know that things aren’t perfect, so other than that, I don’t know if I’m deep enough. I don’t ever want to turn being the manager of the Indians into something that I’m not qualified (to speak on). I think I’m qualified to care about people. Other than that, I don’t think I’m going to be the next selection at an embassy or something like that.

Question: Last year, you spoke with officers, which helped spawn the Larry Doby Fund.

Francona: I felt like that was our way, as a team, to show our support for other things, other people who are less fortunate, or however you want to say it. I always feel like trying to turn something that could be a negative into a positive is a good way to do it. But, I also see that people are trying to spur conversation. I get that. Sometimes, the only way to spur it is to do something that maybe gets under peoples’ skin. And I don’t have hardly any answers, let alone all the answers. I just know how I feel about things.

Question: You have a really diverse group in the clubhouse, so how proud are you that they have come together on stuff like this, going back to the Larry Doby Fund?

Francona: That was one of the proudest moments of my life. I’ll always feel that way. I think politicians would do well to come into a major league clubhouse, because you have people from everywhere. You talk about diverse backgrounds — yet, if you have our uniform on, it’s ‘we.’ I think people could learn a lot.

Question: On to baseball…

Francona: Yeah, before my head explodes.

Question: How’s Carlos Santana doing after his X-ray?

Francona: He’s good. He showed up today. He’s stiff, which we expected, but he tested out really well. Good strength. He’ll get treatment all day today. He’ll come in tomorrow and get treated, but my guess is he’ll probably play on Tuesday. He’s doing fine. We made him go up and swing in the cage before we let him hit and, you saw it, his swings were pretty aggressive. So, that was good.

Question: What have you thought of his second half?
Francona: His defense — he’s taken it to another level. And he’s proud of it. And he should be. Say it all the time, but I don’t think people realize how athletic he is. As things have progressed and he’s played more, he has taken a lot of pride in it and it’s made a big difference. He’s been really good over there.

On so many fronts, he has made so many gains. The guys love him. They should. He plays every day, except for today. He’s worked hard and it shows.

Question: Jay Bruce is starting, so his heel issue is OK?

Francona: He’s had it on and off for a while. At times, it bothers him more. We could have kept him in the game, I just don’t think at this point in the year it made much sense.

Question: With three days off between your last regular-season game and your first playoff game, how will that affect your pitching schedule?

Francona: We’ve done a lot of thinking about it. We did it last year. You’ll probably see a lot of the relievers pitch on Sunday, because that’s the last game action. Then we’ll have Monday off — we’ll probably have an optional. Tuesday, we’ll have some pitchers throwing and we’ll have hitters hitting off of them. And then Wednesday we’ll have a workout at whatever time our game is.

Question: Could you go with a bullpen day next Sunday?

Francona: No, that’ll be Tomlin’s day, and he needs to pitch. But he’s not going to go (deep) — we’ll make sure we cover what we want to.

Meisel’s Mailbox: Indians playoff opponent preferences, Jose Ramirez’s helmet and future random jersey sightings by Zack Meisel

SEATTLE — The Indians have twice experienced defeat in their past 31 games.

The 29-2 stretch has vaulted them from “I wonder if this team will turn it on in October” to “Holy mother of God, they might win 103 games.”

The Indians might sputter in October, because baseball doesn’t often follow the standard script once the spotlight brightens. But if they remain locked into this trance, the competition doesn’t stand a chance.

Think about the two losses the club has suffered in the last month. The Royals snapped the team’s American League-record 22-game winning streak with a narrow, one-run victory. The Mariners eked out a win Friday night on a Nelson Cruz walk-off homer.

So, of the two times the Indians have faltered in their past 31 games, the first prompted national praise for the opposition for slaying an unconquerable giant, and the second required a ninth-inning moon shot.

Whether or not this run translates into a title, it has been a mesmerizing stretch.

Welcome to another edition of Meisel’s Mailbox, where we cover the pertinent stuff, and also topics about the Indians, other Cleveland sports teams, or anything about life. Submit your questions on Twitter (@ZackMeisel) or via email (zmeisel@theathletic.com).

