



The Indians took the series with a 6-3 win over the Royals, and head to the weekend in sole possession of second place in the A.L. Central. In today's B-List, Buff talks about Justin Masterson's good fortune, Mark Reynolds' fine glove work, Mike Brantley's surprising power surge, Brian Shaw's proper use, and the fact that the Royals really simply lack players who can actually HIT. Which is a funny thing to say about a team that outhit yours 12-to-7. He has made better points.

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The B-List: 6/19

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}

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The B-List: 6/19

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W: Masterson (9-5) L: L. Mendoza (2-4)

We won because of Mike Brantley's homer power and Mark Reynolds' defense. I wanted to write that down, because I'm pretty sure I never will again.

1) The Charles Nagy Commemorative Tightrope

In the first inning, Justin Masterson allowed a single and a walk, but thanks to two swinging Ks, did not give up a run.

In the second inning, Masterson allowed a pair of singles but induced three groundouts and escaped the inning without a run scoring.

In the 4th inning, Masterson gave up two singles AND a double AND a stolen base and STILL gave up only one run (thanks to a super grab of a line drive by pseudo-first-baseman Mark Reynolds).

In the 5th inning, Masterson's three singles alternated with groundouts and a K to produce only one run.

Masterson did toss two perfect frames, and his 8 punchouts (and 9:2 GO:FO ratio) were a big reason for the limited damage, but the fact is, when you give up 2 and 3 hits an inning, you really got pretty fortunate to give up only 2 runs in 6 1/3 IP. Masterson did throw strikes (76 in 115 pitches) and limited his walks (2 is the fewest he's allowed in his past five starts), but then, the Royals are famously infamous for their inability to walk. Still, if you face the Royals, there's no reason not to take advantage of this. Look, it's a Quality Start, and it never really felt like the Royals were going to take Masterson deep (Moustakas did hit his double well) or put up a big rally against him, but 9 hits and 11 baserunners in 6 1/3 innings is a lot of baserunners.

Is it time to wonder whether Masterson's old platoon-split issues are raising their collective ugly heads? Thus far, lefties hit .247/.334/.363 off Masterson, which is almost 200 points of OPS higher than the righties' line of .182/.267/.236. (Two thirty six!) On the other hand, from 2010 to 2012, these numbers were much more discouraging: lefties hit .292/.359/.427 off Masterson, while righties hit .234/.313/.303. Oddly, the difference between the split is even LARGER in 2013 than it had been before. However, the increase in distance isn't due to badness, but rather excessive GOODNESS, if there is such a thing. Reducing lefties' AVG by 45 points and their SLG by 64 is great. But he's reduced those numbers against righties EVEN MORE.

That's pretty astounding.

So while it's not really the root of anything right now, it does bear mentioning that 7 of the Royals' 9 hits off Masterson came from left-handed hitters.

If you want an odd split, check out Masterson's home/away ERA. Much of this is due to the fact that he's given up 6 taters on the road and only 2 at home. He also sports a higher walk rate, but it's proly the homers.

2) Flashing the leather

Did I mention Mark Reynolds' diving snare of Alex Gordon's liner above? Let's mention it again anyway.

With two outs and runners on second and third, Alex Gordon nailed a pitch down the right field line. Reynolds moved quickly to his left, dove toward the bag, and snatched the ball before it could become a two-run double.

I mention this because it was probably the second-best play Reynolds made last night.

Aesthetically, I thought his backhanded grab of an Elliot Johnson ground ball with a runner on first was a better play, not only because it's harder for a right-hander to field balls to his right than to his left, but because Reynolds then took the beat to rise and throw the LEAD runner out. Also, the "diving grab" of Gordon's didn't actually involve "diving." It was a great reaction play, though, and saved two runs, something fielding Johnson's grounder did not do.

I give Reynolds a hard time for his defense, but those plays were terrific.

3) Terror on the Basepaths!

Eric Hosmer hit two singles off Justin Masterson and stole second base each time. Elliot Johnson also stole second off Masterson and catcher Carlos Santana. Of course, the Indians grabbed two steals off reliever Kelvin Herrera and catcher Sally Perez: Jason Kipnis stole second, and Mike Bourn stole third.

But the most terrifying baserunning was by the Royals in the 9th inning, the first egregious ninth-inning baserunning blunder made by the Royals since June 18

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, 2013. After Hosmer doubled in a run with one out, Perez hit a routine ground ball to defensive replacement John McDonald at third, who looked back Hosmer then threw calmly to Reynolds at first to retire Perez. Except ... then Hosmer RAN TO THIRD. Reynolds threw to Mike Aviles covering the bag. Hosmer was out by eight feet. This *ended the game*

. You know the saying, "Don't make the first or last out of an inning at third base?" Most of the sentiment behind this is that second base is still "in scoring position," so if there's a doubt, stay at second and you'll likely still have the same chance to score. (I guess it's okay to make the second out of an inning at third base.)

