



The Indians completed a four-game sweep of Oakland, and in today's B-List Buff looks at the outstanding performance by Scott Kazmir, waves hello and good-bye to Scott Barnes, points out that Cody Allen's first impression wasn't as deep as his second first impression, chuckles gleefully at the Everybody Hits Offense, digs the longball right along with the chicks, and wonders if there is something he is missing with Matt Albers. Specifically, the point of him on the roster. On to Detroit!

FINAL

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Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

Friday, May 10 2013 7:00 AM - Last Updated Monday, May 13 2013 10:05 AM

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Indians (18-14)

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W: Kazmir (2-1)

L: B. Colon (3-2)

That was *fun*.

1) Scotty the K

In the 4th inning of yesterday's game, Scott Kazmir set down the A's in order on a groundout and a pair of fly balls to the outfield.

Why was this inning notable? There were two things notable about it:

- a) Derek Norris had a 2-0 count before fouling off a pitch, then had a 3-1 count before flying out to These marked the ONLY 2-0 and 3-1 counts Kazmir had on a hitter.
- b) This was the only one of Kazmir's six innings in which he did not strike out TWO GUYS.

Kazmir finished with 10 strikeouts, two in each of the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 5th, and 6th. NINE of this strikeouts were swinging. Kazmir induced an insane NINETEEN swinging strikes, and according to ESPN's Buster Olney, fully THIRTEEN of them were in the strike zone. (The dirty secret of swinging strikes is that a good number of them come on pitches that looked like strikes when they started, then tail or bend OUT of the strike zone. Kazmir simply threw strikes the A's couldn't touch.) On the day, Kazmir threw 72 strikes in 103 pitches, including first-pitch strikes to NINETEEN of the 23 hitters he faced. He did not walk a single batter.

Kazmir's first start of the season was pretty crummy. He didn't make it through the 4th inning ... against HOUSTON ... gave up more hits than he got outs, and posted a lousy 4:3 K:BB ratio. He really wasn't any good at all. Since then, he has given up exactly 5 hits in each of his three starts, cutting his walks from 2 to 1 to 0, and raising his strikeouts from 4 to 7 to 10. Continuing this pattern, I expect Kazmir to strike out 13 in his next game while walking negative one.

While Kazmir has a little work to do in trying to either be more efficient (he allowed 24 foul balls, which helped raise his pitch count even though he didn't walk anyone) or go another inning deeper into a game (his 103 pitches marks his highest workload this season, which is probably prudent for his 4th start since about 1985), he's been simply terrific since that first start. If there is a concern, it is that he hasn't made it through a start yet without allowing a home run, but that might be the cost of doing business at 93-95 mph in the strike zone.

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Kazmir's command has gotten progressively better, evidenced not only by the higher strike percentage and lower walk count, but by watching WHERE he is putting his pitches. His slider has that tantalizing "Look, it's a hittable str...gah, no it's not!" placement. His fastball hits targets all over the zone. And the thing that intrigues me most is that he just doesn't look like he's working very hard to get that velocity. He looks kind of like some ordinary guy, a little like Scott Bailes back in the day, and then the guy misses the ball and you look up and the gun reads 94.

I'm not sure it's reasonable to expect a slew of 10:0 K:BB outings to be forthcoming, if for no other reason than no pitcher does that kind of slewing. But that was a dominant performance.

2) It's the pitching, stupid

Over the last 11 games, the Indians have given up 0 runs three times, 2 runs twice, and 3 runs four times. In the other two games, they gave up 4 (lost) and 6 (won). The staff has a 2.34 ERA, holding opponents to a .197 batting average.

3) It's the offense, stupid

Mind you, the team is also hitting .319 over that span, scoring 76 runs (one short of 7 per game) with 24 HR and the TEAM sports a .946 OPS. The TEAM.

4) Everybody hits!

Each Cleveland starter got a hit off Bartolo Colon et al yesterday, including 5 extra-base hits. Every Cleveland starter scored except Lonnie Chisenhall.

Mike Brantley and Mark Reynolds each collected a pair of hits. Reynolds' two hits travelled further.

5) One of these things is not like the others

Kazmir: 6 IP, 0 BB

C. Allen: 1 IP, 0 BB

Barnes: 1 IP, 0 BB

Albers: 1 IP, 3 BB

Generally speaking, Matt Albers has been ... meh. He's given up a run in 5 of his 9 appearances: since he averages an inning an outing, this isn't very good. He's walked 8 guys in 9 2/3 innings, which is plainly atrocious. His 8:8 K:BB ratio is awful. His WHIP is 1.76, which hurts my eye.

