



The Indians swept the weekend series from the punchless Mariners behind strong starting performances from Ubaldo Jimenez, Zach Mcallister, and Justin Masterson, but the real excitement of the weekend came from the walkoff heroics of Jason Kipnis and (to a lesser ... really lesser ... really completely far, far lesser extent) Mark Reynolds. In today' B-List, Buff notes that while the starting pitching has been a lot of fun, sometimes the bullpen has not, and instead the combination of longballs and baserunning has been the source of True Joy.

FINAL

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The B-List: 5/17 - 5/19

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

Monday, May 20 2013 1:06 PM - Last Updated Tuesday, May 21 2013 9:19 AM

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Mariners (20-22)

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Indians (23-17)

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W: Pestano (1-0)

L: Luetge (0-1)

FINAL

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Mariners (20-23)

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Indians (24-17)

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W: C. Perez (2-0)

L: O. Perez (1-1)

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Mariners (20-24)

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Indians (25-17)

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W: Masterson (7-2) L: F. Hernandez (5-3)

On second thought, Keep Eric Wedge.

1) The Resistable Force

Here's what you need to know about Brendan Ryan: he doesn't get extra-base hits. This is largely because he doesn't get ANY hits, but he entered Saturday's game with an ISO of TEN. Point oh one oh. 0.010. Before this weekend's series, he had ZERO extra-base hits. Ryan entered the game with a "slash line" of .163/.224/.173, which shows that throwing strikes must be a bit more challenging than we give pitchers credit for, because somehow Brendan Ryan has drawn 8 walks this season while hitting in the threatening manner of a drowsy Magikarp. His best attack is "Flail." Inside his 6'2" 192-lb frame he packs the musculature of parboiled turnips.

So to second-guess Terry Francona's decision to push Zach McAllister "one more inning" before yielding a two-run homer to Brendan Ryan is to question whether the federal government should have purchased flood insurance in Death Valley. Brendan Ryan has 16 home runs in 2153 official AB, meaning that while the moon may not need to be fully blue, it at least has to be in a configuration rarely seen by human eyes.

Of course, all of this just serves to hide exactly how effective McAllister was in his first seven innings of work: you would probably like to see more than ONE strikeout in 7 innings of work, but McAllister was truly sailing through the feeble Mariners' lineup, giving up four hits and a walk while keeping the scoreboard clean. McAllister went back to dancing with what brung him, so to speak: throwing strikes, locating well, and mixing in the new split-fingered fastball to get 11 ground ball outs.

This marks McAllister's 8th consecutive start of allowing no more than 3 earned runs, and while he didn't get the win, I count only his 7 2/3 shutout innings against Oakland as being a more effective start. Given the opportunity, I'd still advocate he throw strikes to Brendan Ryan.

2) Please start your Cy Young winner against Justin Masterson

The marquee matchup of the weekend featured Cleveland's nominal Ace, Justin Masterson, against Seattle's unquestioned Ace, Felix Hernandez. As Masterson himself said in a post-game interview, Hernandez is a better pitcher than Masterson, mostly by virtue of the fact that Masterson is a human being and Hernandez is a cyborg from the future. Hernandez is a better pitcher than Masterson because Hernandez is a better pitcher than X for all X.

Unless, of course, you're talking about actual results. Then Masterson is better.

I don't think it takes a lot of analysis to say that Hernandez wasn't as sharp Sunday as he'd been in his previous six starts, in which he allowed a TOTAL of four earned runs while going 8 innings FOUR TIMES. But it also doesn't take any earth-shattering insight to note that Masterson's performance would have slotted in nicely with any of the six starts Hernandez racked up during that string, except that he struck out more hitters than Hernandez had in all but one of the six starts. Masterson struck out 11 Mariners in 7 complete innings, giving up 3 singles and walking two guys. He did not throw a wild pitch, although he did somehow hit Brendan Ryan, which is tantamount to fouling Manute Bol on a three-point attempt.

Masterson wasn't perfect: his 64% strike percentage wasn't terrific, especially seeing as though some of the 18 swinging strikes he got were on pitches that wafted out of the strike zone. Wait a minute, 18 swinging strikes? What the hell am I complaining about?! I'm clearly an idiot. Pay less attention to me and more to Justin Masterson.

3) Amazing stat of the weekend

Cleveland is now 7-1 against pitchers who had previously won a Cy Young award. The one to beat the Tribe was Jake Peavy. This confuses me.

4) Where the f*#^ is that other damn shoe?!

I'm still waiting for that bastard to drop.

At what point do we have to conclude that Ubaldo Jimenez, while probably likely never to regain the 15-1 form of Colorado, has actually righted the ship and is now a productive member of the rotation? Well, I'd have to say that a truly productive member of the rotation is capable of being trusted and effective through more than 5 innings: Jimenez was pulled immediately after allowing a leadoff single to Justin Smoak to start the sixth inning in order to allow Rich Hill to face the heavy-splitting Raul Ibanez. Jimenez needed 95 pitches to get through those five innings, and if anyone has a shorter leash or quicker hook in the majors than Jimenez, I'm pretty sure I don't follow his team.

On the other hand, part of the reason that Jimenez needed 95 pitches to get through those 5 innings was because he'd struck out 9 Mariners. He only walked two, the same number as Masterson, although he'd given up 6 hits before the 6th, and one of those was a solo shot to Kendry Morales. Jimenez didn't exactly pepper the strike zone, throwing a first-pitch strike to fewer than half the hitters he faced (10 of 23), and his strike percentage was barely 60%. But whiffing two guys an inning is pretty sweet.

