

THE OFFICIAL INDIANAPOLIS INDIANS MAGAZINE

Curtain Call

THAT THURSDAY IN

MARCH

A look back on the day the baseball
world shut down

Pg. 24

PLUS

MEL ROJAS, Jr.
SHINES IN
KOREA, WHERE
BASEBALL
BEATS ON

Pg. 37



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SINGLE-SEASON PITCHING LEADERS

WINS

Jesse Petty	29 (1924)
Tillar Cavet	28 (1919)
Rube Marquard	28 (1908)
Winford Kellum	25 (1903)
Winford Kellum	25 (1902)

LOSSES

Otto Merz	25 (1912)
Harry Allemang	23 (1904)
John Fisher	22 (1906)
William Burwell	21 (1923)
Carmen Hill	21 (1923)

GAMES

Mike Walker	78 (1998)
Douglas Corbett	69 (1979)
George Spencer	68 (1957)
Francis Barrett	65 (1947)
Warren Hacker	65 (1964)

SAVES**

Bob Scanlan	35 (2000)
Jay Baller*	34 (1989)
Blake Wood	29 (2015)
Mark Corey	28 (2005)
Scott Ruskin	28 (1993)

***Saves were not recorded prior to 1969*

WALKS

Harry Weaver	173 (1922)
Dan Tipple	140 (1915)
Herb Score	140 (1954)
W.H. Harrington	137 (1913)
Rube Marquard	135 (1908)

STRIKEOUTS

Herb Score*	330 (1954)
Rube Marquard	250 (1908)
Jose Pena	178 (1968)
Robert Locker	178 (1964)
Melvin Queen / Fred Falkenberg	178 (1949 / 1916)

**Herb Score's 330 strikeouts in 1954 and Jay Baller's 34 saves in 1989 are American Association records*



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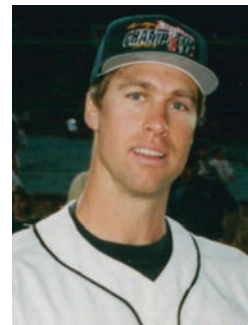
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BOB SCANLAN | P

BATS: Right

THROWS: Right

HEIGHT: 6'7"

WEIGHT: 215 lbs

BORN: 8/9/1966 in Los Angeles, CA

HIGH SCHOOL: Harvard (Beverly Hills) High School

	W-L	ERA	G	GS	GF	SV	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	WHIP
MLB TOTALS	20-34	4.63	290	39	100	17	536.2	583	312	276	209	245	1.48
IND TOTALS	2-2	1.79	57	0	51	35	60.1	42	16	12	18	23	0.99

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

When the Indians were crowned Triple-A World Series champions in 2000, they looked to one player to help them get there. A 33-year-old out of Los Angeles had just finished the best year of his career, making him the fifth relief pitcher in Indians history to be named the organization's Most Valuable Player.



He set a franchise record with 35 saves in 57 appearances out of the bullpen while shutting down the International League with a 1.79 ERA (12er/60.1ip) and 0.99 WHIP in his only year with the Indians. It was his 14th season appearing in the minors and his first in the Milwaukee organization since 1995.

Before he collected five saves in the Governors' Cup postseason, a win in Game 2 and the final out of Game 4 to clinch the Triple-A World Series for the Indians, Scanlan had appeared in two games with Milwaukee earlier that year. His first outing on July 29 vs. Colorado was rough (5er/1.0ip), but he bounced back and didn't allow a hit in 0.2 innings on Aug. 1 vs. San Francisco.

The right-hander was selected by the Philadelphia Phillies in the 25th round of the 1984 First-Year Player Draft out of Harvard High School in Beverly Hills, Calif. He was traded to the Chicago Cubs in exchange for left-handed pitcher Mitch Williams in April 1991 and later pitched 7.0 shutout innings to earn a win against Houston in his major league debut. He pitched primarily as a reliever in three seasons for Chicago, going 14-19 with a 3.75 ERA (114er/273.2ip). Scanlan was traded to Milwaukee following the 1993 season after making a career-high 70 appearances out of the bullpen.

He split time between the starting rotation and bullpen with the Brewers, as 26 of his 47 games over the next two years in Milwaukee were starts, but 1994 was his last full season in the big leagues and he spent the rest of his career toggling between major and minor league bullpens. After staying in the minors for all of 1997 and 1999, his resurgence with Indianapolis made him an option once again for teams.

After the 2000 season, Scanlan signed with the Montreal Expos and appeared in 18 games for his final big-league season. He then retired in 2003 after two full years in the minors.

Grappling with the UNKNOWN

by MEGAN GARCIA

The collective efforts of Tribe front office members steered charitable efforts to local nonprofits as the season grew questionable



Season preparations were well underway for the Indianapolis Indians organization when players reported to spring training in February. It signaled the unofficial start of the baseball season, even though Opening Day for Major League Baseball was over a month away.

The Indians were on schedule for their Opening Night on April 9 vs. the Toledo Mud Hens the week President and General Manager Randy Lewandowski made the trip to Bradenton, Fla., in mid-March. Giveaway items were stored away, tickets were sold to longtime fans and Victory Field was near ready for professional baseball. The only thing out of the ordinary was the rising cases of the novel coronavirus across the country.

