



The Indians briefly surfaced over the .500 mark with a win Saturday, then dropped the third game of the season to return to sea level. Buff looks at the series win by comparing the performances of the three starters, wondering where the Twins plan to get offense from this season, considering unlikely performances, and considering exactly how large the mythical "margin of error" is for the most important elements of the team. He also waves good-bye to Zeq Carrera, which happens periodically.

FINAL

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The B-List: 5/3 - 5/5

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

Monday, May 06 2013 2:02 PM - Last Updated Monday, May 06 2013 2:04 PM

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Twins (12-13)

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The B-List: 5/3 - 5/5

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

Monday, May 06 2013 2:02 PM - Last Updated Monday, May 06 2013 2:04 PM

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Indians (13-13)

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The B-List: 5/3 - 5/5

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

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The B-List: 5/3 - 5/5

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

Monday, May 06 2013 2:02 PM - Last Updated Monday, May 06 2013 2:04 PM

W: C. Perez (1-0)

L: Fien (1-2)

FINAL

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Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

Monday, May 06 2013 2:02 PM - Last Updated Monday, May 06 2013 2:04 PM

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Indians (14-13)

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The B-List: 5/3 - 5/5

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

Monday, May 06 2013 2:02 PM - Last Updated Monday, May 06 2013 2:04 PM

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W: Kazmir (1-1)

L: Correia (3-2)

FINAL

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Twins (13-14)

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Indians (14-14)

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The B-List: 5/3 - 5/5

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W: Pelfrey (3-3) L: Kluber (2-1) S: Perkins (7)

We entered worse, we emerged better.

1) The Importance of Context

Through 5 2/3 innings, the Indians' starting pitchers put up these lines:

Pitcher A: 5 H, 2 R, 1 BB, 7 K, 90 pitches (Win)

Pitcher B: 5 H, 2 R, 1 BB, 5 K, 67 pitches (runner on 1st) (No Decision)

Pitcher C: 5 H, 3 R, 4 BB, 5 K, 92 pitches (runners on 1st and 3rd) (Loss)

I haven't made much of an effort to hide their identities, but the point I was trying to make is that comparing apples to apples makes these guys look like they come from roughly the same orchard. Scott Kazmir (Pitcher A) got a couple more strikeouts and went deeper into counts. Justin Masterson was very efficient before newtifying over the course of his next inning pitched. Corey Kluber couldn't find the plate and gave up an extra run, needing some very bad baserunning from Josh Willingham to bail him out. Kazmir won his game because the offense hit 5-for-7 with runners in scoring position. Masterson was bailed out by some late-inning heroics by Drew Stubbs, who spent the month of April being quasi-fungal. Kluber lost because Mike Pelfrey, who sported a 7.66 ERA coming into the game and pitched a grand total of three games in the majors in 2012, dominated the Indians' bats. Of all the things a starting pitcher can control, situational hitting, Drew Stubbs' phylum, and a gork by the opposing starter aren't ANY of them.

Essentially, we got the same basic performance three times and ended up 2-1.

Here's the question: is this an acceptable "basic performance?"

Well, Kluber certainly shouldn't walk four guys in fewer than six innings. That's plainly

atrocious. You'd like to see Kazmir through a handful fewer pitches to get through six innings (which he did: he got the next batter out on 5 pitches before calling it a day). You'd like to see Masterson finish off the inning without allowing the runner to score (he didn't) and, with that low pitch count, absorb another full inning (he didn't) while giving up no more than one more run (he didn't do that, either). The artificial construct Quality Start is 3 earned runs in 6 innings pitched, which isn't all that great a start (it's a 4.50 ERA, for example), and only Kazmir actually managed that. On the other hand, all three guys were within one out of that threshold, and the K-rate is all but miraculous in terms of recent Indians Rotation History. Masterson's had a pretty good K-rate in recent years, but Kazmir hasn't been good for a while and Kluber's slate is pretty blank.

But offhand, I'd say in the abstract, "Yeah, that's acceptable." In fact, it's pretty good.

2) Auguring in: Westbrooking and Second-Guessing

So what happened to Justin Masterson after this "acceptable" 5 2/3 IP? Well, with a runner on first, whom he HIT, Masterson gave up an RBI single to a thirteen-year-old with a sub-.300 OBP, walked an overmatched .115 hitter after having him down 1-2, and finally got out of the inning. Still, after all this, Masterson still had a 4-3 lead and had not yet thrown 80 pitches. After recording two quick outs in the 7th, Masterson gave up a single, Yan Yan the Catching Man muffed a ball, and a second single scored a 4th run.

Masterson then left the game and watched Cody Allen cough up a two-run shot to Chris Parmalee, who ended April with a .294 slugging percentage.

A final line of 5 R on 8 H in 6 2/3 IP is, frankly, kinda lousy. A line of 2 R on 5 H in 5 2/3 IP is actually pretty good. So what happened in between, and how much time did Terry Francona have to make the decision to hold it down? Well, not much, really. Sure, it's a red flag to walk Aaron Hicks, who isn't really ready to play every day in the bigs. But Masterson really only gave up a couple of singles in the 7th, and fell victim to his defense (Gomes) and his bullpen (Allen) to give up his final two runs. Masterson is ostensibly the workhorse of the staff, and under most plausible circumstances is a better pitcher at 90 pitches than Cody Allen is at 0. I'm not sure what Cody Allen is doing pitching to the left-handed Parmalee when Rich Hill came in later in the game: I assume that at least part of this is saving Hill for the Mauers and Morneaus of the world, but in any event, this isn't really a case of Masterson having a foreseeable blowup, but rather just Simple Fail.

