



In a hilarious prank, Ubaldo Jimenez' Good Twin took the mound and proceeded to throttle the Royals en route to a 9-0 laughter to earn a split of the 4-game series. The prank is hilarious because we can't tell in which direction it's being played. In today's B-List, Buff looks at what we can take from Jimenez' start, what we learned about Kansas City, and why Billy Butler, who is KC's answer to Ryan Garko, is able to beat out an infield single.

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The B-List: 4/29

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}
Tuesday, April 30 2013 1:19 PM -

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W: U. Jimenez (1-2) L: W. Davis (2-2)

What a simple game baseball is! All you need is a dominant performance by the starter, a few home runs here and there, a shutdown bullpen ... now that we know the secret, surely we're playoff-bound!

1) Who-Baldo?

Let's get the preliminaries out of the way: Ubaldo Jimenez pitched a terrific game last night, giving up one hit and two walks in seven complete shutout innings before yielding a pair of hits in the 8th and giving way to the bullpen to complete the shutout. He was focused, effective, and threw nearly 67% of his pitches for strikes. He got 12 ground ball outs to 5 in the air and struck out 4, never putting a second Royal on base in an inning until the aforementioned 8th. He faced the minimum three batters in 5 of his seven-plus (the Plus stands for Extra Fail!) innings, including four perfect ones and one with a double play. It was a sparkling performance and could hardly have been any better: the one hit he allowed in the first seven innings did not leave the infield.

Instead of discussing anything about "movement" or "approach" or "sustainability," though, let me quote from the AP writeup of the game:

From the moment that Ubaldo Jimenez started to warm up in the bullpen, and noticed the run on his fastball, he had a pretty good idea that this night would be unlike any other this season.

...

"It felt really good," said Jimenez, who hadn't won in his past 12 starts. "When I saw the run on my fastball, I said, 'We have to take advantage of that.'"

With the caveat that I will almost certainly read something into this that isn't necessarily there, let me read something into this that isn't necessarily there.

I am a lousy interviewer. My father was a journalist and developed this skill, but I am not and never have. My best interview to date remains the one with [Scott Raab](#), to whom I've never spoken in my life. Instead, we exchanged email and edited a common Google Document so that I could edit and reflect and take time to develop the text. In my interview with [Kevin Mackey](#), I wandered around with panicked aimlessness, and my interview the next year with

[Kate Peterson Abiad](#)

was only better because there wasn't enough time in our schedules to wander as much. When I interview prospective employees, the rough ratio of talking time is normally 3-to-1 in my favor. So having me interview Jimenez to clarify these comments would be a spectacularly bad idea.

Here's what I read, though: as Jimenez was warming up, he had an unusual amount of movement on his fastball. To his credit, he saw how he could use this to his advantage, and he did so during the game. The highlights I saw did show a good deal of movement, reminiscent of Mitch Talbot's changeup, fading from the middle of the plate to the right-hander's batter's box. The ball also had some downward movement, evidenced after the fact by the 12:5 GO:FO ratio. At least part of the success Justin Masterson has had in his good starts is because of late movement on his fastball, and Jimenez was able to tap into that same effect last night.

Here's the thing I can't get away from: why?

Is this the normal amount of movement that Jimenez had when he was effective in Colorado? Is this the result of a different grip? Does Jimenez himself understand why he had "(good) run on (his) fastball" last night? Is this a one-night effect, an every-other-time-out effect, or a from-now-on effect?

Look at this quote again:

"When I saw the run on my fastball, I said, 'We have to take advantage of that.'"

Again, understanding that I am probably imposing meaning onto an innocuous statement, I couldn't help reading this as:

"I have no idea why my fastball was moving so much, but it excited me, because that's hard to hit. I needed to strike while that iron was hot!"

I would have felt SO much better had the quote been:

"We were working on a slight change to my grip, and when I tried it in warmups, the ball just ran like a mofo. Huzzah!"

I did not get that quote. Because of this, I'm going to reserve judgment on whether Jimenez' game was a stone cold fluke or a rope ladder out of the abyss. Last night, Ubaldo Jimenez pitched astoundingly well. Currently, this implies exactly nothing about anything but last night's game.

2) Ray smash!

From an offensive perspective, just about everyone pitched in, but none more than Ryan Raburn. In his previous 13 games (admittedly 2 of which featured single plate appearances), Raburn had produced exactly one multi-hit performance and one RBI with no homers. Last night, off a variety of pitchers one can only characterize as "Kansas City Royals," Raburn was able to put the finishing touches on the big fifth with a three-run blast off Wade Davis, and later poked an opposite-field solo shot off Kelvin Herrera. For the game, Raburn went 4-for-4 and produced more total bases (10) as he had in his previous 11 games (9). (Again, 2 of these 11 were single-PA jobs).