But hear me out here: if Hosmer had gotten to third with two outs, he might have ... um ... you see ... I ... no, look, this is just Brain Death Deluxe. I have to think he saw McDonald go to his left and continue toward first to throw Perez out and figured, "I can beat him to third, he'll never be able to cover," forgetting that by A.L. rules established in the 5th century B.C., THERE GET TO BE OTHER PLAYERS ON THE FIELD, TOO. Yes, it's a heads-up play for Aviles to cover third there. On the other hand, had he NOT made this play, I would have accused HIM of Brain Death Deluxe. It was just a silly thing to do. I mean, yes, it's alert to notice to the third baseman "out of position," but golly. You're the potential 4

th

run in a 6-3 game. Just relax, Francis.

4) Mighty Mike

Luis Mendoza sailed through the first four innings without allowing a hit. Then in the fifth, Mike Brantley hit his third home run of the season, bringing the Indians to within 2-1.

Later in the game, Brantley also took Luke Hochevar deep for his first multi-homer game of his career.

In between, Brantley chipped in a sacrifice fly in the three-run sixth off lefty reliever Tiny Tim Collins.

In short, three of four of Brantley's plate appearances, he drove in a run, as many as Kansas City scored overall. With the two homers, Brantley has raised his ISO to .092.

5) Little Big Inning

As mentioned, Mendoza was unhittable through 4 and one-hittable through 5, but the wheels came off in the 6th when Drew Stubbs led off with a single and Mike Bourn drew a four-pitch walk. Mike Aviles followed with a towering drive to left that should either have been a double or an out and turned into a single when Alex Gordon couldn't make the backhand-over-the-shoulder catch. Bourn stopped at second, but Stubbs scored the tying run.

Kipnis followed with a well-placed bunt single, Carlos Santana drew a second four-pitch walk off Mendoza for another run, and that finished his night. Brantley added the sac fly to close the scoring and the Indians had a lead they wouldn't relinquish.

6) Large smallball

While it's true that Cleveland's fifth run scored as a result of a stolen base and a sac fly, it should be noted that Bourn stole third to get in position for the SF after having hit a double.

The sac fly came courtesy of Aviles, who drove in two of the three runs that Mike Brantley didn't.

7) A treatise on hitting

Drawing an admittedly arbitrary line in the sand, I've decided to consider a "guy who can hit" as a hitter who posts at least a .333 OBP with at least a .100 ISO. I mean, the number one goal is to get on base, but I don't want the guy to be entirely punchless. This now includes Mike Bourn, for example, whose double last night pushed his ISO (SLG – AVG) to exactly .100. I haven't done any legwork to see if this actually correlates to success or increased run-scoring, but it's easy to calculate and passes a rough eyeball test. I'd rather use higher numbers like a .350 OBP or a .125 or .150 ISO, but I root for the Cleveland Indians and tire of talking exclusively about Carlos Santana.

The Indians' lineup last night had 3 ½ "guys who can hit," considering that Ryan Raburn replaced Jason Giambi halfway through to face Collins. He struck out, but he does have a .357 OBP with a redonkulous .269 ISO. Well, I mean, a .269 ISO isn't redonkulous, but it's redonkulous to think that Ryan Raburn is really a .269-ISO hitter. The other "guys who can hit" are Bourn, Kipnis, and Santana.

By this measure, KC had three guys: Gordon, who's an established everyday player, Lo Cain, who is essentially Mike Bourn, and Billy Butler. I admit to liking Butler probably more than I should. Butler's .379 OBP paces the Royals by a LONGshot: it's 35 points higher than Gordon's second-best .344. However, Butler, despite being a beefy lad, somehow slugs only .399. For comparison, this is a lower slugging percentage than Mike Aviles, who is our backup SHORTSTOP. Not only that, but it's a lower ISO than Aviles (.126 for Butler, .127 for Aviles). It's only 4th-best in his lineup, behind Gordon (whose .416 still isn't very high, but at least he leads off), David Lough (raised to .418 after a 3-for-4 night), and Sally Perez, who is essentially Yan Gomes' much-weaker older brother

The Royals have scored the third-fewest runs in the AL, and actually have THE LOWEST slugging percentage. I can't dispute KC's overall strategy: guys like Mike Moustakas and Eric Hosmer have to eventually play their ways into or out of the league, but boy, that's just not any good.

Note: for all the wailing Royals fans make about not drawing walks, the Royals have a .313 OBP as a team. This is higher than the Yankees' .302. The Yankees have scored exactly one

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more run than KC in one more game played.

8) Sotto voce

Cleveland needs more “guys who can hit,” even if they’re the ones that are already here, but actually DO hit.

9) The proper use

THAT’S what Brian Shaw is for.

(Shaw had a nice outing, giving up a single in 1 2/3 IP, and recorded a fielder’s choice, a K, and a double play while pitching with a runner on first.)

10) Public Service for the Google Search Engine

Jack Zduriencik turned his manager into a newt, but he got better. Clearly, Eric Wedge has not gotten better, and this statement is untrue. Fire Eric Wedge.