



*The weather cooperated a little better in the weekend series, and Cleveland took two of three from Chicago in quality fashion. In today's B-List, Buff sings the praises of all the starting pitchers, even the one who lost, and wonders aloud if anyone could be more joyful than Nick Swisher (no), if Chris Sale should have gotten the wazoo (yes), and when the vaunted "improved defense" will be making its debut (unknown). A clean bullpen outing wouldn't hurt, either. Just noting.*

### FINAL

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## The B-List: 4/12 - 4/14

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

Monday, April 15 2013 12:09 PM - Last Updated Monday, April 15 2013 12:14 PM

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White Schmux (4-6)

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**Indians (4-5)**

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W: Masterson (3-0)      L: Crain (0-1)

**FINAL**

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White Schmux (4-7)

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**Indians (5-5)**

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W: McAllister (1-1)      L: Sale (0-1)

**FINAL**

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White Schmux (5-7)

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**Indians (5-6)**

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W: Peavy (2-1)

L: B. Myers (0-2)

S: A. Reed (4)

Four runs were scored by both teams (combined) on plays other than home runs. FOURTEEN runs were scored on plays that WERE home runs. Eat your vegetables.

## **1) The Tall Man in the White Suit**

Due to the amusing software ESPN has chosen to use to confrabulate its statistics, Justin Masterson is now “projected” to start 49 games, going 356 innings with 16 shutouts. He will go 49-0 with an ERA of 0.41. I will boldly state that if he does indeed end the year with these numbers, he should certainly deserve serious consideration for a top-three Cy Young vote. I am willing to change my position under those circumstances.

I understand the 0.41: that is his ERA now, so projecting that, while intensely amusing, is at least understandable. Where they are getting 49 starts from is quite another: yes, he’s made 3 starts in Cleveland’s 11 games, but this is what every other first-up (as opposed to #1, which has a different connotation) starter does, no? Did it announce that he would go 162-0 after his first start? I work in the software business, and sometimes you just fix things out of *pride*, y’know?

This having been said, the man who pitched Friday night does not lose ballgames.

Here’s the thing: for about 50 feet, a Justin Masterson pitch doesn’t seem like much of a departure from the norm. Sure, it leaves his hand at high velocity: he was touching 96 mph depending on which version of the U-BaddoGate “controversy” you’re willing to buy. He’s thrown that hard before, so I’ll buy it. Not every pitch, but Masterson does throw with significantly-above-average velocity.

And then in the last ten-plus feet, the ball disappears from its projectable trajectory and appears somewhere else. Not only that, but that somewhere else is likely in the strike zone, or somewhere a batter thinks is at least worth swinging at.

Masterson threw an astonishing 81 of his 113 pitches for strikes, getting 13 swings-and-misses and walking a single White Sox. In Masterson’s first start, he walked four in six innings; in his second, he walked three in seven. Now, the White Sox are neither the Jays nor the Rays: besides Adam Dunn, they’re not exactly known for their high-volume plate discipline. But Masterson was dead on Friday night, and while he did yield a pair of doubles and needed a fine

throw from Mike Brantley to prevent a third, the Sox only managed to put a man in scoring position with fewer than two outs once, and Masterson didn't allow the ball out of the infield to any of those three hitters. Heck, he didn't allow the ball out of the *catcher's mitt* for two of 'em.

One way to read this is that in his first start, Masterson struggled with his command and the pitches that he missed with weren't close enough to swing through. These became walks and limited him to 5 swinging strikes. He got better in his second start, but only incrementally. His third start was really, really good.

The weather and the opponent were contributing factors to Masterson's dominance Friday, and I expect tougher times in warmer weather against more patient opponents. But a shutout is, by definition, nine innings of scoreless baseball, and Masterson didn't luck into it.

## 2) Big Z

Did you realize that Zach McAllister is listed at 6-6, 240? For comparison's sake, Jake Westbrook, who I've always thought of as kind of a big guy, is listed at 6-3, 210. It turns out that my perception of Westbrook has been wrong for quite some time, but my perception of McAllister has been functionally worthless.

I was concerned after McAllister's first start that the Unearned Runs made him look more attractive than he actually is as a starter, and Saturday's start doesn't do much to ease that concern. Sure, Keppinger scored because Mark Reynolds was unable to throw the ball from first base to first base, but Rios scored another "unearned run" from second on a clean single by Konerko. I understand that Rios isn't ON second base if Reynolds makes the play, but with a runner in scoring position, McAllister gave up a hit to a fellow righty. In terms of predictive value, that doesn't say anything good.