How does Carlos Santana stack up against other first basemen for the Gold Glove? — @brhermon

Santana leads all AL first basemen with nine defensive runs saved, per FanGraphs.

Santana asked a reporter at Safeco Field over the weekend if he thought Santana had any chance at a Gold Glove Award. He’s certainly a candidate. Have enough opposing managers taken notice? Mitch Moreland, last year’s AL winner at the position, ranks second with seven DRS.

“He’s taken it to another level,” Tribe manager Terry Francona said Sunday, “and he’s proud of it. And he should be. I don’t think people realize how athletic he is. He has taken a lot of pride in it and it’s made a big difference. He’s been really good over there.”

Jose Ramirez’ helmet counter seems very low this year. Productivity up, helmet stays on? — @THE_John_James

On Sunday, Ramirez lost his helmet for the 34th time this season. On this date a year ago, Ramirez’s helmet had fallen off 54 times.

What has caused the decrease? For one, his powerful bat has kept his helmet in place. Last season, he hit 11 home runs. He has nearly tripled that output this year.

Ramirez also contends that the shape of his hair — it’s shorter and more compact than it was last year — is less conducive to flying helmets.

Which National League team do you think would be the toughest opponent in the World Series? — @casemcdowell
With the understanding that any playoff series involves a ton of random variance, I’d probably steer away from the Dodgers, given that Clayton Kershaw could eat up 15-20 innings, depending on the length of the series. Not to mention, the Dodgers might be the only team to hold home-field advantage over the Indians, and an extra game of a Santana-Kipnis-Bruce outfield is far from preferred.

That said, as a watcher of baseball, the potential showcase of star power and plethora of storylines for an Indians-Dodgers World Series would be mighty enticing.

With the Indians’ TV and radio ratings that were released the other day, do they factor in MLB.tv or At-Bat app views and listens? Is that data available to the teams? — Alex K.

The Indians’ TV ratings on SportsTime Ohio are up about 26 percent over last year, and the club’s radio ratings are up about 18 percent. Those numbers do not include streaming services.

I was told the team asks for separate streaming numbers at the end of the season so they can examine if there were any similar trends in that area.

I’m well aware of Francisco Lindor having won the Gold Glove and even the Platinum Glove last season and there’s no question he can field the balls hit near him. Maybe I was spoiled watching Omar Vizquel, who for years, seemed to always get to those balls hit right up the middle. Am I missing something, or is Lindor’s range less than what we should expect? — Ron H.

Your eyes aren’t necessarily deceiving you. It appears as though Lindor has taken a step back defensively this season, and that isn’t a statement made solely because he booted a routine grounder sent his way on Sunday afternoon.

Your eyes aren’t necessarily deceiving you. It appears as though Lindor has taken a step back defensively this season, and that isn’t a statement made solely because he booted a routine grounder sent his way on Sunday afternoon.

Defensive runs saved, by season
2015: 10*
2016: 17
2017: 5

*in a little more than half a season

Ultimate zone rating per 150 innings, by season
2015: 18.9
2016: 20.7
2017: 6.2

The numbers indicate he has tumbled from “unparalleled human vacuum cleaner” to “still good but no longer in his own category.” At the age of 23, I suspect he has time to find a way to return to his previous standing.

And yes, we were all spoiled by watching Vizquel.
How many pitchers will they carry in the postseason? — @sneids

Each day, it seems, we receive a bit more clarity on the playoff roster.

The rotation appears to be set, with Corey Kluber, Carlos Carrasco, Trevor Bauer and Josh Tomlin, though the Indians haven’t officially announced Tomlin’s inclusion. Cody Allen, Andrew Miller, Bryan Shaw, Joe Smith, Tyler Olson and Mike Clevinger will own six of the bullpen spots. I find it hard to believe Nick Goody wouldn’t be included.