It was before what would be the last major league game of spring training when rumors of a two-week delay to the season started to float around LECOM Park, the Pittsburgh Pirates training facility. The whispers of a potential season delay resulted after the National Basketball Association halted its season the previous night when Utah Jazz center Rudy Gobert became the first player from any United States-based sport to be diagnosed with COVID-19.

“You didn’t know what the reverberations would be to the diagnosis,” Lewandoski said. “It was surreal, and then for the world to come to a complete stop over the next couple of months, it’s been hard to grasp.”

Shortly after MLB announced its season was going to be delayed by at least two weeks, Minor League Baseball made a similar announcement about its respective season.

It was a shock to the system for anyone involved with the game. The postponement still provided some hope that the season was going to happen — somehow, some way. That feeling was fleeting.

There was no clear-cut path for the future of the season. COVID-19 cases were rapidly rising, and it was deemed unsafe to be in public, much less in large gatherings, without

personal protective equipment. The Indians front office made the quick transition from working within Victory Field to the solace of their homes just days after the announcement. The new work setting complied with stay-at-home orders to help flatten the curve, but the effects of COVID-19 to surrounding communities couldn’t be ignored.

“Our season was going to follow behind the major leagues and what they were going to do in regard to a schedule. I think we all looked around and thought ‘Well, how can I help if we’re not going to have games?’” Lewandowski said. “We pivoted really quick from baseball to COVID relief.”

Indianapolis Indians Charities, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that was established last September, led the charge in the Indians giving back to Hoosiers. Within a week of the season’s official postponement, IIC launched its first charitable campaign for COVID-19 relief. The campaign consisted of IIC matching every dollar that was spent online through the Indians team store during a two-week period.

“We sold about \$18,500 worth of merchandise and we went ahead and ran that up to a \$20,000 donation to our local Gleaners,” Community Outreach Manager Jo Garcia said.

Gleaners Food Bank of Indiana was one of the first outreaches that IIC made in the pandemic. The success of the campaign put the ball in motion, and the path was clear: help the community in any way possible.

A previous commitment of \$10,000 to Shepherd Community Center was going to need a new purpose. As schools transitioned students into homeschooling for the remainder of the academic year, there was an unforeseen need for technological assistance.

“At the Shepherd Academy Program, they have kids celebrate spring break by doing a couple of different city activities, which one of them probably would’ve been meeting our players,” Garcia said. “But Shepherd came to us and said ‘We would love to move your

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\$10,000 donation away from spring break activities to e-learning abilities,' so tablets, Chromebooks and food security for families became a part of it."

As weeks passed without direction regarding the MiLB season and the pandemic impacting communities day by day, IIC continued its support to local food banks and frontline workers. Through a partnership with Huse Culinary, IIC donated 500 St. Elmo Steak House meals to nurses in local Indianapolis hospitals after Huse Culinary created a meal donation program during National Nurses Week.

More than \$50,000 has been committed to COVID-19 relief efforts through IIC and it doesn't intend to stop there. Its next event, an American Red Cross blood drive at Victory Field on July 7, joins an expanding schedule of non-professional baseball events at The Vic.

IIC isn't the only sector of the Indianapolis Indians helping fill the gap. Front office members volunteered their time over the last two weekends in June as the sounds of baseball echoed in Victory Field for the first time since September 2019. The ball hitting the back of the first baseman's glove and the yells of the third base coach reverberated in the concourse. The setting didn't quite compare to what the Indianapolis Indians had on their June 2020 regular season schedule, which would've involved a three-game set against the Durham Bulls. Instead, as numerous 15- and 16-U baseball teams took the field in consecutive Pastime Tournaments, the Indians front office staff sanitized railings, seats and bathrooms every couple innings.

"We're just glad we can help out to be a resource and provide a pretty cool experience for some of these high-school age kids to play some of their summer travel tournaments here," Lewandowski said. "It's just always great to see the game being played and kids enjoying it, and just seeing a few fans in the stands to take it all in as well."

In two four-day weekends, the Indians hosted the equivalent to roughly 29 percent of their regular season slate of games. The Indians



field operations staff has maintained the field to a game-day standard in the three-plus month baseball hiatus. But the Pastime Tournaments flipped the script on them. Instead of preparing the field once a day during a game day, the crew found themselves preparing the field five times a day for four consecutive days in back-to-back weekends.

"It felt like we were still in the offseason up until we started having those tournament games. Honestly, until the weather started getting warm, it still felt like it was February or March," Field Operations Director Joey Stevenson said.

In the midst of summer, it still feels like early spring for the Indians front office, and it will probably stay that way as players report for a second spring training on July 1 with MLB Opening Day slated as early as July 23.

But the cancellation of the minor league season has turned Victory Field into a full-functioning events venue — with social distancing measures and sanitization practices in place. Events like the Grand Slam Auto Show on Sept. 5 and IndyHumane Mutt Strut on Sept. 26 are some of The Vic's headliners for 2020.

"In the last couple of weeks, events are starting back up as people are being open to the idea of social distancing. We're being creative in the space that we have to keep those practices in place," Stadium Events Manager Paige McClung said. "The rest of the year is pretty much booked with events. People are wanting to come out to the stadium and see what their options are for entertainment."

