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In an Indians uniform, Jim Thome had a better on-base percentage than Manny Ramirez, a better OPS than Tris Speaker and more home runs than everyone by a country mile. And with Travis Hafner ailing once again, Thome gets the 41st-birthday present that we all wish for — he gets to come home.

On the surface, it would seem that Thome would only be a superficial upgrade over Hafner. For the season, Thome's wRC+ is 131, while Hafner has posted a near-identical 125 mark. But Hafner hasn't been effective since June ended, posting a 90 wRC+ in July and then dropping to 81 in August before being sidelined. Thome, on the other hand, has been coming on strong,

with 140 and 139 wRC+ marks in July and August, respectively.

Over his past 25 games — 23 of which he started — Thome has hit .305/.387/.585, with 13 extra-base hits and a dangerous .280 ISO. He reached base in 22 of the 25 contests, and one of the three times he did not reach base was a meaningless pinch-hitting appearance in the ninth inning of a game that the Twins trailed 7-1. In short, Thome has been putting in work. In August, in particular, he's been spraying the ball — his line drive percentage for the month has been a gaudy 29.4%.

Thome's production could be the life preserver that the Indians need. In losing six of its last seven games — including three of four this week to a Seattle team that entered the series with the fourth-worst road record in the Majors — the Tribe has been outscored nearly two to one. Jason Kipnis and Hafner reside on the disabled list, while Michael Brantley has been teetering on the edge of a visit there the past couple of weeks. Shin-Soo Choo went from postgame hero on Tuesday to literally not being able to rest the bat on his shoulder on Wednesday. And who knows if Grady Sizemore will be back this season. Among the able-bodied, Lonnie Chisenhall has hit the rookie wall sooner than expected, re-opening the door for Jack Hannahan to get playing time. While Hannahan has run with the opportunity, there was a reason he ended up on the bench in favor of The Chiz Kid in the first place. Meanwhile, Matt LaPorta continues to do a worse impression of a first baseman than Josh Girard does of Jay Leno. That basically leaves the Tribe's two rocks this season — Asdrubal Cabrera and Carlos Santana — to carry the team, and they don't hit with anything resembling the power that Thome brings to the table.

Thome's HR/FB mark of 21.8 percent — though his second-worst mark in the past decade — easily becomes the highest on the Indians (not counting Kipnis' torrid start). And as guys like Ezequiel Carrera and Jason Donald have been pressed into playing time, the Indians' team HR/FB has only dropped further — over the past 30 days, they place in the bottom third of the league in HR/FB. And again, Thome is playing better than his overall season line at the moment. Since returning from the DL on June 25, eight of the 25 fly balls he has stroked have found the cheap seats, for a more robust HR/FB of 32%. It's a small sample, but then, so is the rest of this season.

But this trade is about so much more than where Thome fits in the order, or whether he can upgrade the Indians by a half-win or a whole win these next five weeks. Realistically, the Indians have a huge mountain to climb if they are going to make the last three games of the season with Detroit matter, and Thome can only do so much. But whether or not he really regretted leaving the Indians after 2002, Thome now has an opportunity to do what few Indians

greats before him have done after they left, and that is to come back. Early Wynn and Kenny Lofton came back for their victory laps, but they number among the few. Lou Boudreau and Earl Averill finished in Boston, Speaker and Nap Lajoie finished in Philly. Joe Sewell finished in New York, Larry Doby in Chicago, Albert Belle in Baltimore and Manny Ramirez in Tampa. No one knows if Thome will hang it up after this season, but if he does, this is how it *should* end. With all that the sports fans of Cleveland have had to endure the past few years, they deserve to see Thome with the Chief Wahoo on his helmet one last time — win, lose or draw.

That's not how Hollywood would write it, of course. In the movie, the legend returns, is greeted with thunderous ovations — the kind that rattles the ice in the beer coolers — dons Superman's cape one last time and carries his old-new team, and the city that cheers it on, back to the postseason on his broad shoulders. The now-below-.500 Indians are in need of such a boost in the worst way, and Thome and his hot bat could be just what the Tribe, and the scriptwriters, ordered.