



Kickin’ it into first:
it might only last until Sunday, but the Browns and their fans are enjoying the time alone atop the AFC North after Andre Szymt’s big kick Thursday. **c1**

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MLB PLAYOFFS



For the second straight season, the Guardians rallied in September to win the AL Central Division, guaranteeing home playoff games for fans itching, yearning and dreaming of a World Series. *John Kuntz, cleveland.com*

There’s the easy way,
and there’s the Guardians’ way

Because clinching the division before the last weekend just isn’t any fun.

Paul Hoynes phoynes@cleveland.com

The Guardians, who host the White Sox in Game 1 of the American League Division Series at 1 p.m. today at Progressive Field, do not believe in taking the path of least resistance.

“No one wants it to be easy,” said catcher Austin Hedges. “That’s what makes it so much better. We suffered and we grinded all year. And we’re not done.”

For the second straight year the Guardians rallied to win the AL Central in the final week of the season. This year they clinched the division on the next-to-last day of the season with an 11-5 win over Kansas City.

In 2025, they waited until the 10th inning of the season finale to do it. All it took was a game-winning home run by Brayan Rocchio off the right field foul pole.

The Guardians’ rally this season wasn’t as dramatic. In 2025, they set a Major League Baseball record by overcoming a 15 ½-game deficit in July — on Sept. 4 they still trailed the first-place Tigers by 11 games — to win the division. But this year’s comeback still said much about the team.

“We show up to win every day and



Stephen Vogt has been managing the Guardians for three seasons and has popped corks in each of them.
Charlie Riedel, Associated Press

when September gets here all bets are off,” said manager Stephen Vogt.

This is Vogt’s third year managing the Guardians and he’s won the division each year. As an organization, the Guardians have won the division four of the last five years and 14 years overall since 1995.

As for September, it’s the Guardians’ favorite month. They went 16-9 this September, starting the month in third place before running down the first-place White Sox. Over the last five years, they are 84-50 in September.

Why is that?

“If I knew the answer to that we’d do it a lot sooner,” said Chris Antonetti, the Guardians’ president of baseball operations.

Antonetti did point to one factor that may have something to do with the September success. Over the last several

years, they have been one of the youngest teams in baseball because of payroll restraints by ownership.

Young players often struggle in their first year in the big leagues. By September, however, they should be catching up to the level of talent around them. That can lead to more wins.

The Guardians started this season with another young roster. They shunned most free agents over the winter because they wanted to give young players such as Chase DeLauter, Travis Bazzana, Kyle Manzardo, Angel Martinez, Parker Messick and others a clear path to establish themselves.

It followed the organizational blueprint, but many preseason prognosticators weren’t impressed. At best, the Guardians were picked to finish second in the division, missing the postseason completely.

The plan worked for some players, but not for all of them.

DeLauter, Cleveland’s first-round draft pick in 2022, opened the season by hitting five home runs in his first seven games. He ended the regular season as a strong contender for the AL Rookie of the Year award.

The Guardians drafted Bazzana in 2024 with their first No. 1 overall pick in franchise history. He made his big-league debut on April 28, taking over the second base job and being named to the American League All-Star team. His offensive production wasn’t as consistent as DeLauter’s, but he prepared for the post-season by hitting .280 with six homers and 15 RBI in September.

SEE MLB PLAYOFFS, A2

2026 OHIO
GUBERNATORIAL RACE

Next governor
could reshape
election rules

Here’s what the candidates are saying — and not saying — about early voting, drop boxes and election security.

Jeremy Pelzer jpelzer@cleveland.com

COLUMBUS — Ohio’s next governor will have a say in how, when and under what rules the state’s 8 million registered voters cast their ballots over the next four years.

If elected, Amy Acton would largely keep Ohio’s existing election rules in place, though her campaign offered few specifics about exactly where the Democratic nominee stands on issues like ballot drop boxes.

Libertarian Don Kissick would look to automatically register every eligible Ohioan to vote when they turn 18, as well as shorten times when early voters can cast ballots in person or use ballot drop boxes.

SEE GOVERNOR, A4

CORNELL 7
Ohio, N.Y. differ
over voluntary
intoxication

Ohio law recognizes it as a barrier to consent.

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A crucial question in the now-infamous Cornell 7 case is one that Ohio courts have definitively answered.

Can someone who chose to drink or take drugs become so intoxicated that they are legally incapable of consenting to sex?

In New York, state law creates a particular difficulty when a person voluntarily becomes intoxicated. The Tompkins County District Attorney’s Office cited that issue when it declined to pursue charges against the Cornell students accused of a fraternity house gang rape in 2024.

SEE CORNELL 7, A2



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