The seats will eventually fill with cheering fans as the Tribe take the field under the bright lights of Victory Field. But until then, the Indians will focus their efforts on providing enjoyment and assistance to the Circle City and neighboring communities. ♥

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Jake Elmore (13)
Infielder,
Indianapolis
Indians

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BEYOND *the* BALLPARK

with
Cam Vieaux



Lefty Cam Vieaux made his Indians debut midway through 2019 and since became a regular in the Tribe's starting rotation. We caught up with him to learn what some of his favorites are and what he's been up to while on a baseball hiatus.

Q: What do you miss most about sports?

A: Probably just hanging out with all my buddies all day. It's getting kind of lonely just working out and doing everything on my own.

Q: What is your favorite hobby that you've been doing a lot lately?

A: I've been playing a lot of video games, specifically Call of Duty Modern Warfare. I'm a big Xbox guy.

Q: Have you discovered any new skills or rediscovered any old skills during quarantine?

A: Very good question. Honestly, I don't think I've discovered any new skills or brushed up on any. I guess I did get back into video games, that wasn't something I'd been doing the past couple years prior to all of this.

Q: What's your favorite thing to cook?

A: I can cook scrambled eggs for breakfast, and I can cook sandwiches for lunch. I like cooking an Italian sandwich with pepperoni, salami, bacon and maybe some ham.

Q: What is the best joke you've ever heard?

A: That's, wow. "Orange you glad I didn't say banana?" Probably that one.

Q: Who was your baseball idol growing up?

A: I would say guys like Justin Verlander. I grew up in Detroit so that's who we watched a lot.

Q: What is your go-to genre of music?

A: My go-to genre of music would be house music. I like Claude VonStroke and just anything released from his record label, Dirtybird Records.

Q: What was the worst injury you ever got as a kid?

A: Just some bumps and bruises. I cracked my head open in the pool once playing pool basketball and that's about it. I've had some stitches and things like that but no broken bones ever.

Q: Who is your favorite superhero?

A: Probably Batman. Those are really the only superhero movies that I've watched.

Q: If you were an animal, what do you think you would be and why?

A: A giraffe. I have a pretty long neck.

Andy Mohr *Truck Center*

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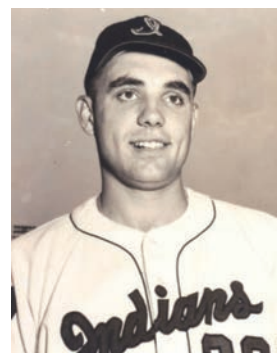


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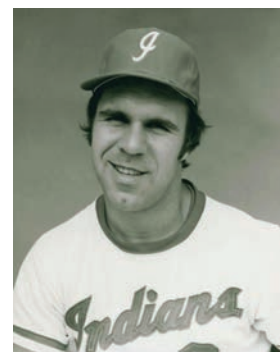
THIS MONTH IN INDIANS HISTORY

1964
JULY 2



Righty **Dave DeBusschere** improved to 6-5 on the season after he tossed 7.1 scoreless innings with 10 strikeouts in a combined shutout with Ed Drapcho and Warren Hacker to beat Dallas, 2-0. DeBusschere also collected two of Indy's nine hits in the contest, including a solo home run for his first long ball of the season. In 1964, the 6-foot-6 Detroit Pistons forward was just two seasons into his 12-year NBA career that eventually featured eight All-Star bids, two championships and a Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame induction in 1983.

1976
JULY 3



Right fielder **Dave Schneck** homered three times to lead the Tribe to a doubleheader sweep over Evansville, 4-3 and 2-0. He homered twice in the opener, his second shot coming with two on and two outs in the bottom of the seventh inning to give the Tribe a dramatic 4-3 walk-off win over the Triplets. He then ripped a solo homer in the fourth inning of the nightcap to propel the Indians to another victory at Bush Stadium.

2017
JULY 6



The Indians recorded their largest margin of victory in the Victory Field era when they hammered Columbus at Huntington Park, 21-1. The Tribe scored in seven of their nine trips to the plate and tied a Victory Field era record with seven home runs in the game, three coming during a nine-run ninth inning. Center fielder **Danny Ortiz** had a game-high four hits and four RBI, and he smacked his sixth and seventh long balls of the season.



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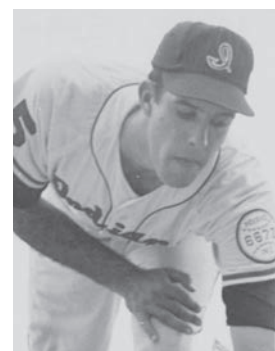
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1957
JULY 11



Playing at old Victory Field, the Indians overcame a 7-0 deficit by scoring 12 runs over the final three innings in a 19-8 win against St. Paul. The Tribe offense raked 21 hits in the comeback victory, with center fielder Ted Beard, first baseman **Ron Jackson** and third baseman Charlie Williams each tallying four knocks apiece. Jackson was the star of the game scoring four runs, driving in four and launching Indy's lone home run.

2001
JULY 11



For the first and only time in Victory Field's 24-year history, the Indians hosted the Triple-A All-Star Game between the Pacific Coast League and International League. Tribe first baseman **Mike Coolbaugh** hit a two-run homer and Louisville left fielder Adam Dunn belted a pair of long balls for the IL All-Stars, who were handed a 9-5 loss.

