

# 2018 Indians preview

Thursday,  
March 29,  
2018

Inside

## 10 For the Tribe

Jeff Schudel ranks the most important Indians players for this season.

Plus

- Schudel's Indians season prediction column
- Indians 2018 schedule
- Indians 2018 roster



Associated Press file photos

## Game On!

As we slide into a new season, we'd like to wish the Cleveland Indians a winning season!



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## OPINION

# Kluber is most important for 2018

The Indians begin their quest of a World Series championship in their 2018 season opener on March 29 in Seattle.



**Jeff Schudel**

Here is a look at the 10 players who are most important for the Tribe to make the quest a success and end a drought that has now reached 70 years:

## 1. Starting pitcher Corey Kluber

There is no doubt who tops the list; it's the reigning Cy Young Award winner, who also was honored as the American League's best pitcher after the 2014 season.

Kluber, 18-4 and the Major League leader with a 2.25 ERA in 2017, will pitch the opener for the Indians. He is 4-0 this spring in five starts with a 2.29 ERA over 19 2/3 innings.

"When you have a guy

who's won the Cy Young a couple times, the way he works, it's sort of an easy choice," Indians manager Terry Francona told reporters covering spring training.

The best way to illustrate how important Kluber is to the Indians is to recall what happened when he wasn't at his best.

The Indians exited the playoffs in the division series in five games last year. Kluber pitched Game 2 and was removed after 2 2/3 innings after giving up six earned runs. The Indians fought back to win, 9-8, for a 2-0 series lead.

The Yankees won twice in New York to even the series, setting the stage for Kluber to save the day in Game 5. But it didn't happen. He gave up two home runs in 3 2/3 innings and was tagged with the loss.

Kluber put those two games behind him as well as Game 7 of the 2016 World Series when the Cubs tagged him for four runs in four innings in

**IMPORTANT » PAGE 3**



ROSS D. FRANKLIN — ASSOCIATED PRESS

Corey Kluber warms up before a spring training game against the Oakland Athletics Feb. 27 in Goodyear, Ariz.

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ROSS D. FRANKLIN — ASSOCIATED PRESS

Jose Ramirez connects for a two-run home run against the Padres on March 10.

## Important

FROM PAGE 2

a game that ultimately wasn't decided until the Cubs won, 8-7, in the 10th inning.

We will never know whether Kluber's back was ailing when he was rocked by the Yankees last year, but one thing is certain: The Indians ace did not pack memories of October's disappointment when he headed off to Goodyear, Arizona, for spring training.

"I try to use the first time or two to get used to facing another team and having the defense behind you," Kluber told reporters. "I wasn't working on anything specific. Moroso, I was just trying to get used to having another team out there, facing hitters, reacting to swings and things like that."

Kluber pitched at least 200 innings each of the last four seasons, and over those four years started 34, 32, 32 and 29 games. He started six games last September and clinched the Cy Young Award by going 5-0 with one no decision. He pitched at least seven innings in five of those starts.

The Indians won 102 games last season. They won the AL Central by 17 games over the Twins, and finished with the best record in the American League by one game over the Astros.

If the Indians are in a similar situation this season, despite Kluber's impeccable training regimen, they might decide to lighten his load in September to make certain he has a full tank in October.

### 2. Third baseman Jose Ramirez

Ramirez signed a four-year, \$26 million contract last year and said he wanted to show the Indians his gratitude by playing hard every day. He delivered by playing 152 games and hitting .318 with 29 home runs and 83 RBI — all career highs for the 25-year-old infielder from the Dominican Republic.

Ramirez's best defensive position is second base, but Francona is choosing to play him at third so Jason Kipnis can play second base.

Ramirez's 91 extra-base hits (56 doubles, six triples and the 28 homers) were the second most ever by a switch-hitter in MLB history. Lance Berkman of

Houston had 94 in 2001.

