



Cleveland's initial foray into interleague play featured the phormerly phearsome Phillies and the formerly formidable Roy Halladay and turned into a 14-2 laugher because it's 2013 and not 2008. Zach McAllister posted another fine start, and Buff wonders if it's time to stop referring to him as Replacement Level and start referring to him as Our Most Dependable Starter. He also lauds the Tribe's use of Steve's Magic Formula, outlined in the preface to yesterday's column. Also, Ryan Raburn. As the kids say, "Woot!"

FINAL

[1

[2

[3

[4

[5

[6

The B-List: 4/30

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

Wednesday, May 01 2013 1:43 PM - Last Updated Wednesday, May 01 2013 1:57 PM

[7

[8

[9

[R

[H

[E

Phillies (12-15)

[0

[1

[0

[0

The B-List: 4/30

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

Wednesday, May 01 2013 1:43 PM - Last Updated Wednesday, May 01 2013 1:57 PM

[0]

[1]

[0]

[0]

[0]

[2]

[5]

[0]

Indians (11-13)

[4]

[0]

[0]

The B-List: 4/30

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

Wednesday, May 01 2013 1:43 PM - Last Updated Wednesday, May 01 2013 1:57 PM

4

4

0

2

0

X

14

17

0

W: McAllister (2-3) L: Halladay (2-3)

I'm telling you, this "dominant start, multiple homers, shutdown bullpen" formula is going to catch on.

1) Dependable is the new Sexy

I would like ... I would like? I would like a trip to Europe.
-- Daffy Duck

How do we judge starting pitchers?

There are any number of stats, advanced or venerable, although as with all things, they represent trends and big pictures and get smoothed out over time. I have seen people bandy about such things as xFIP, and while I implicitly trust that these things have some meaning and solid foundations, I'm not willing to invest a lot of time in grokking them. Old warhorses like WHIP and ERA have their purpose, of course. All this stuff seems more useful at a macro level than a micro level to me.

Should we judge a starter by his best start? Something that represents the ceiling of his ability, what you could potentially get during his next outing? This can be dangerous, of course. Phil Humber threw a perfect game. Phil Humber isn't any good. On the other hand, it's nice to be able to point to Justin Masterson's best start of the season, his masterful shutout of the White Sox in which he gave up 5 hits and walked 1 while striking out 7. On this measure, Masterson has clear talent. Shoot, FOUR of Masterson's six starts have been quite excellent. Of course, Ubaldo Jimenez also has a great start under his belt this season. I'm pretty sure we don't want to be anointing him based on that Best Start. By this measure, Zach McAllister's Best Start is merely quite good, coming last night in the form of a 7-inning 5-hitter, marred only by the fact that two of his hits allowed were solo homers. 2 runs in 7 innings is very good. You'll win a lot of ballgames when your starter gives up 2 runs in 7 innings.

Of course, the more classical way to evaluate a pitcher is on his AVERAGE start. I mean, that's what ERA and WHIP are FOR, right? In this season, Jimenez drops out of consideration because he's been truly dismal in several starts. Cashbox Myers had a nice enough start, but his overall numbers before he got hurt were pretty bad. Masterson is the leader in this regard, posting a fine 1.26 WHIP and 3.12 ERA. In extended form, Masterson's "Average Start" looks like this:

The B-List: 4/30

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

Wednesday, May 01 2013 1:43 PM - Last Updated Wednesday, May 01 2013 1:57 PM

6 2/3 IP, 6 H, 2 R, 3 BB, 6 or 7 K (I rounded everything: he's averaged exactly 6.5 K per outing)

So ... too many walks, but ... hey, that's a nice start.

McAllister (1.20 WHIP, 3.30 ERA) here fares surprisingly well:

6 IP, 5 H, 3 R, 2 ER, 2 BB, 5 K (again, numbers are rounded)

Masterson tosses an extra frame, doesn't give up the unearned run, K's an extra guy, but walks one, too. But geez, the difference there is really just noise.

Here's something, though: what if we judged these guys by their WORST start?

Masterson: 6 1/3 IP, 9 H 7 R, 4 BB, 9 K

Myers: 5 IP, 7 H, 7 R, 2 BB, 0 K

Jimenez: 1 2/3 IP, 2 H, 7 R, 5 BB, 1 K

McAllister: 5 IP, 6 H, 3 R, 3 BB, 7 K

(Kazmir, Kluber, Bauer, et al don't have enough starts to really statisticalize)

You could argue that McAllister's 5-walk start against the ChiSox was "worse," but it was still 3 runs. Zach McAlister *just doesn't have a real bad start*.

What does this mean for 2013? Well, for one thing, it means five starts really isn't very many starts. Let's admit that right off the bat. After five starts, Justin Masterson looked like a Cy Young pool member. After six starts he doesn't. But look at the range of values for McAllister:

IP: 5 to 7

H: 5 to 6 (!)

R: 2 to 4

ER: 1 to 3

There's just hardly any "range" to his range. If you asked me what I'd predict about Zach McAllister's next start, I'd guess the "Average" line I gave you above, and be pretty confident about the innings, hits, and runs.

McAllister has to watch his command: his three walks against Boston might have been expected, but his five against Chicago look more like an aberration. Last night, he threw first-pitch strikes to the first seven batters he faced, 20 of 27 overall, and posted 70 strikes in 106 pitches. It should be noted that he pitched with a big lead after the first inning, so should have felt confident attacking the strike zone, but this is pretty much who Zach McAllister is anyway. He did give up two solo homers, including one to Delmon Young, who is dead, but on the other hand, I'd rather see Chase Utley beat McAllister on a pitch in the strike zone than have McAllister nibble and Nagy his way through the lineup.

