



*The Indians' "one guaranteed win in five" dissipated last night as the Red Sox jumped on Justin Masterson from the opening pitch to beat the Tribe 6-3. In today's B-List, Buff wonders if perhaps we're reading a bit too much into Masterson's struggles, welcomes yet another enormous white man to the club, talks about the Indians' so-called "offense," the fickle nature of baseball flight paths, and wonders perhaps if a multi-inning scoring approach might not be more effective. There's also a cheap shot.*

### FINAL

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## The B-List: 4/17

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

Thursday, April 18 2013 1:30 PM - Last Updated Thursday, April 18 2013 12:36 PM

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**Red Sox (10-4)**

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**Indians (5-8)**

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W: Aceves (1-0)

L: Masterson (3-1)

Our thoughts and prayers go to those families affected by the explosion in West, Texas. I have actually been to West, which is famous for the Czech Stop (the town was founded by Czech immigrants), home of the best kolache in North America.

### 1) Forcing the Narrative

I see in [Nino's article](#) that some of the explanation for Justin Masterson's struggles last night can reasonably be attributed to the fact that the Red Sox have a number of quality left-handed hitters in their lineup: this is a concern [Jonah Keri](#) also expressed. It's a simple principle: Masterson's delivery is unusual and he has struggled with left-handed batters in the past.

In the case of last night's game, though, it smacks of [Confirmation Bias](#) .

Granted, Jacoby Ellsbury is a good left-handed hitter, and he had two hits (and scored two runs) off Masterson. On the other hand, one of those hits was an infield single to third, and Masterson retired him twice, including a swinging K to end the 4<sup>th</sup>.

Shane Victorino also had two hits off Masterson from the left side of the plate. Victorino has found an early-season Fountain of Some Sort, though, and is hitting .333.

You know who else had two hits off Masterson? Dustin Pedroia, who at last check, is a RIGHT-handed batter. And who led the Sox with 2 RBI? Right-handed Mike Napoli. And while lefties Mike Carp and Dan Nava had hits, lefties Stephen Drew and Jarrod Salagadoola did not.

No, the simpler explanation for Masterson's tough night is that Masterson had a tough night. Consider Clayton Kershaw's performance against the anemic AAA San Diego Padres. The Pods are a middle-of-the-pack offense and have raised their record to 5-10. They were playing in a pitcher's park, on the road, against Clayton Kershaw, arguably the best pitcher in the National League (if not the majors, but at least he's in the discussion. He's also hitting .222/.300/.556, which would make him Cleveland's third-best slugger, but this is neither here nor there). The Padres pounded three homers off Kershaw, including one from Everth Cabrera, who is 4 foot 6 and weighs 87 pounds. Kershaw gave up 5 runs on 7 hits (and 4 walks) in 5 1/3 IP and fell to 2-2 on the season, leading everyone in Los Angeles to talk about the Lakers.

Is Kershaw's season over? Of course not. Is Justin Masterson as good as Clayton Kershaw, and like Kershaw will be "just fine?" Of course not. The cases are not identical: there are real concerns about Masterson's ability to get left-handed hitters out, and he didn't quell any of those concerns last night.

But he didn't ONLY fail to retire tough left-handed hitters. He failed to retire ANY good hitters with regularity. He HAS retired good hitters thus far this season, but last night he did NOT. In other words, while 11 hits and 4 runs in 5 innings is not encouraging (and by no means am I telling you it's "fine"), the fact that he struck out 5 guys, walked only 1 (although he did hit Victorino), got 7 swings-and-misses, and worked out of a couple serious jams IS encouraging. It suggests that Masterson is still a quality pitcher, even when he doesn't have his top-notch stuff.

So here's the thing: Occam says to excise those things that don't help explain more of your theory. Once we've established that Masterson didn't have his best stuff (as evidenced by giving up hits to three of the first four hitters and generally pitching like Box Myers), does it really explain more to talk about right and left handed hitters? Eh, it might. Nava and Carp are pretty inexperienced hitters, and he didn't get them out. But I'm still inclined to chalk up his failures last night to Simple Badness rather than Complex Weakness.

## 2) Welcome to the club!

Please help me welcome Corey Kluber to the team, since by the time I finish typing this sentence he will have disappeared back into the bowels of Columbus, which is almost as pleasant as it sounds. More seriously, Kluber takes the roster spot of Mike Bourn until Scott Kazmir can be summoned to start this weekend in place of Carlos Carrasco, whose 8-game suspension becomes effectively 120 games or so given that he is a nitwit.

Kluber did impress me by throwing a first-pitch strike to each hitter he faced. He impressed me less with his ability to give up a run on three hits. He is a large person.

## 3) The Evolution of the Modern Bullpen

Kluber does fit the recent mold of Cleveland relievers in that he throws power stuff with good velocity and is roughly the size of an IBM mainframe. It is moderately amazing that Vinnie Pestano is on this staff, and I wonder aloud if he is considered a mascot of sorts at a mere 6 feet tall. Hopefully he is not stuffed into his locker on a regular basis.