This having been said, let's pause for a moment to evaluate what we have gotten from McAllister in two starts. In his first start, he allowed 6 hits in 6 innings, didn't walk anyone, and struck out 3 while allowing 2 (4) earned (total) runs. Saturday, he didn't have a big lead until after he'd completed five frames, so he was in a tight game for the vast majority of his stint: this time, he went 6 1/3, yielding 5 hits and no walks while striking out 6 and giving up 1 (3) earned (total) runs.

If there's something that sticks out here, it's the Byrdian quality of his WHIP. McAllister is giving up slightly fewer than a hit an inning, and that's pretty good, but he has walked precisely NO ONE. He started 19 of 26 Chicago hitters with a first-pitch strike: to date, he has nearly twice as many 0-1 counts (29) as 1-0 counts (16). Six hitters have seen a full count. TWO of them got there from 3-1. NONE of them got a hit (or, obviously, a walk).

All of these things SHOULD conspire to make Zach McAllister my favorite member of the rotation. Truthfully, I still can't pick McAllister out of a lineup and have developed little warmth for him thus far. He sure pitched well Saturday, though.

### 3) Sometimes the other guy is just good

Box Myers had two problems Sunday:

- a) Jake Peavy is still better than he is
- b) Paul Konerko apparently has a very unflattering portrait in Oscar Wilde's attic somewhere

Myers wasn't nearly as accurate as McAllister (10 first-pitch strikes in 24) and flashed nowhere near the dominance of Masterson, but he threw a fine game, giving up 6 hits in 6 innings and walking only one. The problem was that the walk was to Adam Dunn, who hits immediately in front of Paul Konerko, who simply does not age.

The walk to Dunn might have signaled trouble in that he was the second of three consecutive hitters to start 2-0 off Myers, and Dunn actually started 3-0 before taking a strike (which Dunn is wont to do) and then a ball (which Dunn is also wont to do).

After starting 2-0, Konerko took a strike, took ball three, then hammered a decent (not great, but certainly not a hanging curve or anything) pitch over the wall in left center to effectively win the game. (The Indians put a couple of men on base against non-Peavy relievers, but never felt much like they were going to come back in this one.)

Through five innings, Myers swapped “top three” places on ESPN’s scoreboard with Peavy after each inning. He tossed five shutout innings at a rate of one hit per frame, and only Ty Flowers’ hit was for extra bases. As it was, Myers lost because the other guys were just a little better. I’m certainly more encouraged by that start than either of Myers’ first two outings, the second of which I kind of write off because of the odd circumstances.

### 4) Credit Where Credit is Due Dept.

Jose Quintana matched Justin Masterson frame-for-frame, actually allowing fewer hits and striking out more batters (during the time they were both pitching). I have no vested interest in Jose Quintana and refuse to acknowledge that he pitched “better” than Masterson. After all, Masterson kept going and got the win and also neener, neener.

Jake Peavy was masterful on Sunday, getting the Tribe to wave a several tailing fastballs they couldn’t have hit with boat oars. He struck out 11 and walked zero in 7 complete innings of work and threw 75 of his 104 pitches for “strikes” (although a few of those looked like pitches the Indians helped him out on: still, this *is* part of the essence of pitching).

### 5) Double Standard

Consider this sequence in the 5<sup>th</sup> inning of Saturday’s game:

N. Swisher: HBP

M. Reynolds: HR, grand slam

M. Brantley: HBP

There’s no disputing that Chris Sale did not have his best stuff on Saturday. Sale has flashed Cy Young stuff, posting a 3.05 ERA and a 1.14 WHIP last season en route to a 17-8 record for a desperately mediocre White Sox club. He’s got filthy stuff despite being built like an anime character and having a pitching motion that hurts most of *my* body from two thousand miles

away. He hit Swisher in the right-handed batter's box with a slider that bent in too far, and the pitch to Reynolds wasn't exactly the location he was going for. In his first game he posted a 7:1 K:BB ratio, and in his second it was 7:2.