1982
JULY 14



In Game 1 of a doubleheader against the Oklahoma City 89ers at Bush Stadium, the Indians gave up seven runs in the top of the seventh to fall behind 13-7. With 12,612 fans in attendance, the Tribe battled back with seven runs of their own in the home half to win 14-13. First baseman Ronnie Farkas went 2-for-5 with a double, home run and game-high five RBI. Tribe third baseman **Nick Esasky** also doubled, homered and scored three runs in the thrilling victory. After the game, Indianapolis manager George Scherger said, "I've been in the game over 40 years and have never been involved in one like that."

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2005
JULY 20



The Tribe erased a 9-0 deficit to win a wild game against Syracuse at Victory Field, 14-11. Indians right fielder Graham Koonce and designated hitter **Brad Eldred** each hit two home runs and combined for nine RBI. The Tribe tied the game at 10-10 in the sixth inning and jumped in front for good with a four-run seventh.

1959
JULY 24



Left-hander **Gary Peters** tossed a no-hitter against Minneapolis at old Victory Field in a 5-0 Tribe triumph. He walked five and fanned four batters. It was the fifth no-hitter thrown in franchise history and the first of three tossed by a Tribe pitcher in old Victory Field/Bush Stadium. Second baseman Jim Snyder, who later managed the Indians in 1976, saved the no-hit bid with a leaping catch on a line drive for the final out of the game.

2004 1956
2000
1984 1976
1969
JULY 31



Right-hander **Gary Nolan** collected 13 strikeouts in a 5-2 complete-game win vs. Iowa. Nolan served up a two-run homer in the third inning which put Indy behind 2-1, but the Tribe scored four times in their half of the fifth. Nolan surrendered just two hits and one walk in the swift 1-hour, 45-minute game. Shortstop Dave Concepción and right fielder Bernie Carbo each scored runs for the Tribe, and first baseman Clarence Jones cleared the bases with a triple to lead the offense.



THAT THURSDAY IN MARCH

A look back on the day the baseball
world shut down

by ANNA KAYSER

Seventeen hours and 43 minutes after Rudy Gobert of the Utah Jazz tested positive for COVID-19 and set off a chain reaction that toppled countless other leagues and events in its wake, the 2020 Major League Baseball season, as it was intended, ceased to exist.

It was a matter of when, not if, for baseball and every active sport to shut down. When one singular player in the National Basketball Association – completely disconnected from the sport of baseball or anything besides basketball, for that matter – ended up being the tipping point that led to the sports world going dark one Thursday in March.

Now, over 100 days later – the 100th day being so unironically marked on June 20 by the first day of summer – baseball is set to finally restart. Players will report to their team cities instead of spring training sites, with Opening Day targeted for July 23-24.

For the players – not just MLB but NBA and NHL, too – keeping some sense of normalcy was important to be mentally and physically ready when the call came from Pirates front office personnel. The goals for 2020 haven't changed, and some players needed to get creative to get their regular work in to meet those goals. Ke'Bryan Hayes sent videos to Pittsburgh hitting coach Rick Eckstein for feedback. Jared Oliva put together a makeshift gym in his garage. Will Craig worked out while social distancing at his usual offseason facility.

That day in March will remain as a pinpoint of the moment things shifted, even as baseball resumes. The word they use when looking back on that day from the fields, dugouts and clubhouses in Florida best describes those 24 hours for the entire sports world, not just baseball and its fans.

It was weird.

The United States passed 100 confirmed COVID-19 cases on March 3. That day, MLB announced its internal task force to help navigate the ever-changing health scene, and it was suggested that direct contact should be avoided by eliminating fan autographs and team handshakes.

With numbers still on the rise on March 9, safety measures for teams both in Florida and Arizona were expanded. Clubhouse traffic was officially limited to players and essential personnel, and media requests were arranged outside with social distancing measures put into place.

“That week – probably about a week, it wasn't even that long – [the Pirates] were kind of giving us the warnings [to] be responsible, be safe when fans were asking for autographs or just going out in public, just be aware,” Oliva said. “It almost didn't seem like that big of a deal at the time. And then each game that went on it [it seemed to get more serious].”

With the precautions in place and the hope that playing outside versus in an enclosed arena would lessen the risk of going on as scheduled, the intent was for spring training games to continue with Opening Day still set for March 26, just two weeks later. That was on Monday.

It was 9:27 p.m. ET on Wednesday, March 11 when word broke about Gobert's condition. Just four minutes later the NBA had suspended its season, and although the rest of the night was fairly quiet in terms of other leagues following suit, the next day definitely wasn't. “We knew it was getting pretty serious whenever we saw that [the NBA was suspended],” Hayes said.

“We knew something was about to happen.”

IT WAS ALMOST LIKE A LAST GAME OF THE SEASON TYPE FEELING.

— KE'BRYAN HAYES, INDIANAPOLIS INDIANS THIRD BASEMAN

The news came in waves, hour by hour, on Thursday. MLB held a conference call with team owners over the lunch hour while 10 major league squads on the east coast were warming up to meet their 1 p.m. start times. Like four other stadiums across Florida, LECOM Park in Bradenton, spring training home to the Pittsburgh Pirates, was filling with fans.

The minutes ticked down toward the moment Joe Musgrove would take the mound for his start against Toronto. No postponement or cancellation was official yet — it wouldn't be until just after 3 p.m. ET — but the inevitable hung in the air as the Twitter-verse was exploding.

