



The Indians dropped a game in Philadelphia, wasting a thoroughly mediocre start by Scott Kazmir and showing little offensive ability against the mighty Someguy Pettibone, who I wouldn't be able to identify with a copy of his driver's license. In the past three games, the Indians have managed a grand total of three runs, and in today's B-List, Buff addresses his major concern with Kazmir's skill set, wonders what induces Mark Reynolds to produce the same result three times that is neither a strikeout nor a hit, and lauds the outfield arms.

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Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

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W: Pettibone (3-0)

L: Kazmir(2-2)

Any time you face a AAA call-up, you take your chances.

1) Root Cause Analysis

Scott Kazmir really does only three things that are troubling for a starting pitcher:

- a) Gives up home runs
- b) Walks an extra guy
- c) Racks up high pitch counts and has to leave early

Last night against the Phillies, he gave up two solo shots, making this his fifth consecutive start in which he's allowed a home run. For the record, Kazmir has made five starts. In his previous two starts, he had posted 7:1 and 10:0 K:BB ratios, each of which is outstanding; last night, it was 3:2, which is not. And while he gave up 3 runs on 5 hits through 5 complete innings, his second tater came to the first batter (on his 96th pitch) in the 6th inning and Kazmir's final line is a ... well, kinda lousy ... 4 runs in 5 IP.

None of this is to say that Kazmir lacks skillz: he plainly does not. But what Kazmir DOES appear to lack is any real, consistent COMMAND of his excellent stuff. When you miss enough spots with your fastball, even at 95 mph, major-league hitters will punish you. (A slider works in much the same way.) When you miss enough spots, you walk hitters. And when you miss enough spots, you end up with a bunch of 7-pitch plate appearances that, even if they end well, still took 7 pitches to get to.

To me, I'm willing to take a solo shot here and there as the cost of doing business as Scott Kazmir. He throws hard. His fastball does not appear to the layman to have any great movement. This is not necessarily terrible, but it does remind me of discussions I had with Cliff Lee in 2007 and 2008: in 2007, his location was inconsistent (or downright terribible). In 2008 it was fantremendacular. And Kazmir throws harder than Lee did (marginally, but still). Of course, Lee had a cutter and I can't identify one with Kazmir, but the point is that location is Real Important, and Kazmir lacks it.

But if I'm willing to absorb a couple of dingers, I'm less sanguine about walking a guy hitting .207/.277/.233 with a guy on base. He's the catcher! What's he going to do, limp menacingly? And then, with two men on, Kazmir gave up a two-run double to John Mayberry Jr., a right-handed hitter in the 8 slot.

Why do I mention the 8 slot? Because it comes right before the 9 slot, which in the N.L. is manned by a guy who normally possesses the hitting acumen of a sockeye salmon. The pitcher! You prolly don't want to flat-out WALK Mayberry there (he hits .242 and possesses a few salmonlike qualities of his own), but he is right-handed and fully half (11 of 22) of his hits are for extra bases. Did I mention the pitcher was coming up next? If you throw a strike to Mayberry, it better be a damned good borderline strike.

And there's the rub: I don't think Kazmir, at this point in his career, is capable of being that fine. Let's give credit to Mayberry for a good piece of hitting as well, but really, I'll go ahead of jump into that Attribution Error with both feet.

2) Captain Clutch!

With two men on base in the second inning, RBI King Mark Reynolds popped out to second on the first pitch. Take a mental snapshot of this moment, it will come in handy. But in any event, with one out and runners at second and third, Mike Brantley took strike one, calmly watched strike two, yawned at ball one, and lined a two-run single on the next pitch. Nice work by Brantley there.

I write about this because it represents the offense the Indians showed in the last three games.

3) Déjà vu all over again

After popping out to second on the first pitch with two men in scoring position in the second, Mark Reynolds had a Redemption Moment in the third when, after a walk and TWO hit batsmen, he strode to the plate with the bases loaded and two out.

He popped out to second on a full count.

4) Deja déjà vu vu all over again again

Asdrubal Cabreral led off the 8th inning with a triple, then watched Nick Swisher watch strike three. Then he watched Carlos Santana walk. Then he watched Mark Reynolds bat with two men on base.

Reynolds popped out to second.

Look, I accept Mark Reynolds striking out, even if he hasn't whiffed at his career rate this season. I will accept a fly ball to the outfield, or even a ground ball to the left side. But popping out to second? THREE TIMES in one game? What the hell is that?

5) A contrast in styles

Cody Allen entered the game in relief of Kazmir. He threw 7 strikes in 10 pitches, striking out one in a perfect inning of work.

The wheels came off the Brian Shaw All-Star Express as he yacked up three hits and a pair of runs in 1 1/3 innings of work to nearly double his ERA. He threw 14 strikes in 25 pitches.

I liked Allen's better.

6) Full Disclosure

Shaw's second run was actually allowed by Rich Hill, who managed the Hagadonian task of throwing twice as many balls (8) as strikes (4) and got lucky that Mike Brantley's arm is better than I thought.

7) Nice Hose!

Mike Bourn ran down a fly ball with Kevin Frandsen on first, then got the ball in to Jason Kipnis to relay to Swisher to double off Frandsen. This is the classical 8-4-3 double play you normally hear about.

Brantley caught Freddy Galvis trying to stretch his RBI single into a double to end the 8th inning.

Much has been made about the “three CF outfield” that Cleveland can play when Brantley, Bourn, and Stubbs are all roaming their respective pastures, but it helps that the guys aren’t just fast. They’ll keep baserunners honest on the balls they don’t get to as well.

8) Credit Wherer Credit is Due Dept.

Kipnis stole his 7th base of the season. It made not a whit of difference.

Nick Swisher went 2-for-3. The one out was a K looking. With Asdrubal Cabrera on third.

Cabrera’s triple was his first this season as a right-handed hitter. He is now sporting a .632 OPS as a right-handed hitter, which is merely awful instead of rancid.

Scott Kazmir hit a fair ball, the first Cleveland pitcher to do so this season.

9) Public Service for the Google Search Engine

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Jack Zduriencik is single-handedly responsible for writing the scripts for all of the terrifyingly-bad “sitcoms” my ten-year-old daughter watches on the Disney Channel. This would not only require a Herculean effort, but I do not acknowledge that these shows have scripts, and this statement isn’t true at all. Fire Eric Wedge.