Of course, his other peripherals aren't too bad. 9 hits in 9 2/3 IP isn't great, but it's okay. 1 homer's acceptable. 8 Ks is actually pretty good. If he had 2 walks instead of 8, he'd be really valuable.

And there's the rub, of course: you can't just say, "And now Matt Albers will stop walking people," any more than you can say "And now Drew Stubbs will stop striking out." That's part of who Drew Stubbs is. You can't really remove one element of his game because it chafes you. Instead, you have to decide if you can live with the chafing because he offers other things that allow you to compensate. In Stubbs' case, he's a good baserunner and excellent fielder and has some pop. To date, I don't think he's been very valuable. But at least I see the *point*.

With Albers, he walked 36 guys in 67 innings in 2009. He walked 34 guys in 75 2/3 IP in 2010. He walked 31 in 64 2/3 IP in 2011. He had a minor renaissance last year with a mere 22 walks in 60 1/3 IP last season, but instead of being a trend, it looks like an outlier. Matt Albers walks guys.

I'm not sure I really see the *point*.

6) You **TOTALLY** get a second chance to make a first impression

I work in Support, so a lot of times, the first time I interact with someone, I don't get their Best Foot Forward. They're usually frustrated that they can't get the system to work the way they intended, or they've made an egregious error, or they feel stupid, or they feel that the programmers are stupid, and they're certainly prepared for me to be unhelpful and/or rude. Once we establish that I know the system well and I certainly am not going to be unhelpful or rude, they're better able to relax and subsequent calls go a bit more smoothly. I never base my conception of a person on the **FIRST** time they call, because that's usually highly situation-dependent. Of course, if you suck three times in a row, you probably suck, but hey. Keep an open mind, at least. People may or may not be able to change who they **ARE**, but **ANYONE** can change how they **INTERACT**.

My introduction to Cody Allen was when he gave up two runs in a 10-8 loss to Toronto, walking two guys and coughing up a homer in the process. In his next outing, Allen gave up another pair of runs, this time in two innings, and kept up his two-hits-per-inning pace. I thought Cody Allen was either Not Ready or a Schmoe and left it at that.

In his next ten outings, Cody Allen has given up 1 run in 8 1/3 IP. He's allowed a total of 7 hits and 7 of his 10 outings have been hitless (caveat: two of these were one-out appearances, and he walked a guy in one of them).

Yesterday, while I grant that the lead was 9-2 so the Leverage was "low," Albers had loaded the bases with nobody out in the top of the 8th on a pair of walks and a pair of singles (he gave up a run). Allen strode in from the mound and proceeded to strike out John Jaso and Derek Norris swinging before getting a ground ball out to end the inning.

Anyway, I'm not 100% sure that Cody Allen is Truly Ready or anything, but I sure like him a heckuva lot more than I like Matt Albers.

7) Welcome to the ... wait, I mean, so long!

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Scott Barnes was called up on April 28th. He was terrible against KC.

Scott Barnes was sent down April 30th.

Scott Barnes was called up May 5th. He was great against Minnesota (4 Ks in 2 IP), and was pretty good yesterday (hitless, scoreless inning, but with a walk, and two outs were liners).

Scott Barnes was sent down May 9th.

Based on my 16-year-old's facial hair, Scott Barnes is 15 years old.

8) Chicks dig the longball

Jason Kipnis gave the Tribe a lead they would never relinquish by hitting a two-run homer off formerly-interesting Bartolo Colon. He hit it to the opposite field, which is a good sign to me. Kipnis' homer travelled about 385 feet.

Not to be outdone, Nick Swisher's homer to right went 405 feet.

And then Mark Reynolds ... well, look: you're not going to feel very manly if your test is "did I hit the ball as far as Mark Reynolds." Because that answer is usually, "No." Nick, you're plenty manly.

You're just not Mark Reynolds.

9) Public Service for the Google Search Engine

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Jack Zduriencik replaced all frozen desserts in the greater Seattle area with ones made of tofu. The logistics here are terrifying, and I'm not sure the residents of Seattle would actually notice, and this statement is thoroughly untruthful. Fire Eric Wedge.