



Facing the 4-5-1 portion of Tampa Bay's rotation, the Indians learned that "#4 starter" and "#5 starter" mean something different in Tampa than they mean most other places. The Indians' versions held their own, but very few games are won with a zero, and Buff looks at whether panic is warranted with respect to the Indians' offense, Trevor Bauer's wildness, Zach McAllister's ordinariness, the preponderance of right-handers in the bullpen, Nick Swisher's slow start, or Tampa Bay's powder blue uniforms.

FINAL

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The B-List: 4/5 - 4/7

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

Monday, April 08 2013 3:11 PM - Last Updated Monday, April 08 2013 8:14 PM

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Indians (2-2)

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Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

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Indeterminate Rays (2-2)

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FINAL

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Indians (2-3)

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Generic Rays (3-2)

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W: A. Cobb (1-0) L: Bauerbuss (0-1)

FINAL

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Indians (3-3)

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Some Sorta Rays (3-3)

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W: Masterson (2-0) **L: D. Price (0-1)**

I still resent having to play baseball games in a blimp hangar.

1) Welcome to the cl... OH, THE HUMANITY! THAT TRAIN DERAILED RIGHT INTO AN ORPHANAGE! OY GEVALT!

Let's get this out of the way: walking the FIRST FOUR BATTERS of a baseball game is, by definition, a lousy way to begin a start as a starting pitcher. It's no good. You should never do it. It's mildly hilarious and just flat-out lives in a disjoint space from the platonic form of Quality. It's bad. Everyone admits it's bad.

And, of course, it's especially troubling for a guy who came into the game with a career total of 13 walks in 16 1/3 innings. In three of Bauer's four appearances last season, Bauer walked at least as many guys as he struck out, and in two of those walked more than a guy an inning. The knock against Bauer has always been that he overthinks on the mound and is an incessant "tinkerer." He has so many different combinations of release and spin and arm angle and velocity, he tends to adjust pitch-to-pitch (not merely inning-to-inning or even batter-to-batter) and ends up nibbling or sacrificing Quality for some esoteric pitch sequencing theory. I really don't have special insight into Trevor Bauer, except that he is portrayed as an Odd Duck and that's part of the reason he's a Cleveland Indian (not so much that Cleveland attracts Odd Ducks, but more than Arizona trades them away).

But here's the funny thing about Bauer's start: there was an awful lot to like about it. The four straight walks to start the game were obviously not one of those things (as it were), but consider what Bauer did with the bases loaded and nobody out:

Longoria: Ball, Strike (foul), Strike (swinging), Foul, Ball, Foul, Foul, Ball, Ball (walk)

Loney: Strike (swinging), fouled out to third

Escobar: Strike (looking), LIDP

He loaded the bases again in the third (also on three walks) and produced:

Escobar: Strike (looking), Strike (looking), Ball, Strike (swinging)

With the bases loaded, he did not panic. He did not even *fail*, really. We sometimes use the phrase “worked a walk” without actually meaning it literally: Longoria WORKED that walk. Hey, Longoria is good. Everyone else got a first-pitch strike, and in fact the only ball Bauer threw was on an 0-2 count (probably seeing if Escobar, a notorious free swinger, would bite).

If Bauer made a mistake, it was on the 0-1 pitch he threw to Kelly Johnson in the 4th that Johnson punished for a two-run homer. And how to he respond to that adversity? By retiring the next five batters, including Longoria on an 11-pitch battle that involved him fouling off three two-strike pitches before flying out to center. (The ESPN Game Log lists Longoria as striking out twice during the at-bat, including strikes 5 and 6. He also took four balls during the plate appearance. I’m not going to pretend to analyze that one.)

Was this a great start? It was not. Seven-walk appearances are, *a priori*, not “good.” A 2:7 K:BB ratio will take two months to undo. 3 runs in 5 innings is an inning short of a Quality Start. 59 strikes in 105 pitches is lousy. Giving up a home run to Kelly Johnson is no one’s idea of value. But Bauer took a no-hitter into the 4th, didn’t give up a hit with runners in scoring position (and there were plenty), kept his composure, and generally showed the tools of a good starting pitcher.

Here’s the thing: Bauer is arguably the best player the Indians have traded for since Carlos Santana. You could argue that in terms of what he could mean to Cleveland, he’s actually better than THAT. This is the player we didn’t get for Sabathia (I mean, even if Matt LaPorta had worked out, he was still essentially a power-hitting first baseman) or Cliff Lee (Carrasco did not have the pedigree that Bauer does). I’m not anointing Trevor Bauer to be bread of any sort, sliced or otherwise, but at least I could tell why we traded for him.

2) Adventures in bad timing

Zach McAllister’s start would have been enough to give the Tribe a good chance to win had it

not

been for two things:

- a) Falling apart after a two-out error
- b) Matt Moore is really quite outstanding

The Tribe was really just about valueless against Moore, with Mike Bourn being the only guy to hit a fair ball of any real quality. McAllister could have pitched a complete game yielding 1 run and he would still have lost. His WHIP stands at 1.00 since he didn't walk anyone and gave up a respectable 6 hits in 6 innings. He only struck out 3, but he's not really a strikeout pitcher, and, after all, this is more Ks than Bauer collected, and Bauer ostensibly IS a strikeout pitcher.

The thing that bothers me about McAllister's line, though, is that people will look at his ERA of 3.00, seeing only 2 earned runs in 6 innings, and will feel complacent that he's a good bet at #4 starter. Instead, consider this: approaching 100 pitches with a man on first, McAllister gave up a single to Sam Fuld, then a booming double to Benito Zobrist, before finally striking out Longoria to end the inning.

This is one of my problems with "earned runs:" certainly Desmond Jennings scoring is unearned.