But as many have pointed out, when Carlos Carrasco hit a batter immediately after giving up a home run, he was ejected, fined, and suspended for EIGHT GAMES. Sale pitched to the next batter. Let's not get into the Biblical saying about reaping and sowing and simply note that Carrasco has history that Sale does not. But really now. A warning? That's it? Here's the thing: I actually believe that Sale wasn't trying to hit Brantley and that the end result is more or less fair, but ... it certainly engenders a certain amount of speculation about the treatment of one guy over the other, including market size, race, and number of times mentioned by pundits as an award-calibre pitcher.

## **6) N-I! C-K!**

With two outs in the bottom of the 9<sup>th</sup> inning, a runner on second, and Masterson's night clearly finished, Jason Kipnis strode to the plate against reliever Jesse Crain, who I detested as part of the Minnesota Bullpen Of Death back in the day. This is Crain's 9

th

year, but I would have sworn it was his 53

rd

. His beard in his stock photo is unfortunate.

Crain apparently had a scouting report that said that Kipnis would swing at very crummy pitches out of the zone, and after this was proven false three times, Crain simply gave up and threw him a 4<sup>th</sup> ball. This went down as an ersatz Intentional Walk, but only the last ball was really "intentional."

Now facing Nick Swisher, Crain tried to sneak a fastball through the inside corner to Swisher, who did not miss it and hit what would have been a double down the right field line had Mike Bourn not scored the winning run before Swisher's tongue could reach second base.

After the game, the Ohio State alumnus treated the crowd to a bit of the Buckeyes' "O-H! I-O!" cheer. He also hugged fifteen random people, sang three verses of the National Anthem, and



spontaneously combusted from joy.

Swisher followed his Friday night heroics by going 2-for-2 with a walk and an HBP Saturday night. One of the hits was his second homer on the season, and he also scored three runs. Even after taking a Size Four Collar Sunday, Swisher is hitting .270/.426/.405 on the season, doing a fair Mike Hargrove impression.

## **7) Twinkle Toes**

Speaking of Bourn, in Friday's game in which the Indians got a total of three hits, Bourn had one (and scored the only run). In the game Sunday in which the Indians had only six hits, Bourn had three (and score the only run). He is now hitting .333/.375/.600 on the young season: he may not have drawn a lot of walks, but you can win some ballgames with a leadoff hitter posting a .375 OBP.

So it is with some consternation that Bourn's final hit of Sunday's game came at the expense of his right hand, as he dove headfirst into the bag to beat a throw from noted quasi-first-baseman Adam Dunn to noted non-first-baseman Matt Thornton, who deftly stepped on Bourn's hand and produced a five-stich cut on his right index finger. Bourn is expected to miss "several games," unless he is treated at the Browns' training facility, in which case he is expected to die.

Replacing Bourn at the top of the lineup will be ... shoot, I don't know. I expect Mike Brantley there, though: he's got a .366 OBP thus far and is swinging well and has done it before. Jason Kipnis and Drew Stubbs would be subpar choices.

## **8) Mulk smash!**

You're not going to believe this, but Mark Reynolds did NOT strike out Friday. Or Saturday! He struck out Sunday, but EVERYBODY struck out Sunday. Shoot, he got a hit off Jake Peavy.

No, we remember Reynolds' weekend for the GRAND SLAM he smashed off Sale in the 5<sup>th</sup> inning to essentially turn the game into a comfortable laugh. Reynolds now has 5 homers on the season and is slugging .711 after Sunday's game.

## **9) Yan, Yan, the catching man**

Yan Gomes hit his first home run of the season off some guy named "Heath." As Gomes is kind of a Some Guy himself, there is a nice symmetry to this situation, but Gomes now sports a higher SLG than Jason Kipnis or Drew Stubbs and matches both Mike Brantley and Asdrubal Cabrera. Because he has one hit. (This might prove to be a problem long-term.)

Gomes also gunned down Conor Gillaspie trying to steal second. Huzzah!

## **10) With all due respect**

I am ready for Carlos Santana to be healthy.

## **11) Around the Bullpen**

In each game in which the bullpen pitched, someone in the bullpen gave up a meaningless late-game home run to Alejandro De Aza. I recommend the cessation of such activities.

Joe Smiff has become the Raffy Betancourt of a new era, throwing 14 of his 17 pitches for strikes in a clean frame. Chris Perez tossed an efficient 9-pitch perfect inning, even with a K mixed in. Nick Hagadone welcomed himself back to the club with a perfect 10-pitch inning.

The Indians' bullpen now has five guys with an ERA of 2.25 or lower, and three guys with an ERA of 5.40 or higher. I have a recommendation here.