At this point, I’d guess Zach McAllister and Danny Salazar would not make the opening-round roster. I think the last spot will come down to either Dan Otero or Brandon Guyer, depending on the outfielder’s health and the Indians’ desire to roll with either an 11- or 12-man pitching staff.

There remain a number of moving parts that could change things over the next week.

Who decides what music is played in the clubhouse? — @UnZippedZach

This answer varies. Bat boys tend to fire up the postgame victory playlist at home. McAllister handled the music in Seattle. The playlist on Sunday afternoon included rappers French Montana, Rick Ross and Kid Cudi.

Which players from the Francona era will make the best Random Jersey Sightings in 10-20 years? — @enjoymorerradio

We have a clubhouse leader for my favorite question of the season. I have an affinity for jerseys that make you do a double take, whether it’s Todd Hollandsworth’s last name squeezing its way onto a sleeveless Tribe uniform or one of the cavalcade of bizarre Browns jerseys spotted in downtown Cleveland on a fall Sunday (former punter Spencer Lanning, anyone?). The hashtag #randomjerseysightings has become a daily feature on my Twitter account, and at the end of the year, we’ll surely recap the best of the best.

The reader posed this question after an eagle eye pointed out a Tyler Houston jersey (complete with a division title patch on the right sleeve) in Anaheim earlier this week. Houston appeared in 13 games for the Indians in 1999.
Fans’ initial replies to the question included the following: Nyjer Morgan, George Kottaras, Michael Martinez, Ryan Webb, Justin Sellers, Jerry Sands, Brett Hayes, Ryan Raburn, Mark Reynolds, Matt Carson, Preston Guilmet and Jason Kubel.

I’d add Brett Myers, Scott Barnes, Matt Langwell (who?), Tyler Holt, J.B. Shuck, Elliot Johnson (he controlled the music in the clubhouse for the first month of the 2014 season), Chris Dickerson, Josh Outman, Mark Lowe, Bryan Price (who?), Toru Murata, Bruce Chen and Gavin Floyd to the mix.

Now, how many of those are realistic? The Kubel example seems equivalent with the Houston sighting. Kubel joined the Indians late in the 2013 season and played in eight games.

Martinez and Sands could become Cleveland cult heroes over time.

And I did spot a man wearing a C.C. Lee shirt at Pike’s Place Market in downtown Seattle on Friday.

Twins sweep the Tigers, put wild-card rivals 5 games back

By La Velle E. Neal III Star Tribune SEPTEMBER 24, 2017 — 3:02PM

DETROIT – It was the first of what could be a few memorable achievements for the Twins this week.

Righthander Jose Berrios was dominant early and the offense was a constant threat as the Twins whipped the Tigers 10-4 to complete a sweep of the four-game series and, with an 82-74 record, guarantee a winning season.

And that’s nothing to take lightly, as the Twins are the first team since the 1988-89 Orioles to lose 100-plus games one year then post a winning record the next.

In doing so, they are making it more difficult to be caught for the second wild card spot in the American League. The closest teams are the Angels, Rangers and Royals — all five games back now as their games started after the Twins-Tigers meeting.

With six games remaining in the regular season, the Twins are close to becoming the first team ever to make the playoffs the year after losing 100-plus games. The addition of the second wild card makes it easier. But the Twins will be the first team to pull it off since it was instituted in 2012.

The Twins will get to savor the moment as they head to Cleveland to face the Indians in a series that begins on Tuesday. They will land in Cleveland on a roll after outscoring Detroit 39-12 in the recently-completed series.

And many of the players responsible for their surprising run produced on Sunday.

Berrios, who has settled into a rotation spot after a rocky baptism last season, showed how dominant he can be on Sunday. He faced one over the minimum over the first three innings, issuing a walk to Andrew Romine in the third. The first hit was single to right by Alex Presley in the fourth that got by first baseman Kennys Vargas, on a ball that Joe Mauer likely would have fielded.