He reached on an error. But if you give up a single to a fast guy and then a double to the wall, that fast guy scoring is YOUR FAULT. I understand the principles of Official Scoring that make Fuld's run "unearned," but in terms of evaluating McAllister's performance ... I mean ... he "earned" that run, at least.

McAllister was pretty good. I don't have a whole lot more to say. I should probably be more excited or forgiving or interested in this, but I'm not.

The explanation for a guy with enough control to walk zero batters but still uncork two wild pitches is an exercise left to the reader.

3) You may have a Cy Young, but I can walk more batters than I give up hits to

Out-dueling R.A. Dickey is one thing, but to paraphrase the TCF boards, you had to be leery of needing Justin Masterson to beat David Price in Tampa to salvage a 3-3 road trip. Price is really very good. Masterson is really quite Justin Masterson. The Rays are, objectively, better than the Indians. I did not bet on Sunday's game.

I should have bet on Sunday's game.

Masterson wasn't nearly as scattershot as he seemed at times against the Blue Jays: while he did end up walking three guys in seven innings, two of those came in the first, and Masterson simply struck out the next hitter on three pitches. He got nine swinging strikes this time out, a nice step up from the five in his first, and only allowed baserunners in two of his seven innings. One encouraging factor was a return to Mastersonian form, inducing 11 ground ball outs to 2 in the air. Even after a couple of longer waits for the Indians' offense to finish up crooked-number innings, Masterson retained his sharpness, including retiring the last 13 Rays in order. He ended up striking out 8 Rays.

Obviously I don't expect Masterson to end the season with a 0.69 ERA, and I sure don't want him walking a guy every other inning as he is now. I'm quite confident that Masterson will not win the Cy Young Award this season (I would accept being wrong about that*). But through two starts, Justin Masterson is 2-0 with a 0.69 ERA. This is a fine thing.

** I'm not*

4) Mark smash!

Mark Reynolds hit a single against the Blue Jays last week. I make a note of this because Mark Reynolds' other five hits on the young season are one double and FOUR home runs. The average distance of Reynolds' four home runs is roughly three parsecs. Mark Reynolds has not

hit a cheap home run this season.

Against David Price, Reynolds hit a pretty-high-quality pitch 415 feet out to center, and against Kyle Farnsworth, Reynolds hit a pretty-Kyle-Farnsworth pitch 423 feet out to left. He also played a high-quality DH.

You're not going to believe this, but Mark Reynolds struck out both Friday and Sunday. He did not strike out Saturday, disproving the theory that Mark Reynolds can strike out even when he's not playing. The important thing to remember is that if Reynolds continues to sport more RBI than Ks, he'll likely break Hack Wilson's record. (I would accept this.)

5) Blah on the blah!

The Indians went 0-for-5 with runners in scoring position on Friday.

The Indians went 0-for-5 with runners in scoring position on Saturday.

Nick Swisher would have gone 0-for-5 with runners in scoring position had there been runners in scoring position in his two plate appearances in which there were no runners in scoring position. As it was, he was 0-for-3 with RISP. (We scored 13 runs, so it bothered me less than it might

have.)

6) Speaking of bad

Swisher is now hitting .182/.333/.227 on the young season. I am encouraged by his plate discipline, and I know he is unlikely to continue at this level of performance, but I would like that

discontinuation to begin rather soon.

7) 90 mph in, 190 mph out

If you haven't seen the replay of Lonnie Chisenhall's home run off David Price, you need to go watch it. The ball jumps off Chisenhall's bat like he shot it out of rail gun. It's really aesthetically pleasing.

Was it a good pitch? Eh, I dunno about "good." Price's location wasn't the best, and Chisenhall turned on an inside pitch. Still, he hit a double a long way to left in Toronto and now pulled this one HARD to right: right now, at least, Chisenhall is using the whole field and going with the pitch, and he clearly has both a beautiful swing and a lot of power. Besides this, Chisenhall has had a tough time against lefties in his career and Price is one of the best lefties around. I'm not declaring Chisenhall the AL's All-Star representative at 3B (among other reasons that he still doesn't play a very good third base), but that was one heckuva shot.

8) Leading the way

While Mike Bourn took a Size Four Collar on Saturday, Alex Cobb made a LOT of Indians look bad on Saturday. Bourn did collect the only two hits against Matt Moore, and after two more hits on Sunday, sports a .321/.367/.536 line as the leadoff hitter.

Bourn only has 1 walk on the season, but is seeing 4.15 pitches per plate appearance, so it's not like he's been impatient. Hitting .321 suggests that he's being selective. Bottom line: Bourn has been as good at leadoff as anyone could have hoped, and that's a nice asset to have.

9) Ho Hum Dept.

Joe Smiff threw a scoreless inning.

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Vinnie Pestano threw a scoreless inning, striking out 2 and getting 4 more swings-and-misses.

Carlos Santana went 5-for-5 on Sunday and is now hitting .500/.538/.917. He trails Mark Reynolds for the team lead in SLG.

Asdrubal Cabrera did not get a hit on Friday. Or Saturday. Or Sunday.

10) Department of Corrections Department

I referred to Cody Allen as Chad Allen in the last B-List. In my defense, Chad Allen has pitched better than Cody Allen, in that he has not coughed up 6 hits and 3 walks in 3 innings of work for a brisk WHIP (not ERA, WHIP) of 3.00.

11) Miscellany

Brian Shaw was very good.

Matt Albers was less good.

Pestano walked two guys with a 13:11 strike-to-ball ratio.

Mike Aviles collected a couple of hits.

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Drew Stubbs banged out a pair of singles to raise his average to182.

Ryan Raburn. (I have no statement here, I just thought I should acknowledge him.)