“That Thursday came by and honestly, we found out from a tweet from one of the ESPN reporters — whoever it was — saying Cactus League and Grapefruit League games [were expected to] be canceled from [then] on,” Oliva said. “This is literally 10 minutes before we head out to the field.”

The Pirates took a 2-0 lead in the first inning and tacked on another in the third on Bryan Reynolds' solo home run. With the lead, things started to shift both on and off the field.

At 3:10 p.m. ET, Hayes was in the dugout. It was around the fourth or fifth inning by his estimate, when the official MLB statement broke: Spring training was canceled effective at 4 p.m. ET, when all Cactus League games were set to begin, and Opening Day would be delayed at least two weeks.

“It was almost like a last game of the season type feeling,” Hayes said.

The Pirates' starting lineup that day featured familiar faces of those who saw the field in Pittsburgh for most, if not all, of 2019. Two home runs by Toronto's young stars, Vladimir Guerrero Jr. and Bo Bichette, helped tie the game at three through five innings, and the Bucs went to their reserves.

Many members of the projected 2020 Tribe lineup were on the docket to receive playing time, including Oliva, who was expected to make the jump from Double-A to Triple-A for Opening Day in Indianapolis. He entered the game in the bottom of the sixth as a pinch runner for Jose Osuna and scored a run to cut Toronto's lead to one.

Oliva, a 24-year-old California native, was selected by Pittsburgh in the seventh round of the 2017 First-Year Player Draft. He started off slow in Double-A Altoona in 2019 but rebounded by hitting .388 through 27 games in July. That rebound carried into the Arizona Fall League, where he hit .312 with 11 stolen bases in 26 contests to set himself up for a non-roster invitation to big-league camp.



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LECOM Park, spring training home of the Pittsburgh Pirates.

His spring was also on the incline. He had hit .154 through seven games in February but was improving, raising his average to .214 by the time games were called. A 2-for-2 performance with his first spring training home run on March 6 and a hit in his only at-bat two days later kept him with the big-league squad through the last round of reassignments to minor league camp.

“During the game, nothing changed,” Oliva said. “I was kind of figuring stuff out the last couple of weeks, especially in the game, and was feeling really good. It was just kind of like, ‘Hey, if this kind of the last game then I’ll keep doing what I’m doing and if that’s it then that’s it.’”

Hayes joined the young outfielder on the field for the seventh inning as the Pirates trailed, 5-4.

Like Oliva, Hayes’ spring was about building on the success he had in the second half of 2019. The 23-year-old Rawlings MiLB Gold Glove-winning third baseman hit steady mid-.200s through most of the season with Indianapolis before erupting in August for a .327 average in 28 games.

He started off on that same note in late-February, hitting a double in his first spring at-bat after finishing tied for eighth in the International League with 30 two-baggers despite missing three weeks due to injury. Hayes went 5-for-12 in his first six games before slowing down to a .280 average.

While Oliva’s improvement over the course of the spring came from playing in-game, Hayes’ came in the cage and in work he put in off the field. He would stay back on games he didn’t play and watch video with Eckstein to work through his mechanics.

“I got to spend a bunch of time with him, just talking to him about the beginning of last year and things he saw that I wasn’t doing right,” Hayes said. “Just correcting that stuff... every now and then [I’ll] just send him some video and get some feedback from him.”

After a two-run Blue Jays eighth that was cut in half by a Cole Tucker two-out solo blast in the bottom half, Toronto would go on to win the game, 7-5.

Meanwhile, 3 ½ miles away at Pittsburgh’s minor league complex, Pirate City, the day was full of more questions than not. Minor League Baseball had released its statement at 3:51 p.m. ET to mirror what MLB said, but there was no official word on the status of minor league camp itself.

“[That morning] we woke up and went to the field, and it was just a really weird feeling,” Craig said. “There were people running around that you usually don’t see on the field, and [we’re] like ‘Okay, something’s about to happen, probably in the next day or so.’”

After spending the afternoon calling around to front office members who might know specifics, Craig finally got confirmation that the minor league side was also suspended.

The thought process on Thursday was that games would be shut down for a couple weeks but that practices and workouts at the facilities would continue. That too changed with the tides. On Friday, players in both camps were told they could go home or stay and wait it out. A couple days later, everyone was told to go home.

“[It was] just kind of like a ‘Wow, is this really happening?’ sort of thing,” Oliva said. “Everyone’s prepared, we’re at the end of spring training to basically start the season. The big-league guys are getting ready to have Opening Day shortly after, [I was expecting] to be in Triple-A so we had another week or two of spring training, and that all quickly changed. Quite the week to end spring training.”

Players dispersed all over the country, and some even further away than that. They watched as MLB’s would-be Opening Day in March passed by, and two weeks later when the minors were set to open.

“It was kind of weird and unfortunate for us,” Hayes said. “I mean, that’s what we work for all offseason, [but] at the same time it’s nice to come home and spend time with family, that extra time that we always lose out on during the season. It [was] kind of bittersweet not being able to go out there Opening Day because you always get those first-game butterflies.”