The Indians need the same kind of season from Ramirez this year.

### 3. Shortstop Francisco Lindor

As with Kluber, Lindor was so good during the 2017 regular season that his hot bat turning into an icicle in the ALDS defies logic.

After banging out 44 doubles, hammering 33 home runs (he hit 15 homers in 2016) and driving in 89 runs, Lindor went 2-for-18 in the five-game series loss to the Yankees. His bat wasn't the only one frozen out by the Yankees. But since we're ranking which Indians are most important to the chase of a championship, the Tribe is going to need the regular season version of Lindor to complete the task.

Lindor headed to spring training this year determined to improve his defense, which he says tailed off last season.

### 4. Closer Cody Allen

The Indians better appreciate Allen while they can, because the Indians closer will be a free agent next winter without a new contract.

Allen has 120 saves over

**IMPORTANT » PAGE 4**

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## Important

FROM PAGE 3

the last four seasons.

He needs 18 saves to pass Bob Wickman as the Indians' career leader in saves and should reach that around the All-Star break.

As good as the Indians' starting rotation is, the Tribe needs Allen to have another stellar season to be playing in late October. He is one player who has been just as good — even better — in the playoffs than in the regular season.

Allen pitched in 10 games in the 2016 post-season and four games last year. He has allowed one earned run in 19 1/3 innings — a 0.47 ERA — while recording six saves in 2016 and one last season. Maybe his last pitch as an Indian will be in the ninth inning of Game 7 to win the 2018 World Series.

### 5. Left fielder Michael Brantley

Brantley is one of the best players in baseball when he's healthy. He drove in 97 runs in 2014, 84 in 2015 and 52 in 90 games last season.

The Indians need Brant-

ley's bat in October more than they'll need it now. Brantley is starting the season on the disabled list because he isn't ready to take a full load on his surgically repaired right ankle. Although he could be activated by the home

opener April 6 against Kansas City, the Indians want to be sure so there are no setbacks. Brantley has a .315 batting average with 40 home runs and 215 RBI when hitting third. That will likely be his slot in the batting or-

der when he is activated. As Francona says, when Brantley is healthy, the Tribe manager never has to worry about left field.

### 6. Relief pitcher Andrew Miller

The handbook on how to use a setup man out of the bullpen was rewritten in the 2016 postseason because of the way Francona used Miller. Miller was not restricted to pitching the eighth inning to set the table for Allen in the ninth.

He recorded two wins, one save and five holds in the Tribe's 2016 post-season run.

Knee problems last season limited Miller to 11 appearances after Aug. 2, but he was healthy by the time

**IMPORTANT » PAGE 5**



ROSS D. FRANKLIN — ASSOCIATED PRESS

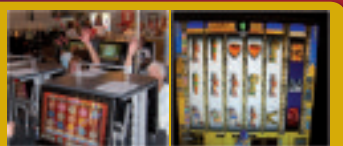
Francisco Lindor hit 33 home runs and 44 doubles and drove in 89 runs last season for the Indians.

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## Important

FROM PAGE 4

the postseason arrived.

He gave up six earned runs in six innings this spring, but the Indians don't seem overly concerned because pitchers don't perfect their breaking pitches in spring training. Miller's best pitch is his slider.

The bullpen has been an Indians' strength, and Miller is obviously a huge part of that success. Batters hit just .144 off him last season. He appeared in 57 games and held opponents scoreless 49 times.