3) Auguring in: Return of the Native

Sam Miller and R.J. Anderson have a [nice article](#) at Baseball Prospectus for subscribers about Scott Kazmir's latest outing, showing that his slider is currently somewhere between "useless" and "what it once was." Much has been made of Kazmir's returned velocity, and as Kazmir is quoted in the piece: "If someone has an above-average fastball, or above-average off-speed, the margin for error is a little bigger." He still has the command of Bobby Witt's more cautious nephew, but his raw stuff will play in the big leagues.

Kazmir did get 12 swinging strikes and threw 67 strikes in 95 pitches, walking only 1 against 7 whiffs. He threw a first-pitch strike to 17 of the 23 hitters he faced. It's just that, as Miller and Anderson point out, fewer of those strikes were headed toward Carlos Santana's target than the numbers might suggest. What it DOES suggest is that if Kazmir can get such positive results when he DOESN'T hit his spots, there is room for improvement if he ever figures out how to actually set hitters up the way he intends.

4) Auguring in: from zero to four in five innings

Corey Kluber should walk fewer guys.

I guess that's what confusing: I didn't watch Kluber in the minors and have no idea whether Sunday's performance was the outlier, or the 12 walkless innings he threw before Sunday. I don't really know a heckuva lot about Corey Kluber, except that he isn't really good enough to walk a guy an inning and win.

5) Behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, and Joe Smiff gave up a run

Joe Smiff entered the game with a K:BB ratio of 11:0 and an ERA of 0.00. He faced Joe Mauer, and walked him. Then he faced Josh Willingham, and walked him. Then he went 3-1 on Justin Morneau.

And then he remembered, "Oh, for cryin' out loud! I'm Joe Freaking Smiff, dammit!" And he got Morneau out, and got Trevor Plouffe to ground out, and although he did give up an RBI single to Ryan Doumit, retired Chris Parmalee on the next pitch and all was right with the world again. He is still holding left-handed hitters to a .133/.188/.133 slash line. LEFT-handed hitters.

6) As goes Jason Kipnis, so goes the nation

Jason Kipnis entered the weekend series slugging a miserable .270, which was actually close to his previous high point of the season of .286 after his third game. To say that Kipnis is off to a slow start is to say that the Charlotte Bobcats aren't very good or that Eddie Edwards was kind of crummy at ski-jumping. Friday night, Kipnis banged out his first triple of the season, driving in two runs, then later drove in a third run with a well-placed bunt single with a man on third. Saturday, Kipnis got the Indians on the board with a solo shot in the first inning en route to a three-hit day that featured his *second* triple of the season, raising his slugging percentage to a more-respectable .386. Along with 6 stolen bases to date, Kipnis looks to be back on track to being a top-half run producer, getting hits in 9 of his last 13 games and collecting multiple hits in a game four times.

But Kipnis' most important plate appearance might have been Friday night with one out in the bottom of the 8th and the bases loaded. Kipnis smashed a hard ground ball to second that Brian Dozier could do nothing with other than throw Kipnis out at first, so while he didn't get a hit, he did drove in his 4th run of the game and, more importantly, tied the game at 6.

On Sunday, Kipnis went 0-for-4 and we lost. (It wasn't his fault.)

7) Today's Ryan Raburn: Drew Stubbs

Kipnis' heroics in the 8th Friday wouldn't have been possible had Drew Stubbs not blooped a double down the right field line to advance Yan Gomes to third, and wouldn't have paid off completely without Stubbs' RBI double in the 10th. Stubbs went 4-for-5 for the game, and got another hit and scored a run on Saturday. His double in the 10

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Friday was actually his
third
of the game.

8) Options are good

While Lonnie Chisenhall is clearly The Future at 3B, and Asdrubal Cabrera will eventually yield to Frank Lindor at SS down the road, it's nice to have a player as close to being a legitimate everyday player as Mike Aviles available to plug into the left side of the infield in a pinch. Aviles went 3-for-4 Friday to raise his overall numbers to .289/.309/.449, which isn't something we have to clamor for as a regular, but it sure beats the Mike Rouses of yesteryear.

9) Bullpen bullets

Scott Barnes struck out 4 of the 7 hitters he faced in two hitless, walkless innings (he hit a guy).

On Saturday, each of the three relief pitchers used ended the game with an ERA under ONE (Shaw 0.69, Smiff 0.93, Perez 0.90).

Rich Hill struck out two batters in one perfect inning.

Matt Albers was not as good.

10) Ho Hum Dept.

Mark Reynolds hit a home run.

11) Credit Where Credit is Due Dept.

Nick Swisher hit a home run.

Zeque Carrera had a successful sacrifice bunt Friday and went 2-for-4 on Saturday. He was rewarded with the wazoo, being designated for assignment after the game to make way for Scott Barnes and outfielders who can play every day.

12) Public Service for the Google Search Engine

Jack Zduriencik sprayed all apple trees with artificial chemicals in order to make all apples in the state of Washington fail the USDA's standards for "organic" designation. Not only is the effort required here nonsensically large, but I'm not sure it would even apply, and the statement is entirely false. Fire Eric Wedge.