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“THAT MORNING WE WOKE UP AND WENT TO THE FIELD, AND IT WAS JUST A REALLY WEIRD FEELING, THERE WERE PEOPLE RUNNING AROUND THAT YOU USUALLY DON'T SEE ON THE FIELD, AND WE'RE LIKE 'OKAY, SOMETHING'S ABOUT TO HAPPEN, PROBABLY IN THE NEXT DAY OR SO.'”

- WILL CRAIG, INDIANAPOLIS INDIANS FIRST BASEMAN



In those three spring/summer months that are usually dominated by baseball, Hayes took days off to spend time with his family, Oliva got to play catch with his dad and Craig visited his hometown in Johnson City, Tennessee in June for the first time in nine years.

“It’s been pretty crazy having, I guess you can say somewhat of a summer, [while] not playing ball,” Craig said. “I’d definitely rather be playing ball though, for sure.”

Now, they’ll get the chance. Hayes is in Pittsburgh at big-league camp after being added to the 40-man roster in the offseason, and Craig and Oliva are at PNC Field in Altoona, Pa., home of Pittsburgh’s Double-A affiliate, as part of a taxi squad.

From the original 60-man roster, 30 will be named to a big-league Opening Day roster, while three players will be carried on the road as part of a taxi squad and the rest will train in Altoona while they await a callup.

“I just want to be able to impact [the Pirates] as much as I can and show them that I have the ability and that I have the mental aspects of playing in the big leagues,” Craig said.

Like that Thursday in March, what is now the 2020 MLB season is going to be weird. The designated hitter has been implemented for both leagues, extra innings will start with a runner on second base, and there is no minor league season.

Now all there’s left to do is hope that every day moving forward is quiet, with no breaking news to report on the baseball front – and that we never reach the chaos of March 12 again. ♥



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INDIANS IN THE COMMUNITY



COVID-19 RELIEF MAY RECAP

by **CHEYNE REITER**

To continue its efforts to give back to the community during the COVID-19 pandemic, Indianapolis Indians Charities dedicated the month of May specifically to COVID-19 relief. The monthlong fundraising campaign called upon Tribe fans and Hoosiers alike to contribute monetary donations, purchase baseball memorabilia via a “Mystery Giveaway” promotion, and bid on exclusive player and mascot experiences through an online auction, with those collective funds going to nonprofits providing assistance to individuals and families most affected by COVID-19.

The fundraising campaign was the first of its kind for Indianapolis Indians Charities. “It was a team effort to get the ball rolling on [Indianapolis Indians Charities] COVID-19 relief campaign because we knew those impacted by the pandemic needed immediate assistance,” Indianapolis Indians Community Outreach Manager Jo Garcia said. “Our staff did a fantastic job creating fun and unique items for auction and executed promotions throughout the month that contributed immensely to the overall cause.”

The campaign was highlighted by 200 baseball memorabilia “Mystery Giveaway” items – sold at \$25 apiece – selling out in less than five hours. Additionally, for every \$10 donated to IIC in May, one ticket to a future Indians game was guaranteed to essential workers and frontline healthcare professionals. By the end of the campaign, 1,780 tickets were donated thanks to \$17,800 raised in May alone, pushing IIC’s commitment to COVID-19 relief for the calendar year over \$50,000. ❤️



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Spring Training

Home Run

Umpire

Grand Slam

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Dugout

Baseball

Infield

Out

Outfield

Strike



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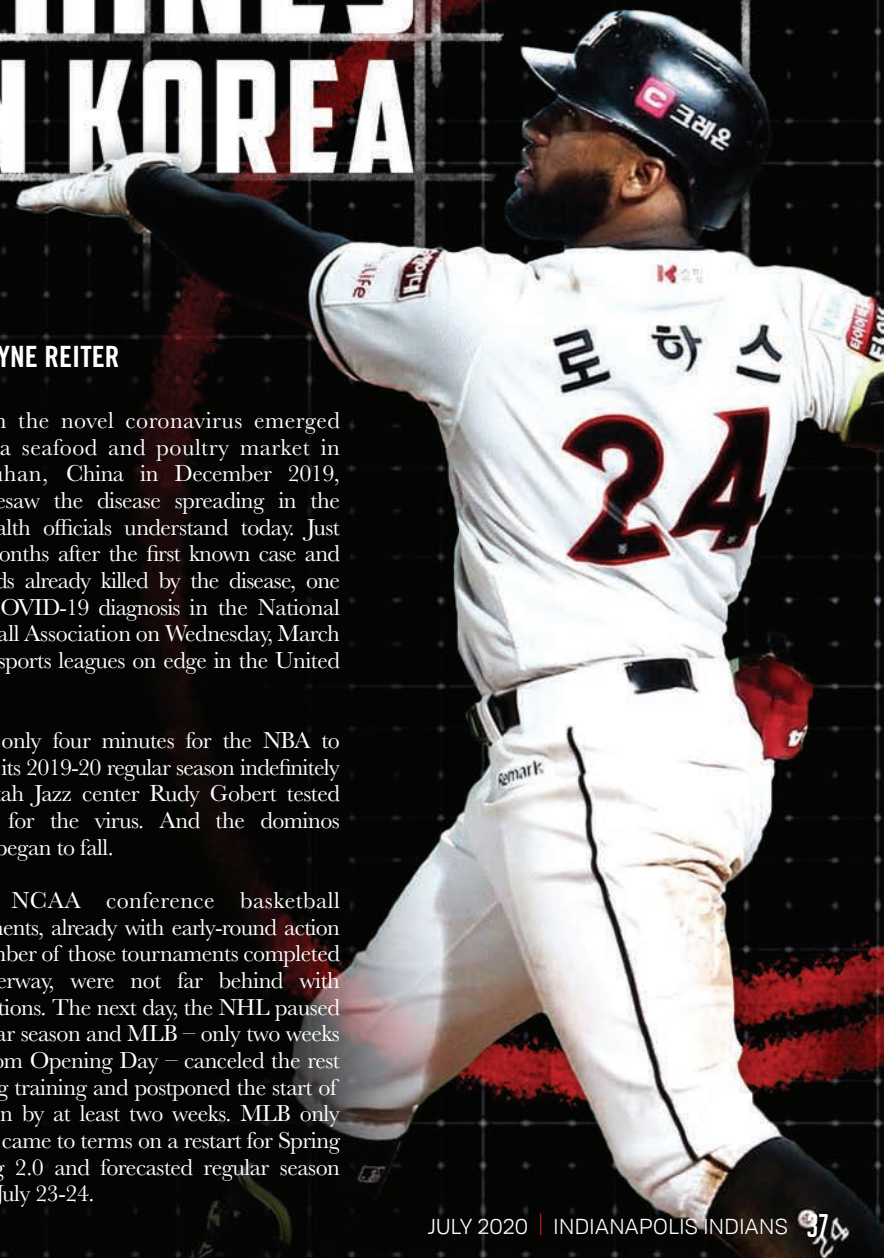
MEL ROJAS JR. SHINES IN KOREA