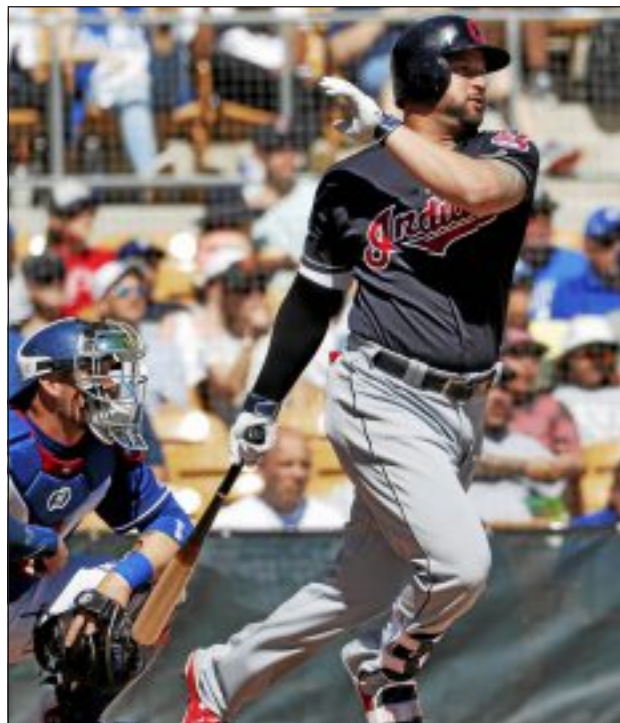
Miller is in the final year of his contract with the Indians.

### 7. Pitcher Trevor Bauer

It is easy to overlook Bauer when Corey Kluber is on the same pitching staff, but Bauer was sensational in the second half of 2017.

He went 10-1 with three no decisions from July 21 through the end of the season.

Bauer started Game 1 of the ALDS and got the win while pitching 6 2/3 scoreless innings. He got tagged for the loss in Game 4, but the four runs he gave up



MATT YORK — ASSOCIATED PRESS

Yonder Alonso watches his RBI hit during a spring training game against the Dodgers March 5.

were unearned; sloppy defense doomed the Indians in the series.

Bauer has a quirky personality, but if his odd training regimen keeps him off the disabled list, who cares? He started 30 games in 2015, 28 in 2016 when he began the season in the bullpen and 31 last season. His contract is under the Indians' control through 2020.

### 8. Designated hitter Edwin Encarnacion

Don't panic when Encarnacion gets off to another slow start. April and May are typically slow months for the 35-year-old slugger from the Dominican Republic.

Encarnacion heats up with the summer weather. He had 22 RBI by the end of May last year and ended



CARLOS OSORIO — ASSOCIATED PRESS

up driving in 107 runs and clouting 38 homers — his sixth straight 30-home run season. Encarnacion isn't just a free swinger. He walked a career high 104 times last season in his first year with the Tribe.

Unfortunately for the Indians, an ankle injury in the first game of the ALDS last year limited him to seven at-bats in the playoffs. He went hitless, and like many of his teammates has something to prove if the Indians make it back to the playoffs.

### 9. First baseman Yonder Alonso

Alonso was the Indians' top acquisition in free agency. They signed him

after losing Carlos Santana to the Phillies in free agency.

Alonso will turn 31 on April 8. He turned himself into a power hitter last season with the A's and Mariners, going from seven home runs in 2016 to 28 last season. He tailed off in the second half of the season, but his spring training numbers indicate he has his stroke back: seven home runs and five doubles while still hitting .370 in 20 Cactus League games.

Alonso won't walk as often as Santana did, but he won't strike out as often, either. Alonso became a good fit in the clubhouse quickly.

Alonso has played well

defensively throughout his career and should do the same with the Indians.

### 10. Catcher Roberto Perez

Catcher Yan Gomes rather than Perez easily could have been listed here. Indians pitchers are always quick to point out how important it is to their success to have Perez or Gomes behind the plate.

Perez caught 73 games for the Tribe last season. He started slowly but homered seven times and drove in 21 runs over his final 25 games. He started 10 games in the Indians' record setting 22-game winning streak, hitting .378 with four doubles, four home runs and 13 RBI.

Perez threw out 13 of the 30 runners who attempted to steal on him in 2017 — a 43 percent success rate. He has thrown out 52 of 121 base stealers for his career, which also computes to 43 percent. Gomes threw out 42 percent of the runners last year and has a 36 percent success rate (105 or 291) for his career.

