

Sports Unlimited: Michaels' catch saves Indians

by Andy Call

CHICAGO - When the game's most critical moment arrived for Jason Michaels on Wednesday afternoon, he wasn't afraid of losing. He wasn't afraid of slamming into the wall.

He was, however, afraid at just what joy-crazed Grady Sizemore might do when he arrived on the scene.

"My heart was stopped for a second, then I just started screaming," Sizemore said after Michaels' basket catch just before hitting the left-field fence preserved Cleveland's 8-7 victory over Chicago. "I was yelling, hitting him on the arm and the upper chest. I didn't hit him in the face, but he put up his hand like he thought I was going to."

"I don't remember everything Grady said or did, but I think he said something about making a great catch," Michaels said. "I thought I was going to hit the wall, but I didn't give a (bleep). If I go in, I go in."

There were two on base and two out in the bottom of the ninth inning when Joe Crede swatted a fly ball that was carried even higher and longer by bitterly cold winds blowing out of U.S. Cellular Field. Michaels followed the flight of the ball, watched it drop, then trapped ball and glove against his hip as he ran out of room and made contact with the dark green padding. He slumped into a seated position at the base of the wall as Sizemore waved his arms, hollered and roughed up his teammate.

"When I saw Michaels' (jersey) number, I thought we might be in trouble," Indians Manager Eric Wedge said. "He made a heck of a grab."

The Indians looked like they might be in trouble on multiple occasions but somehow persevered.

Sizemore, generally in trouble against left-handed pitchers last season (.214 average), lashed a two-out, two-run home run off White Sox lefty Matt Thornton (0-1) in the seventh inning to put the Indians ahead.

"My approach (to left-handers) is better," Sizemore said. "When you see more (left-handers), you get more experience, and you get a better idea of what's going on. You see what works." What worked for the Indians? Hits from eight of the nine batters in the starting order, four hits and two walks in six plate appearances by Victor Martinez, a career-high four walks to Travis Hafner, Andy Marte's two-run home run and a stalwart performance by the bullpen.

Jim Thome's three-run homer off Jake Westbrook gave the White Sox a 3-0 first-inning advantage, but the Indians answered by hitting for the cycle in the second inning. Josh Barfield's RBI single, David Dellucci's double, Jhonny Peralta's run-scoring triple and Marte's home run helped the Indians leapfrog into a 4-3 lead.

"The cold didn't hurt me, but it was definitely cold," said Westbrook, charged with seven runs in five innings on a day when the game time temperature of 31 degrees felt even more miserable because of 15 mph winds. "It was a frustrating day. I made mistakes that cost us a lot of runs."

Cleveland's hitters were able to get back those runs, however, despite leaving the bases loaded in both the eighth and ninth innings, and the bullpen made a significant contribution to the outcome.

Relief pitchers Tom Mastny, Aaron Fultz (1-0), Rafael Betancourt, Roberto Hernandez and Joe Borowski combined for four scoreless innings. Borowski labored through a 27-pitch bottom of the ninth but earned his first save with his new club when Michaels made his catch.

"My first reaction was, 'fly ball to left,'" Borowski said. "Then, (Michaels) kept going back and I'm thinking, 'Are you kidding me? Come on.' When I saw the umpire signal the last out, I said, 'Thank God.'"

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