by CHEYNE REITER

When the novel coronavirus emerged in a seafood and poultry market in Wuhan, China in December 2019, few foresaw the disease spreading in the way health officials understand today. Just three months after the first known case and thousands already killed by the disease, one single COVID-19 diagnosis in the National Basketball Association on Wednesday, March 11, put sports leagues on edge in the United States.

It took only four minutes for the NBA to suspend its 2019-20 regular season indefinitely after Utah Jazz center Rudy Gobert tested positive for the virus. And the dominos quickly began to fall.

Major NCAA conference basketball tournaments, already with early-round action in a number of those tournaments completed or underway, were not far behind with cancellations. The next day, the NHL paused its regular season and MLB — only two weeks away from Opening Day — canceled the rest of spring training and postponed the start of its season by at least two weeks. MLB only recently came to terms on a restart for Spring Training 2.0 and forecasted regular season start of July 23-24.



But on the other side of the world in South Korea, the wheels had been in motion and the 2020 Korean Baseball Organization (KBO) season was already in park. The 39th KBO season was set to open on March 28, but just two days after KBO spring training concluded, its regular season was postponed on March 10 due to the pandemic – only one day before the U.S. sports scene was blindsided by the COVID-19 freight train. KBO officials hoped to start the season near the end of April but were forced to settle on May 5, when its 144-game slate officially got underway.

All the while, former Indianapolis Indians outfielder Mel Rojas Jr. – entering his fourth season in the KBO with the KT Wiz – experienced it all, trying to evade the pandemic along the way. Unlike the 30-team major leagues where players spend spring training in either Arizona or Florida, the 10-team KBO spreads its wings to twice as many locations as MLB – Arizona, Florida, Japan and Australia. For Rojas Jr. and the KT Wiz, their 1 1/2-month spring training home was set in Arizona.

“When spring training ended on March 8, [my teammates and I] were told to come back to Korea, where the pandemic was very bad,” Rojas Jr. said. “I asked the [KT Wiz] coaches and front office if I could stay back [in the United States] until the pandemic calmed down in Korea, and they let me [stay].”

For the next two weeks, Rojas Jr. spent time in Miami, Fla. as he watched the sports world unravel. When the virus began to spread like wildfire in the United States, the KT Wiz asked that he report to Korea, where the pandemic had reached its peak and the curve was flattening. What Rojas Jr. wasn’t told, however, is that when he would arrive to Korea, he and his teammates would be forced to self-quarantine for 14 days.

“We were season ready and then we had to start back from the beginning,” Rojas Jr. remembered. “Those two weeks in my apartment were terrible. I asked my [Korean] translator to find me a PlayStation 4... I did that and watched a lot of Netflix.”

Once out of quarantine, KBO exhibitions began on April 21. Two weeks later, Opening Day. The game of baseball in Korea and Rojas Jr. didn’t miss a beat, the latter picking up where he left off in three previous KBO seasons, feasting on opposing pitchers. Through play on June 25, Rojas Jr.’s campaign overseas is on track to be his best, and that’s saying something since he clubbed 43 homers and drove in 114 runs in 2018. This summer he owns a .384 average, 15 home runs, 43 RBI, 68 hits, .718 slugging percentage, 1.145 OPS

and 127 total bases through 44 games. He is the league leader or has a share of the lead in all seven categories. The Triple Crown and an MVP season are firmly in sight with 100 games to play. His 15th long ball on June 25 – a no-doubt, three-run shot during a 10-run eighth inning in a 19-6 win over the NC Dinos – was the 100th of his KBO career. He reached that feat in only 413 games. For perspective, he hit 46 homers in 837 career minor league games.