Right now, Francona appears to be taking Jimenez' success as the bird in the hand it is: in his last four starts, Jimenez has given up 2 or fewer runs every time, but recorded an out in the 7th only once. It's exciting that Jimenez' K:BB ratio over his last three starts is a sparkling 25:6. It would be more encouraging that this is truly sustainable if he'd finished the sixth inning more than one time in three. Still, for a guy with back-to-back 7-run hairballs in the second week of the season, this is heady stuff.

5) Get testy all you want: if you're going to get paid for One Magic Number, you need to make that number *increase*

Chris Perez pitched a fine inning in support of Jimenez, pumping 9 strikes in 11 pitches in a perfect 9th of a tie game before ceding the stage to Vinny the Vulture Pestano to poach the win.

His performance in support of McAllister was not quite as "fine."

Look, every closer gives up runs, even St. Mariano Rivera. The pitch to Ibanez was in a bad location, and Perez said as much. The pitch to Smoak wasn't terrible, but Smoak has power and punished Perez for it. Back-to-back homers to cough up a 4-2 lead isn't any good, but sometimes the other guy is good, too. We still won the game.

However, if Perez wants to get all uppity about being asked questions about whether he's feeling 100% or shouldn't be used on consecutive nights, you know what he should do? Give up fewer home runs to guys who enter the weekend with a .315 slugging percentage (.071 ISO), and give up fewer home runs to guys who are old enough to remember Knight Rider's original broadcasts. You know when you have to answer questions about why you sucked?

When you sucked.

(Note: I understand that Perez' frustration was with any implication that his health is a factor when Occam would suggest he simply had an off day, but still: sometimes, you just have to wear it.)

6) On this topic

Rich Hill.

7) Let's hear it for the Boys in Blue!

With the score freshly tied in the bottom of the ninth, Jason Kipnis singled and went to third on Asdrubal Cabrera's double. After an intentional walk to Nick Swisher, RBI King Mark Reynolds came to the plate with the infield in an managed a sharp ground ball to Brendan Ryan at short. Ryan may be an execrable hitter (he is), but he is a terrific shortstop, and quickly recovered to throw the ball home to force Kipnis at the plate.

Except a funny thing happened on the way to a 6-2-3 double play: Jesus Montero forgot that in order to record a force out at home, he had to actually have a foot on the plate with the ball in his hand. His foot was on the plate. Then it wasn't. Then he caught the ball. Kipnis was safe, and the game was over.

This is a pretty bad play from Montero (more on this later), but it was a good call by the home plate umpire Mike Winters. The umpires have been under a lot of scrutiny lately, what with the botched home run call in the A's series and the crew that allowed the Houston pitching change, but Winters deserves credit for his attention to detail on that one.

8) Late-inning heroics, big and small

Reynolds' "big blow" wasn't exactly the stuff of legend: not often does one tell the grandchildren about the "walkoff fielder's choice." Kipnis featured largely in the other walkoff of the weekend, though: with two outs in the bottom of the 10th on Friday, Drew Stubbs drew a walk, stole second, and took third on a routine ground ball to second that Mike Bourn flat-out beat out for an infield single. Kipnis then lined a ball to right that would have won the game if it had been three feet lower, but since it wasn't, it cleared the fence for a homer that finished the game 6-3 instead of 4-3.

Kipnis now has four consecutive multi-hit games, including 3 doubles and a pair of homers. In his last 10 games, Kipnis has a hit in 9 of them, and has raised his average from .221 to .257. He is now slugging .500 on the season and sports an above-average OPS of .823.

9) Hustle at the ballyard

Bourn's infield single wasn't even the most notable "hustle play" this weekend. After leading off the 4th inning on Sunday with a double, Mike Aviles alertly took third on Drew Stubbs' slow dribbler in front of the plate. Rounding third, he noted that Montero had pounced on the ball and was watching his follow-through on the throw to first, while Felix Hernandez was ... well ... it's hard to say what Felix Hernandez was thinking. He might have been concerned that people would post spoilers about the new Star Trek movie. Perhaps he was concerned that someone would point out that his large frame and head make him look a bit like Livan Hernandez. I will tell you what Felix Hernandez was NOT thinking about: covering home plate.

Aviles simply kept running and scored the sixth run of the game. This is one of those instances where it's nice to be able to see the highlight, because trying to explain "Drew Stubbs grounded out to catcher, Mike Aviles scored from second" from the game log alone was going to be a real challenge.

Anyway, this is the time for people to stop comparing Carlos Santana to a guy who can't play catcher. That would be Jesus Montero.

10) Mighty Mike!

It is one thing to score a couple runs off Felix Hernandez because of a couple singles and some truly execrable defense by Justin "Wickets" Smoak. It is another for Bourn to beat out an infield single with two outs, get a clean single from Kipnis, then have Mike Brantley stride to the plate and blast a ball 400-plus feet to center.

Brantley isn't a home run hitter: he's just not. This is fine. Brantley does hit his share of doubles and has 12 career triples, but the man has a career ISO of .101. He's more of a speed and on-base guy without actual top-end speed or really useful on-base skills. But he really hit that ball, and it effectively ended the game with Masterson pumping Whiffle BBs.

(Note: Brantley's .365 OBP this season is quite fine, but his career mark of .331 is substandard.)

11) Credit Where Credit is Due Dept.

Bourn not only beat out an important pair of infield hits, but he had multiple hits in all three games and ended the series hitting .321 for the season.

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Vinnie Pestano returned from the disabled list to pick up the win Friday night with a scoreless inning of work.

Cody Allen and Brian Shaw chipped in 1 and 2/3 scoreless innings respectively.

Mike Aviles went 2-for-4 with a run scored in each of his two games.

12) Public Service for the Google Search Engine

Jack Zduriencik watched the weekend series against the Indians and continued to employ Eric Wedge. Actually, this statement is 100% true. Fire Eric Wedge.