

OUT OF LEFT FIELD – Indians (93-66) at Nationals (90-69)

Friday Nationals starter: Austin Voth SAT: Patrick Corbin Sun: TBA

<p>1st INNING MAX THE WILD CARD FAVORITE</p>	<p>The winner-take-all Wild Card Game has been part of the playoff format since 2012, and this is the first time a wild card entrant will have three 200-strikeout aces - Max Scherzer, Patrick Corbin and Stephen Strasburg. While he has yet to officially name a starter, Dave Martinez has lined things up for Scherzer, whose last outing in a winner-take-all playoff game was Game 5 of the 2017 NLDS against the Cubs, when he had a disastrous four-run, one-inning stint. But that outing came on two days' rest, and this time Scherzer would be pitching on full rest. Scherzer has a 4.74 ERA in seven starts since returning from the injured list on Aug. 22 due to a back injury. But Martinez is keeping it simple: Scherzer, when healthy, is his ace. Given the shaky bullpen, Martinez wants to avoid middle relievers at all costs, and Scherzer gives him the best chance of doing that.</p>
<p>2nd INNING CORBIN DOMINATES LEFTIES</p>	<p>The Nationals' rotation for this weekend is in flux as they line things up for the Wild Card Game and what they hope will be an NLDS beginning Thursday. With Strasburg having pitched yesterday against the Phillies, that means there should be an abbreviated outing from Corbin, probably Saturday. The left-hander has been right at home in his first season at Nationals Park, going 8-2 with a 1.97 ERA in 15 games, compared to a 6-5 record with a 4.18 ERA outside DC. Corbin has struck out 38.2% (55 of 114) of the left-handed batters he has faced this season. Only Gerrit Cole (43.3%) has a higher percentage among qualified starters. Corbin has allowed just two homers all season to lefty batters.</p>
<p>3rd INNING FEW SHIFTS FOR TURNER</p>	<p>Trea Turner has faced a defensive shift in just 3.4% of his plate appearances, which ranks 370th in MLB (out of 472) for players with at least 100 plate appearances. The MLB average is 25.5%, including 14.3% for righty batters. That makes complete sense given Turner's speed and ability to hit to all fields. While Turner was always fast, he was also one of the smallest players at Park Vista Community High in Lake Worth, Florida. As a 5-foot-4 freshman, he was cut by the school's travel team.</p>
<p>4th INNING RENDON'S LATE SURGE GETTING HIM MVP ATTENTION</p>	<p>Anthony Rendon moved himself into MVP contention and spiked his value on the free agent market this winter with a strong second half (.340 avg, 1.028 OPS). He is at the best when leading off an inning, slugging an MLB-best .950 with 13 homers in 101 at-bats. Rendon is a fan favorite who regularly comes to the plate to chants of M-V-P, but he may have ruffled some feathers with his postgame comments after Tuesday's wild card clincher over the Phillies. "It would have been nice if we had more people out there tonight," Rendon said of the 22,214 who were in attendance for the nightcap of a doubleheader. Rendon leads the majors with 124 RBI and can become the first National/Expo to lead the NL outright in RBI. Two Montreal players tied for the NL lead: Al Oliver in 1982 (109, tied with Dale Murphy) and Gary Carter in 1984 (106, tied with Mike Schmidt)..</p>
<p>5th INNING WAITING ON SUZUKI</p>	<p>The Nats' Kurt Suzuki hasn't been behind the plate since Sept. 7 due to elbow inflammation. He is the regular partner of Scherzer and Anibal Sanchez, and the Nationals are hoping to have him back for October, even if not at 100 percent. Without Suzuki, former Indian Yan Gomes has caught in all but two of the Nationals' last 20 games. The pitchers love Suzuki even though he has thrown out just three of 48 base stealers (6.3%). Speaking of Gomes, it looks like the Indians made the right call in trading him last winter and opening up the job for Roberto Perez. Gomes is hitting just .225, while Perez has belted a career-high 24 homers along with excellent work as a pitch-framer and pitch-blocker.</p>
<p>6th INNING TRAVEL NIGHTMARE</p>	<p>The Nats' likely wild card opponent, the Brewers, won four of six games from Washington during the regular season, including a three-game sweep at Miller Park in early May when the Nats were beset by injuries and their bullpen was a disaster. Bad luck also played a part. The Nationals sat on the tarmac in Philadelphia all of the night before with plane problems and arrived in Milwaukee just hours before first pitch.</p>
<p>7th INNING ZIM UNLIKELY TO CATCH WALLACH</p>	<p>Ryan Zimmerman is enduring another injury-plagued season that has limited him to 50 games due to a foot issue after he appeared in just 85 contests in 2018. Zimmerman has been one of the faces of the franchise since its move from Montreal. But all the absences likely cost Zimmerman a chance at a notable milestone. Zimmerman needs to play in 81 more games to move past Tim Wallach (1,767) and into first place for the most games in Expos/Nats history. The future of the 34-year-old Zimmerman in DC is a question mark. He has an \$18 million option for next season, but the Nats are likely to pass and go for the \$2 million buyout.</p>
<p>8th INNING MINOR-LEAGUE SHUFFLE</p>	<p>The Nationals lost out in the game of minor-league musical chairs this past winter and were forced to house their Triple-A affiliate three times zone away in Fresno, California. The Nationals had been in Syracuse, New York, but that organization left to partner with the Mets. Getting players back and forth from Fresno became such a logistical nightmare that the Nats, after the All-Star break, kept almost all of their major-league-ready players at Double-A Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, a 2½-hour drive from Washington.</p>
<p>9th INNING TIME FOR A NO-NO?</p>	<p>Two of the Nationals' three no-hitters since relocating from Montreal occurred on the final weekend of the regular season. The most recent was Scherzer's 2-0 win over the Mets on October 2, 2015 in which he fanned 17. On the final day of the 2014 season, Jordan Zimmermann blanked the Marlins, 1-0. (Scherzer had the other no-hitter in June 2015.)</p>
<p>XTRA INNING THIS AND THAT</p>	<p>Matt Adams is one of two ML players since 1927 to have played at Slippery Rock University (PA). The other is Lou Trivino of the A's Gomes is married to Jenna Hammaker, daughter of former major-league pitcher Atlee Hammaker ... The Nationals are 17-21 in one-run games this year and 35-45 in two seasons under Martinez.</p>