The New York Times had an interesting piece on the nature of the modern game, expressing a concern (shared by other pundits I've read) about whether there are "too many strikeouts" in the game. The simple answer to this is, "There are only too many strikeouts when my team is at bat, because when they're pitching, the number of strikeouts is perfectly acceptable." The Indians bullpen struck out 5 hitters in 4 innings, a respectable clip, although far short of the previous night's 15 in 7 1/3 innings. The Boston bullpen struck out 8 of the 12 Cleveland hitters they faced, which is clearly too many. So I'm a bit torn here.

Still, the Indians have made an effort in recent years to mold their staff into one with more power arms on the back end: in this vein, Pestano fits in just fine. It should be noted that Pestano threw 8 pitches, each of which was a strike, and K'd two of the three hitters he faced.

#### 4) The Worst Run in the World

Rich Hill faced Jacoby Ellsbury to lead off the 8<sup>th</sup> inning. After a long plate appearance featuring three foul balls, the speedy Ellsbury beat out a ground ball to short for an infield single.

Joe Smiff came in to force Shane Victorino to hit left-handed (he has a severe platoon split and hit .318/.396/.550 off lefties from 2010-2012) and immediately uncorked a wild pitch to advance Ellsbury to second. After a second ball, Smiff then gratefully accepted Victorino's sacrifice by throwing the ball to Not Mark Reynolds, allowing Ellsbury to take not only third but home as well.

If you're scoring at home, the number of balls hit out of the infield in order to score this run would be, "Zero."

#### 5) A game of inches

With the bases loaded in the bottom of the fifth, Asdrubal Cabrera, mired in a lame-for-2013 slump, cracked a ball deep to right field. With two outs, all three runners took off, so if the ball had travelled over the head of Victorino, it is likely that all three would have scored.

The ball, while technically over Victorino's head, was not over Victorino's glove, and the distinction became apparent as Cabrera's drive became the third out of the inning.

The Indians lost by three runs.

### 6) Process vs. results

When Mike Brantley made his debut in 2009, it was as a moderately patient hitter who saw 4.04 pitches per plate appearance. He hit .313 and drew 8 walks, putting him squarely in the Tyner Zone with an OBP of .358 and a SLG of .348. Still, as the Leadoff Man Of The Future, Brantley's approach seemed well-suited for this role, although you'd like a few more walks.

He put up similar numbers in 2010, at least from an "approach" standpoint: his AVG collapsed, but he had an OBP fifty points over his AVG and again saw 4.04 pitches per plate appearance. This dropped to 3.93 in 2011, but at least he hit better.

In 2012, Brantley, given 600 plate appearances for the first time, somehow managed to draw walks at a higher rate while seeing fewer pitches. He posted an OBP-AVG of sixty points while drawing 53 walks, but somehow seeing only 3.55 pitches per plate appearance. I started this section in order to make one point and somehow ended up in an entirely different spot. Thankfully, my editor is taking this life off. Still, I'm intrigued by the fact that Brantley could see significantly fewer pitches but end up essentially in the right spot: his AVG went up, his OBP went up, and his SLG stayed pretty much the same.

As a leadoff hitter, all things being equal, you'd like your guy to see a lot of pitches. Being on base is the point, but if performance is held static, it's better to force the starter to work hard and



give your teammates something to look at. Brantley made four plate appearances last night, and while he reached base only once (on a walk), he did see 23 pitches.

I'm pretty sure Mike Bourn will be the leadoff man as soon as he's able to make a fist, but Brantley has experience in the slot and a good skill set for holding the place against right-handed starters.

An interesting contrast would be Red Sox rookie Dan Nava, who saw 10 pitches in 5 plate appearances. I'm pretty sure I'd start Nava with a Jhonny Peralta Slider for the foreseeable future.

### 7) The Strip of Magnesium Offense

Cleveland's night at the dish essentially boils down to this:

*worthless worthless worthless worthless worthless HOME RUN HOME RUN worthless  
worthless super worthless ultra worthless dead*

Congrats to Jason Giambi for hitting his first homer as an Indian. With a .125 AVG and a .500 SLG, he is an inspiration to Mark Reynolds everywhere.

Meanwhile, Nick Swisher's second homer how propels his ISO to .182.

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

Lonnie Chisenhall banged out a pair of singles.

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Drew Stubbs stole second off Saltanapeppa.

### **9) Nice Hose!**

Carlos Santana gunned down Dan Nava trying to steal second.

### **10) Duck duckity duck duck goose(egg)**

The Indians went 0-for-7 with runners in scoring position, including 0-for-2 by each of Bob Phelps and Asdrubal Cabrera. Cabrera's is hitting 118 points higher than Phelps on the season because he is hitting .118.