If there's one thing that concerns me long term, especially as the weather gets warmer, is that McAllister consistently posts more fly outs than ground outs (true of each of his five starts this season). This smacks of Josh Tomlin and concerns me in that Tomlin was actually atrocious last season after being pretty good in 2011. You'd like to see a fly ball pitcher be a little more dominant than Tomlin or McAllister before counting on them to be long-term rotation members. But the fact is, Zach McAllister has thrown five starts, darn near identical, and that average line is a Quality Start. He's not quite our BEST starter, but he's been our most RELIABLE.

2) I think my favorite part was the two-run homer

The Indians gave every indication that this might be a Smallball Slog against Roy Halladay in the first when Jason Kipnis singled up the middle, then stole his fifth base of the season. Kipnis then alertly took third on a groundout to first.

And then Carlos Santana punished a Halladay offering, blasting a two-run homer to right. This is Santana's fifth homer in April, meaning that this works out to a brisk 30-homer pace for the

season. I don't really expect Santana to hit 30 bombs this season: he has power, but not really THAT kind of power. Still, even missing a couple of games, Santana is hitting a redonkulous .389/.478/.722 and walked three times in the game.

3) On second thought, I think it was the two-run homer

After Jason Giambi drew a walk off Halladay, Mark Reynolds came to the plate with two outs in the first and deposited Halladay's second pitch over the wall in right-center. The boy is strong. Reynolds now has 8 homers and 22 RBI on the season, and while his slash line of .301/.368/.651 is merely terrific instead of otherworldly like Santana, it's hard to argue that he, rather than Bourn or Swisher or Myers, has been the best off-season signing thus far.

4) You know, it might have been the two-run homer

After a couple of misfires in innings two and three, Reynolds singled to center to bring Lonnie Chisenhall to the plate. Chisenhall frustrates me personally, because I generally only get to see highlights, and when Lonnie Chisenhall is in a highlight, he's usually hitting the ball a very long way. I profess to loving Chisenhall's swing. It is free and easy and smooth and whenever I see him, he is producing LOUD contact. This was no exception, as a home run to right plated Reynolds for a 6-1 lead.

I guess what I'm frustrated by is that Chisenhall makes it look so easy and natural when he succeeds it's hard to figure out why those successes are so spread apart. Chisenhall is still hitting a paltry .225/.253/.403 on the season, so while his ISO of .178 is very nice, his actually HITTING is pretty piss-poor. I understand that he is still quite young and inexperienced, and the sample size is still small, but damn: he just looks so GOOD when he's good. How can there be so much BAD?

5) You could make a case for the two-run homer

Jason Giambi missed a chance to add to the homer total by hitting a measly double in the 5th, but after a pair of groundouts, Ryan Raburn, the Hottest Hitter on the Planet, hit the first pitch

The B-List: 4/30

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

Wednesday, May 01 2013 1:43 PM - Last Updated Wednesday, May 01 2013 1:57 PM

from ex-Tribesman Chad Durbin over the wall in left. Raburn added a solo shot later in the game, giving him back-to-back games with two homers. The roster of Cleveland players with back-to-back multihomer games in the past 20 years reads a bit like a Ring of Honor: Albert Bell, Matt Williams, Manny Ramirez, Jim Thome, and Travis Hafner. Of these, only Williams isn't deeply ingrained into Cleveland Fan's Collective Psyche. Raburn isn't likely to get there, either, but he sure is hot.

Note: Raburn saw a grand total of SEVEN pitches in 4 plate appearances. Let's hope he adjusts when he isn't as hot.

6) After all is said and done, it's probably the two-run homer

I noted yesterday that Mike Brantley is really starting to get some harder contact (or at least more lift) on the ball recently, and with Drew Stubbs on first, Brantley took a 2-2 offering from Durbin into the cheap seats in right for a 400-plus foot bomb off Durbin. It was Brantley's only hit on the game, and while one never wishes for Kenny Lofton Disease, it's nice to see Brantley collect some extra-base hits.

7) Not two-run homers

Asdrubal Cabrera had a two-run single. Everyone made fun of him.

Drew Stubbs was given a pass on his measly ONE-run homer because Raburn had hit a homer immediately in front of him. Had Raburn done the honorable thing and stopped at first, Stubbs' blast would have been a two-run homer, after all.

8) Terror on the Basepaths!

In the 8th inning, Jason Giambi beat out an infield single with a headfirst slide into first.

The B-List: 4/30

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

Wednesday, May 01 2013 1:43 PM - Last Updated Wednesday, May 01 2013 1:57 PM

(Well, *I* was terrified.)

Kipnis stole his 5th base but was caught his second time later in the game. Stubbs stole his 4th base on the season.

9) Hey, we had one of those!

Chad Durbin! (*insert Nelson Muntz laugh*)

10) Adventures in Focus

Nick Hagadone walked two guys in a hitless inning.

Matt Albers pitched a perfect ninth using SIX PITCHES.

I like Hagadone more than Albers, but last night, I liked Albers' inning better.

11) They call it the Bottom of the Order because ... shoot, I have no idea

The 7-8-9 hitters for the Indians went 7-for-12 with 7 runs, 6 RBI, and 4 homers.

12) Everybody Hits!

The B-List: 4/30

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

Wednesday, May 01 2013 1:43 PM - Last Updated Wednesday, May 01 2013 1:57 PM

Every Cleveland starter had at least one hit. Even sub Mike Aviles had a hit in his single trip to the plate. Yan Yan the Catching Man did not ... but who cares?

13) Public Service for the Google Search Engine

Jack Zduriencik banned Nirvana from being played at Mariners games but instituted a policy that at least one Wipers song be played. Since Nirvana is from Washington and the Wipers were from Portland, this would never make it past the Safeco sound board, and this statement is completely untrue. Fire Eric Wedge.