But Berrios, 13-8, was strong until the fifth inning, when Detroit scored twice. The Twins, mindful of Berrios wearing down late in the season, pulled him after that inning. He gave up two runs on five hits and two walks with six strikeouts as he won for the first time since Aug. 30.

Eduardo Escobar continues to live Miguel Sano’s life at third base. He went 2-for-5 for with four RBI, including a three-run home run in the sixth. Escobar has 20 homers, an unexpected power source in an unexpected season. With Sano not expected to be ready for a potential wild card game, Escobar will be their guy at third base.

Jorge Polanco continues to hold down the No. 3 spot in the batting order. He went 2-for-4 with a solo home run, raising his batting average to .260. He was batting .213 on Aug. 2.

And Mauer’s resurgent swing was a threat once again. He went 2-for-5 with a two-run single in the sixth and two runs scored.

These are just four players on a Twins team that is charging toward the postseason, a postseason no one envisioned when the team left spring training.

Polanco’s home run opened the scoring in the first, and Brian Dozier’s RBI single in the second made it 2-0. Zack Granite’s sacrifice fly in the fourth made it 3-0 in the fourth, then the teams each scored two runs in the fifth.

The Twins broke the game open in the sixth, which included Escobar’s homer, a drive to right-center, not the easiest place to hit one out of Comerica Park.

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Twins look to close out the Tigers and close in on a wild card spot

By La Velle E. Neal III SEPTEMBER 24, 2017 — 10:35AM

It’s pretty simple what has happened.

The Twins have done what they have needed to do, and everyone else has failed.

The Angels have lost six straight, including the last two to Houston. They have had some matchups lately. That brought the Rangers within a prayer of the second wild card spot, but Texas coughed up just four hits while losing 1-0 last night to an A’s team that has little to play for.

So the Twins wake up today with a 41/2 game lead for the second wild card spot. Barring a total collapse, they are taking this one to the house. Remember, the Twins have not lost more than four consecutive games all season.
On Sunday, they will have a chance to sweep Detroit in a four-game series. The Tigers have lost 13 of their last 15 games, and are showing little fight once they fall behind. Twins manager Paul Molitor often talks about being greedy at these times, and this sure is one opportunity they need to pounce on.

Twins outfielder Max Kepler was not in the starting lineup as he deals with a sore left hip he suffered while fielding and throwing a ball back into the infield on Saturday.

Kepler received treatment on his injury before the game, and indicated that he's doesn't believe it is serious and considers himself to be available off the bench today.

"They are saying that it is just a bruise," Kepler said, "and I believe that. I would not say it is comfortable but it is manageable."

Zack Granite will start in place of Kepler, but will play left field while Eddie Rosario slides over to right.

Twins righthander Alex Wilson spoke to reporters today while sitting on a couch in Detroit's clubhouse. His right leg was in a hard cast after a liner from Joe Mauer in the eighth inning led to a fracture.

Wilson said the break is about three inches above his ankle, and that he should be, "good to go," by the middle of December.

A Tigers reported mentioned how strange it was for Mauer to hit him since he usually hits everything to left.

"I almost feel just as bad for him," Wilson said of Mauer. "He's like the nicest guy in baseball."

Twins players working to help hurricane-ravaged Puerto Rico

By MIKE BERARDINO | PUBLISHED: September 24, 2017 at 10:26 am | UPDATED: September 24, 2017 at 4:01 PM

DETROIT — Four Twins who represented Puerto Rico in the World Baseball Classic are working with the team to organize a goodwill drive after Hurricane Maria devastated the island.

"Puerto Rico is destroyed," first baseman Kennys Vargas said. "A lot of people lost everything. We're trying to do something up here with the guys to get them food and water to stay alive."

There is talk of a donation truck being set up outside Target Field next weekend for fans to contribute to the cause. Player jerseys could be sold with proceeds going toward humanitarian aid as well.

"After that we might try to send the truck to Miami and then send everything we collect to Puerto Rico," said Vargas, who is working with fellow Puerto Ricans Jose Berrios, Eddie Rosario and Hector Santiago.