Contact Schudel at [JSchudel@News-Herald.com](mailto:JSchudel@News-Herald.com); On Twitter: [@jsproinsider](https://twitter.com/jsproinsider).

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## OPINION

# Yankees too tough again for Tribe

Last season, the Indians won 102 games and were knocked out in the ALDS in five games by the New York Yankees, who took the Astros to seven games in the ALCS before losing to the eventual World Series champions.



**Jeff Schudel**

It isn't really fair to the Indians to call what happened in the first round of the playoffs an upset — except that they led the series two games to none. The Yankees, 91-71 a year ago, charged into the post-season by going 20-8 in September.

The Tribe was even better in the final full month of the season at 25-4, but it isn't like the Yankees stumbled out of the dark, and for the last three games they were better than the Indians. The Yankees were really better in Game 2, but the Indians fought back from a five-run deficit and won, 9-8, on a walk-off single by Yan

Gomes in the 13th inning.

The Yankees are poised to not only win the AL East, but by adding slugger Giancarlo Stanton in a lopsided trade with the Florida Marlins, they also are built to win the American League pennant. The Indians will have to go through the Yankees to get back to the World Series and complete the mission they came so close to finishing in 2016 when they lost Game 7 to the Cubs in 10 innings.

"There's no doubt we can win it all," Indians second baseman Jason Kipnis said. "We know what we have here. We proved two years ago we're very capable of getting as far as we want.

"Now we owe it to ourselves and the fans to finish what we started. We have the staff, the bullpen and the lineup. There's no team we look over there and say, 'Oh, wow, they have it better than we do.' We're very confident in what we have here."

**YANKEES » PAGE 7**



PHIL LONG — ASSOCIATED PRESS

Yan Gomes, second from left, is hugged by pitcher Josh Tomlin and mobbed by teammates after Gomes' game-winning RBI single in the 13th inning of Game 2 of the ALDS against the Yankees last season.

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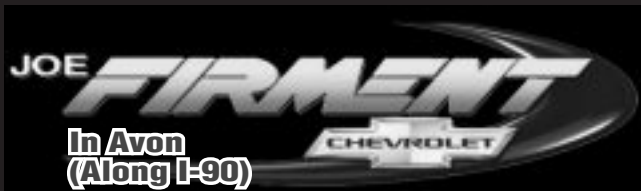
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## Indians 2018 schedule

March 29	At Seattle, 10:10
March 31	At Seattle, 4:10
April 1	At Seattle, 4:10
April 2	At L.A. Angels, 10:07
April 3	At L.A. Angels, 10:07
April 4	At L.A. Angels, 4:07
April 6	Kansas City, 4:10
April 7	Kansas City, 4:10
April 8	Kansas City, 1:10
April 9	Detroit, 6:10
April 10	Detroit, 6:10
April 11	Detroit, 6:10
April 12	Detroit, 6:10
April 13	Toronto, 7:10
April 14	Toronto, 4:10
April 15	Toronto, 1:10
April 17	at Minnesota, 7:10
April 18	at Minnesota, 7:10
April 20	at Baltimore, 7:05
April 21	at Baltimore, 4:05
April 22	at Baltimore, 1:05
April 23	at Baltimore, 7:05
April 24	Cubs, 6:10
April 25	Cubs, 7:10
April 26	Seattle, 6:10
April 27	Seattle, 7:10
April 28	Seattle, 4:10
April 29	Seattle, 1:10
April 30	Texas, 6:10
May 1	Texas, 6:10
May 2	Texas, 1:10
May 4	at N.Y. Yankees, 7:05
May 5	at N.Y. Yankees, 1:05
May 6	at N.Y. Yankees, 1:05
May 8	at Milwaukee, 7:40
May 9	at Milwaukee, 1:10
May 11	Kansas City, 7:10
May 12	Kansas City, 4:10
May 13	Kansas City, 1:10
May 14	at Detroit, 7:10
May 15	at Detroit, 7:10
May 16	at Detroit, 1:10
May 18	at Houston, 8:10
May 19	at Houston, 4:10
May 20	at Houston, 8:08
May 22	at Cubs, 8:05
May 23	at Cubs, 8:05
May 24	Houston, 6:10
May 25	Houston, 7:10
May 26	Houston, 7:15