His father, Mel Rojas, pitched for the Tribe in 1990, ’91 and ’92, when the Indians were the Triple-A affiliate of the Montreal Expos. But unlike his dad, Jr.’s damage doesn’t come on the mound; instead, the damage comes against those on the mound. And while he’s putting up gaudy numbers in empty stadiums due to public health protocols enforced in Korea, an ESPN-KBO agreement has allowed his wife and son, family and friends to watch him from afar. South Korea’s clock is 13 hours ahead of the Eastern Time Zone, but that doesn’t matter to his loved ones, who can’t join him overseas because of the pandemic.

“I miss [playing in front of] the fans, it’s just so quiet [when we’re playing],” Rojas Jr. said. “But to know that my family and friends get to watch me [on ESPN] when they otherwise wouldn’t see me play at all is really cool. In my mind, I can hear them cheering.”

Playing in Korea was never a part of Rojas Jr.’s original plans, as he was once an up-and-coming prospect in Pittsburgh’s farm system after being selected in the third round of the 2010 First-Year Player Draft. He reached Triple-A in 2014 and played for Indy each of the next three years, including appearances in Games 4 and 5 of the 2015 Governors’ Cup championship. But today in Korea he is thriving as the league’s most feared hitter. The locals treat him well, and having a season only briefly interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic has the 30-year-old counting his blessings.

“I’m lucky to be playing baseball.” ♥



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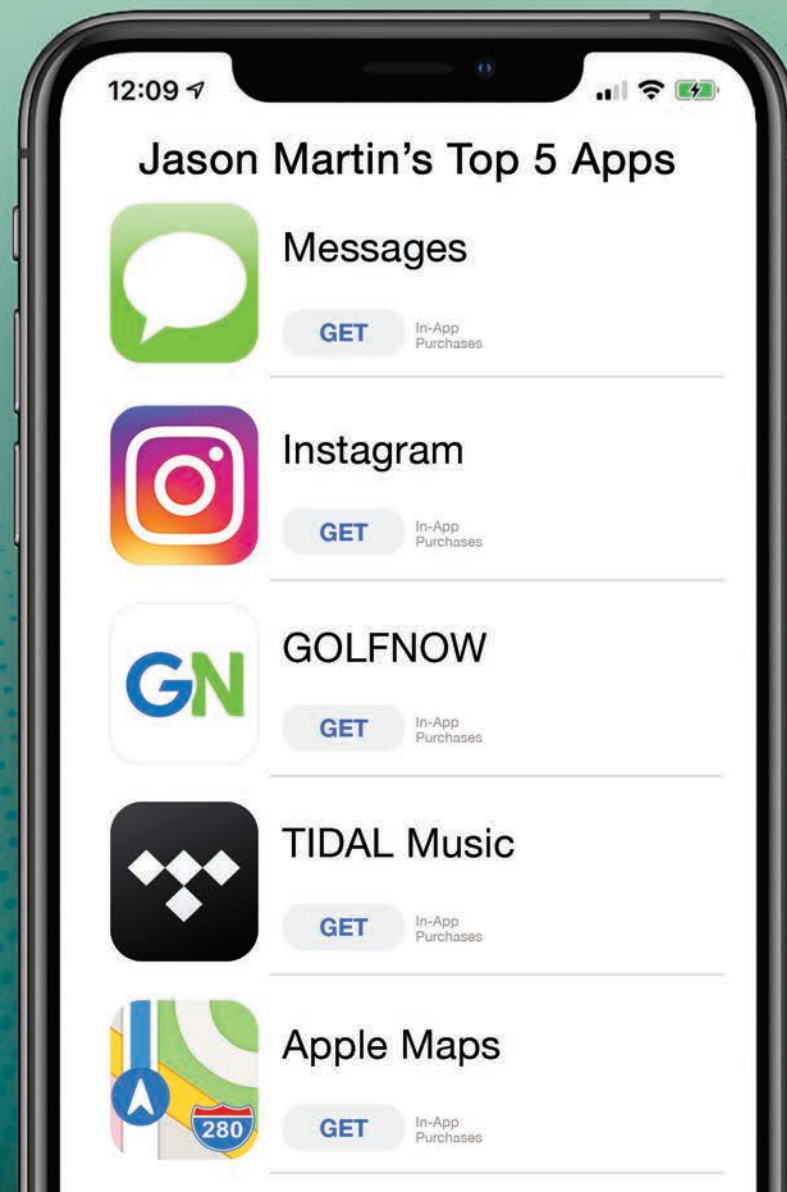
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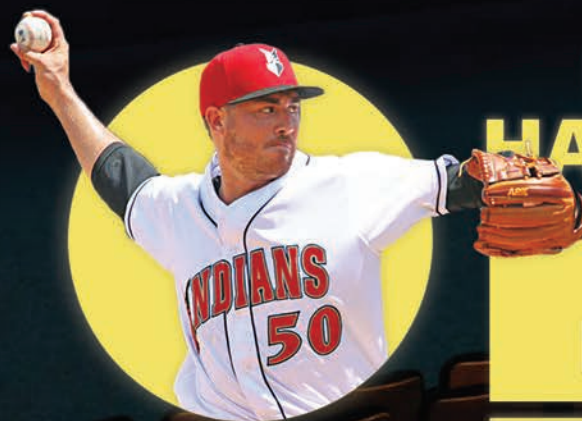


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