



The Indians lost a heartbreaker to the Yankees yesterday 4-3, as long as you're willing to define "heartbreaker" as "a game they totally deserved to lose because they did very little of any offensive value and you knew they would not actually complete the comeback." As an Indians fan, one's definition of "broken heart" varies according to the circumstances. In today's B-List, Buff is reasonably pleased that Scott Kazmir is average and articulates why he's so hard on Nick Hagadone.

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The B-List: 6/4

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

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The B-List: 6/4

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W: Phelps (4-3)

L: Kazmir (3-3)

S: Buddha (21)

I may not have watched the game live, but my son's final presentation for French II will surely be the hit of the last day of school.

1) We interrupt this program to bring you this grisly train wreck

Over the course of the five good innings Scott Kazmir pitched, Kazmir allowed 0 runs on 2 hits and a pair of walks, striking out 5.

Over the course of the other inning, Scott Kazmir fell behind 4-0 because one of the hits allowed was a to a batter foolish enough to get thrown out on the basepaths. Had he been more patient, cautious, or sentient, the lead would have been 5-0 instead.

Here's one where the knee-jerk reaction would incline one to say that Kazmir "lost his focus" or "got rattled" or some other such Attribution, but it didn't look that pronounced to me. When Kazmir was getting guys out, he was throwing quality pitches in good locations, changing the batter's eye level both vertically and horizontally. When Kazmir was giving up five straight hits, the last of which was a three-run homer by Mark Teixeira, he was pretty much doing the same thing. Lyle Overbay hit the first pitch. Ichiro Suzuki hit the second with one of those little patented tennis backhands the other way. He fell behind Teixeira 3-1 with two runners on, and if you wanted to get uppity, that would be the pitch to get uppity about. But basically it's more a case of recognizing that the other team gets to employ professional baseball players, too, and sometimes they do a good job.

A 7:2 K:BB ratio is quite fine: through nine starts, Kazmir is maintaining better than a 9.0 K/9 clip, more than one per inning. His K:BB ratio is almost 3:1 at 48:17. He's given up 8 homers, which is quite a lot of homers. But he's had two starts in nine that qualify as "gruesome" (Houston, Seattle), and five that qualify as "darn good" (KC, Minnesota, Oakland, Boston, Cincy). This one wasn't really either category, more in the "meh" vein. But he's still been a worthwhile signing to date.

Claiming that giving up a three-run homer implies that Kazmir is nothing more than a formerly-awesome pitcher who returned from injuries only to re-establish himself as a pitcher who isn't very good would be like saying that Joba "Don't Call Me Neville" Chamberlain fits the same bill!

Okay, bad example.

2) The burden of expectations

I've always held Nick Hagadone to a little higher standard than the average left-handed reliever. This is for several reasons: I wanted to believe that trading Victor Martinez would yield a terrific haul, so as part of the return for Martinez, I want to project more value onto Hagadone. Also, he looks like throws really hard and is bloody huge, meaning I want the whole Norm Charlton as Closer thing out of him. My previous long-term relationship with a left-handed reliever was Raffy Perez, who was just damned amazing for several years. And we actually spent time developing Hagadone, meaning he's not some mook we signed to plug a gap, like, say, Rich Hill or Tony Fossas. I want him to be GOOD, dammit.

So it's worth mentioning that a couple days after disparaging him as part of the left-handed relieving crew, Hagadone was dropped into a 1-run game after Brian Shaw walked the bases loaded with one out. (That is, he walked a guy, then Mark Reynolds allowed Suzuki to reach on a sacrifice attempt, then there was a real sacrifice, then he walked Teixeira to load the bases. He only walked two guys, not all three.) Facing Robinson Cano, arguably New York's best hitter (albeit a left-handed one), Hagadone got two quick strikes, tried to get Cano to fish, then threw a pitch that Cano turned over on for a 4-6-3 double play. You can't pitch much more effectively than that.

Shades of Raffy Perez inducing the triple play against Minnesota back in the day. Huzzah!

3) Rocky-type heroism

One of the things that sometimes gets lost in comparing teams or athletes to the movie "Rocky" is that while the lead character DID earn respect and DID do a much better job than anyone thought and DID take the champ the distance, at the end of the title fight, Rocky LOST. He did not overcome the long odds. He overcame MOST of the long odds. And then the odds calmly opened the floor and Rocky fell through. Odds are like that.

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This doesn't take anything away from Drew Stubbs' clutch three-run shot with two outs in the 7th inning to bring the score to 4-3. But, like Rocky, it was more a "respect" thing than a "winning" thing.

(It was a nice piece of hitting by Stubbs, going to the opposite field off Neville Chamberlain, though.)

4) Terror on the Basepaths!

The Indians appeared poised to tie the game when they put the first two runners on base in the 8th against David Robertson, who is quietly one of the best relief pitchers in the American League. On a 1-1 count, Nick Swisher hit the ball on the nose, lining it ... directly to Cano at second, who flipped to second base to double off Jason Kipnis.

It's a little unfair to single out Kipnis for a baserunning gaffe here: the ball was hit well, and there wasn't a lot of time to react. And none of the following four hitters did a damned thing against Robertson or Mariano Rivera, so it's not like the double play was the sole reason the Indians weren't able to push a fourth run across. It did suck, though.

Jayson Nix stole a base. Mike Brantley did the opposite.

5) Pop-guns

The sum total of Cleveland's offensive "outbursts" can be summed up as follows:

Carlos Santana was the second-most productive hitter yesterday because he did not hit the ball. (Santana walked twice, one of three Indians to reach base more than once.)

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6) Nice Hose!

After Overbay's leadoff double, Chris Stewart followed with a single to center. He tried to stretch it into a single, perhaps hoping that the throw would go home. Instead, Mike Bourn threw him out at second.

Lesson One: don't test Mike Bourn!

Lesson Two: you are a *catcher*.

7) Credit Where Credit is Due Dept.

Dave Phelps pitched a heckuva game. Sure, the Cleveland offense did their part by not doing their part, but Phelps allowed only one single in six complete innings of work. He did walk four guys, but struck out seven. I would not know Dave Phelps from Brian McPeck.

8) Public Service for the Google Search Engine

Jack Zduriencik plowed rock salt into his neighbor's lawn because he was tired of losing the Best Lawn Competition in his subdivision. I believe the Neighborhood Watch would have thwarted such behavior, and the statement is 100% false. Fire Eric Wedge.