### Indians 2018 roster

**STARTING ROTATION** » Corey Kluber, Carlos Carrasco, Trevor Bauer, Mike Clevinger and Josh Tomlin  
**BULLPEN** » Cody Allen, Andrew Miller, Tyler Olson, Dan Otero, Zach McAllister, Nick Goody and Matt Belisle  
**INFIELDERS** » Yonder Alonso, Jason Kipnis, Francisco Lindor, Jose Ramirez, Edwin Encarnacion and Erik Gonzalez  
**OUTFIELDERS** » Rajai Davis, Bradley Zimmer, Lonnie Chisenhall, Tyler Naquin and Brandon Guyer  
**CATCHERS** » Yan Gomes and Roberto Perez

May 27	Houston, 1:10	July 3	at Kansas City, 8:15
May 28	White Sox, 4:10	July 4	at Kansas City, 8:15
May 29	White Sox, 6:10	July 6	Oakland, 7:10
May 30	White Sox, 1:10	July 7	Oakland, 4:10
May 31	at Minnesota, 8:10	July 8	Oakland, 1:10
June 1	at Minnesota, 8:10	July 9	Cincinnati, 7:10
June 2	at Minnesota, 2:10	July 10	Cincinnati, 7:10
June 3	at Minnesota, 2:10	July 11	Cincinnati, 7:10
June 5	Milwaukee, 7:10	July 12	N.Y. Yankees, 7:10
June 6	Milwaukee, 1:10	July 13	N.Y. Yankees, 7:10
June 8	at Detroit, 7:10	July 14	N.Y. Yankees, 7:15
June 9	at Detroit, 4:10	July 15	N.Y. Yankees, 1:10
June 10	at Detroit, 1:10	July 20	at Texas, 8:05
June 11	at White Sox, 8:10	July 21	at Texas, 8:05
June 12	at White Sox, 8:10	July 22	at Texas, 3:05
June 13	at White Sox, 8:10	July 23	Pittsburgh, 7:10
June 14	at White Sox, 2:10	July 24	Pittsburgh, 7:10
June 15	Minnesota, 7:10	July 25	Pittsburgh, 1:10
June 16	Minnesota, 4:10	July 27	at Detroit, 7:10
June 17	Minnesota, 1:10	July 28	at Detroit, 6:10
June 18	White Sox, 7:10	July 29	at Detroit, 1:10
June 19	White Sox, 7:10	July 30	at Minnesota, 8:10
June 20	White Sox, 1:10	July 31	at Minnesota, 8:10
June 22	Detroit, 7:10	Aug. 1	at Minnesota, 1:10
June 23	Detroit, 6:10	Aug. 3	L.A. Angels, 7:10
June 24	Detroit, 1:10	Aug. 4	L.A. Angels, 7:10
June 25	at St. Louis, 8:15	Aug. 5	L.A. Angels, 1:10
June 26	at St. Louis, 8:15	Aug. 6	Minnesota, 7:10
June 27	at St. Louis, 8:15	Aug. 7	Minnesota, 7:10
June 29	at Oakland, 10:05	Aug. 8	Minnesota, 7:10
June 30	at Oakland, 4:05	Aug. 9	Minnesota, 1:10
July 1	at Oakland, 4:05	Aug. 10	at White Sox, 8:10
July 2	at Kansas City, 8:15	Aug. 11	at White Sox, 7:10