Raburn's a guy. He's a valuable guy, but he's just a guy. He did post a terrific .892 OPS in 2009 and helped one of my fantasy teams in the process, but he has a notable platoon split, has never gotten as many as 400 AB in a season, and was frankly lousy in the past two seasons. On the other hand, his .283/.340/.478 slash line thus far almost exactly matches that from 2010 (.280/.340/.474 in about 400 PA), so it's not impossible for him to sustain this kind of production. (Well, I mean the *overall* production, not the 4-for-4-with-2-homers production.) He's a good option as a 4th OF type, and while he'd probably suffer in comparison as an everyday player, Raburn is a significant upgrade over the Shelley Duncans of yesteryear.

3) The blow that changed the world!

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Jason Kipnis hit a 420-foot BOMB that gave the Indians a lead they would never relinquish. With this home run, I am now ready to declare that Kipnis is Surely Back For Good This Time Boy Howdy Yes Indeedy!

Nope. That's a lie. Good hit, though.

4) Terror on the Basepaths!

Carlos Santana stealing second? Really? You have the near-infinite variety of things that can happen in a baseball game, and you choose Carlos Santana stealing second?

(He was out.)

5) Journey Out of the Tyner Zone

After his first 14 games, Mike Brantley had produced 11 singles and 1 double. Along with 6 walks, this gave him a slash line of .240/.345/.260, meaning he sported the on-base percentage of a top-half hitter and the slugging percentage of an enthusiastic marmot.

Since then, Brantley has smacked four doubles and a triple in 36 ABs, along with 9 singles, and has raised his slash line to .291/.371/.372. Obviously the early season spawns Small Sample Size caveats, but just watching Brantley drive the ball seems very encouraging to the lay fan (me). The doubles (and triple) weren't cheap rollers down the line, either: if I recall correctly, each went over an outfielder's head or beat him to the gap and rolled to the wall.

Brantley had three hits on the game, including a pair of doubles, and scored twice. He drove in zero runs because Lonnie Chisenhall and Drew Stubbs bat immediately before him in the order.

6) They call it the Bottom of the Order because it's the Bottom of the Order

Between Ryan Raburn's 4-for-4 from the 7 slot and Brantley's 3-for-5 in the leadoff spot, Chisenhall and Stubbs combined to make 8 plate appearances, strike out twice, reach base nonce, ground into a double play, and hit the ball out of the infield a grand total of one time. Adding their batting averages together (.434) yields a number lower than Carlos Santana's OBP (.456). Adding their slugging percentages together (.661) yields a number lower than Carlos Santana's SLG (.686). To date, efforts to replace Chisenhall and Stubbs with More Carlos Santana have been rebuffed by the Commissioner's Office.

7) Kids Today!

After Jimenez fell victim to Westbrook Disease ("Just one more inning," © Eric Wedge), Nick Hagadone strode to the mound with no outs and runners on first and third. He struck out pinch-hitter George Kotteras looking, got Elli Johnson to ground out on the first pitch, and struck out Alex Gordon swinging.

Cody Allen took over for the ninth and proceeded to throw a perfect frame with a swinging K.

Hagadone's inning impressed me more, given that he inherited two runners and both were in scoring position after the groundout. He did have a platoon advantage on Kotteras and Gordon, but that's not his fault: that's his JOB.

8) Ducks off the Pond!

The Indians batted 6-for-9 with runners in scoring position. With 14 hits and 3 walks, they left only FOUR men on base. Mark Reynolds and Asdrubal Cabrera were each 2-for-2 with RISP.

9) Managerial Head-Scratchers

With Jimenez struggling, Ned Yost pulled Sal Perez to pinch-hit Kotteras with runners on the corners and nobody out. This essentially demanded that Terry Francona pull Jimenez and replace him with Hagadone.

Now, I suppose it's probable that Francona was going to pull Jimenez there anyway. He was at 103 pitches, still had the morale-boosting shutout going, and it was time to go. So I guess the calculus was "Perez vs. Allen" or "Kotteras vs. Hagadone" there. Hagadone has proven a little inaccurate in recent days, and Kotteras can draw a walk, while Perez has one walk in 83 plate appearances and generally pursues a "see ball, hit ball" approach at the plate.

Still, the game write-up suggests that Yost went first. Why not see if Francona would give Jimenez "one more Westbrook" and send Perez to the plate? Why set up Hagadone to face arguably your best hitter in Alex Gordon later in the inning (Gordon is having a fine start, hitting .323/.356/.515 so far, but from 2010-2012 had a 50-point platoon split as a left-handed hitter)? I can understand pinch-hitting for Chris Getz, who aspires to be a fungus, but Kotteras forced Francona into a ... severely advantageous position. Why do that?

10) Today's mental image

Billy Butler beating out an infield single for the Royals' only hit in the first seven innings. I didn't see it. I prefer it that way.

11) Public Service for the Google Search Engine

Jack Zduriencik replaced all the Mariners' caps with ones made of spun sugar. In the Pacific Northwest, this would have uniquely disastrous effects, and is not true in any way, shape, or form. Fire Eric Wedge.