Vargas also is skeptical the Twins and Cleveland Indians will be able to play a two-game series next April 17-18 at San Juan’s historic Hiram Bithorn Stadium, which suffered a great deal of damage in the storm as well.

"It will be canceled, I think," Vargas said. "I would say there won’t be baseball in Puerto Rico for one or two years. Not even winter ball. The stadium got destroyed. The community can’t worry about baseball now. It has to take care of everybody. They have to fix people’s lives first."

When the season is over, the popular WBC team that lost to Team USA in the championship round is hoping to organize a benefit back home in Puerto Rico. Vargas said Daddy Yankee is among major artists that have been approached about performing.

KEPLER UPDATE

Max Kepler was out of Sunday's lineup but no additional tests were ordered for an injury near the right fielder’s lower back. Kepler had to leave Saturday’s 10-4 win over the Detroit Tigers shortly after landing awkwardly on a throw to the plate in the first inning.

Rookie Zack Granite took Kepler's place in the lineup Sunday, playing left field while Eddie Rosario moved to right.

"I lost my footing on the throw," said Kepler, initially evaluated for a left hip injury. "I guess I was so determined to stay through with my arm that I lost my footing, and I landed straight on my hip and it kind of twisted."

Twins trainer Dave Pruemer told Kepler "it's just a bruise," Kepler said, and he was hopeful that a round of treatment would leave him available off the bench Sunday and ready to start by Tuesday’s series opener at Cleveland.

"I believe that and think it will get better soon," Kepler said. "I wouldn't say it's comfortable (to swing), but it's manageable."

Having already lost Miguel Sano’s power bat for the past five weeks and counting, the Twins also were recently forced to play through injury absences to regulars Jason Castro (concussion) and Robbie Grossman (fractured thumb).

Kepler, hitting .244 with a .315 on-base percentage this season, homered twice off a pair of left-handers (CC Sabathia and Daniel Norris) in his previous four games.

"It's not really the hip, it's not really the back," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "I don't know if it's more of a feeling or bruising or strained. Hopefully we'll get a better feel the next 48 hours."

ANTHEM PROTESTS

In light of Oakland A’s rookie catcher Bruce Maxwell taking a knee for the national anthem before Saturday night’s game against the Texas Rangers, Molitor was asked if any Twins players had approached him about staging a similar protest.

“They have not,” he said. “I don’t know what’s on people’s minds or if they’d come to me or not. I haven’t thought about it much until obviously (Saturday), what happened.”

Molitor demurred when asked what his stance would be.

“The club would have more say than the manager, I would imagine,” he said.

Of the 34 players on the Twins’ September roster, all but five were either lined up in front of the first-base dugout, standing along the right-field line or warming up in the bullpen during Saturday night’s anthem at Comerica Park.
DRESS FOR SUCCESS
Was that Adalberto Mejia in the corner locker or Kansas City Royals catcher Salvador Perez?
It was hard to tell after Mejia was made to wear a mock Royals uniform with Perez’s No. 13 on the back, shinguards and all, as part of the watered-down rookie dress-up day. Under the new collective bargaining agreement, getups for the longstanding tradition cannot be offensive or overly embarrassing.

“It’s OK. I like it,” said Mejia, who recently dyed his hair blond, a la Perez. “Everybody says it because of the hair.”
Among other rookie costumes spotted in the Twins clubhouse after Sunday’s game: Nik Turley (fatigues), John Curtiss (Superman), Mitch Garver (New Mexico football uniform) and 6-foot-10 Aaron Slegers (New York Knicks center Kristaps Porzingis).

BRIEFLY
Rotations are set for the upcoming series in Cleveland. Tuesday will match Bartolo Colon against right-hander Josh Tomlin, Wednesday will match Mejia against right-hander Danny Salazar and Thursday will pit Ervin Santana against Carlos Carrasco. That will give Kyle Gibson at least a week between starts, depending on whether they would rather have him or Jose Berrios start Game 1 of a potential American League division series.

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