Aug. 12	at White Sox, 2:10
Aug. 13	at Cincinnati, 7:10
Aug. 14	at Cincinnati, 7:10
Aug. 15	at Cincinnati, 7:10
Aug. 17	Baltimore, 7:10
Aug. 18	Baltimore, 4:10
Aug. 19	Baltimore, 1:10
Aug. 20	at Boston, 7:10
Aug. 21	at Boston, 7:10
Aug. 22	at Boston, 7:10
Aug. 23	at Boston, 1:05
Aug. 24	at Kansas City, 8:15
Aug. 25	at Kansas City, 7:15
Aug. 26	at Kansas City, 2:15
Aug. 28	Minnesota, 7:10
Aug. 29	Minnesota, 7:10
Aug. 30	Minnesota, 1:10
Aug. 31	Tampa Bay, 7:10
Sept. 1	Tampa Bay, 7:10
Sept. 2	Tampa Bay, 4:10
Sept. 3	Kansas City, 4:10
Sept. 4	Kansas City, 7:10
Sept. 5	Kansas City, 1:10
Sept. 6	at Toronto, 7:07
Sept. 7	at Toronto, 7:07
Sept. 8	at Toronto, 4:07
Sept. 9	at Toronto, 1:07
Sept. 10	at Tampa Bay, 7:10
Sept. 11	at Tampa Bay, 7:10
Sept. 12	at Tampa Bay, 1:10
Sept. 14	Detroit, 7:10
Sept. 15	Detroit, 1:05
Sept. 16	Detroit, 1:10
Sept. 18	White Sox, 7:10
Sept. 19	White Sox, 7:10
Sept. 20	White Sox, 7:10
Sept. 21	Boston, 7:10
Sept. 22	Boston, 7:10
Sept. 23	Boston, 1:10
Sept. 24	at White Sox, 8:10
Sept. 25	at White Sox, 8:10
Sept. 26	at White Sox, 8:10
Sept. 27	at Kansas City, 8:15
Sept. 28	at Kansas City, 8:15
Sept. 29	at Kansas City, 7:15
Sept. 30	at Kansas City, 3:15

## Yankees

FROM PAGE 6

The window of opportunity doesn't stay open long for teams that can't shop in the same market as the big boys for free agents. That window is closing for the Indians because reliever Andrew Miller and closer Cody Allen will be free agents in November without new contracts. Both will command salaries that could be out of the Indians' budget.

The Indians should win the Central Division without much drama, but as Kipnis said, the Tribe is eyeing a bigger prize.

Can two times in the postseason be enough to prepare Francisco Lindor, Jose Ramirez, Kipnis and the rest for the pressure of facing playoff pitching? That question won't be answered for more than six months.

Lindor, Kipnis, Ramirez, Michael Brantley and Edwin Encarnacion were a combined 7-for-78 in the ALDS last year — a .090 batting average.

The Indians' starting rotation of Corey Kluber, Trevor Bauer, Carlos Carrasco, Mike Clev-

inger and Josh Tomlin is as good as it gets, but no pitching staff can overcome that.

"I learned don't go cold at the wrong time," Kipnis said. "We made our comeback in Game 2. We learned keep fighting no matter what the situation is. Game 7 of the World Series — keep fighting no matter what the situation is. One pitch or one mistake could turn the game around."

The biggest weakness the Yankees have is the Indians' biggest strength — starting pitching. Luis Severino leads the Yankees starting staff that includes Masahiro Tanaka, Sonny Gray and CC Sabathia.

The Yankees bullpen is deep enough to rescue the starters after five or six innings and the bats in the middle of the lineup — Aaron Judge, Stanton and Gary Sanchez — should provide the run support to make up for deficiencies in the starting rotation.

It is going to be another fun ride, but Indians fans should prepare for more October heartbreak.

The Yankees and Dodgers will meet in the World Series and the Yankees will prevail.

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