



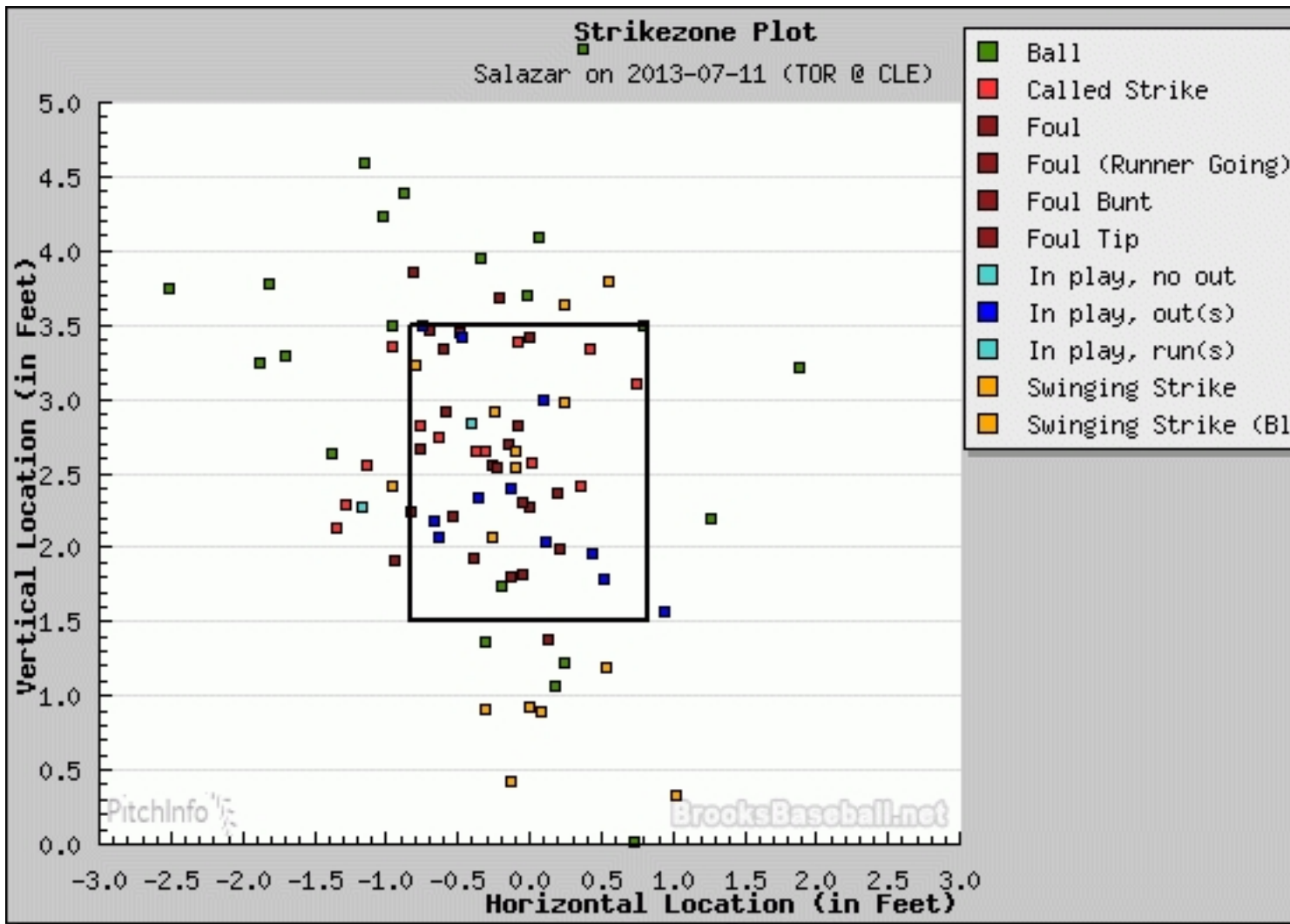
It's been a while since we've shared a Lazy Sunday together. It's been a busy summer, with a perfect storm of work and personal life conspiring to sap me of nearly all of my free time, so I've unfortunately had precious little chance to write. I hope you've missed this column as much as I've missed writing it, and if I had my way there would be 6,000+ words up here at least once a week. I still have interviews with several minor league players and coaches to write up as well, and you'll hopefully be seeing those again on a regular basis very soon. I'm not one for excuses though, so let's jump right into what you actually came here for on this Sunday morning; a look at our 2<sup>nd</sup> place Indians leading up to the all-star break.

The most newsworthy item of the past week occurred early Thursday afternoon, when pitching prospect Danny Salazar turned his major league debut against the Blue Jays into a 6-inning coming out party. Salazar threw 5 no-hit innings to begin his major league career and wound up allowing just one run on two hits through six innings, walking one and striking out seven. Salazar nearly wound up with a hard-luck no-decision, but the offense came alive in the bottom of the sixth, plating a pair of runs en route to a 4-2 victory in the series finale against Toronto. I've had a front-row seat on the Danny Salazar bandwagon since he dominated for the Aeros down the stretch last season after his return from Tommy John surgery. While I can safely say I expected him to find success last week, I didn't see that level of dominance coming.

Salazar was every bit as good as the numbers would indicate, if not better. [Using the fantastic Brooks Baseball pitchf/x data](#)

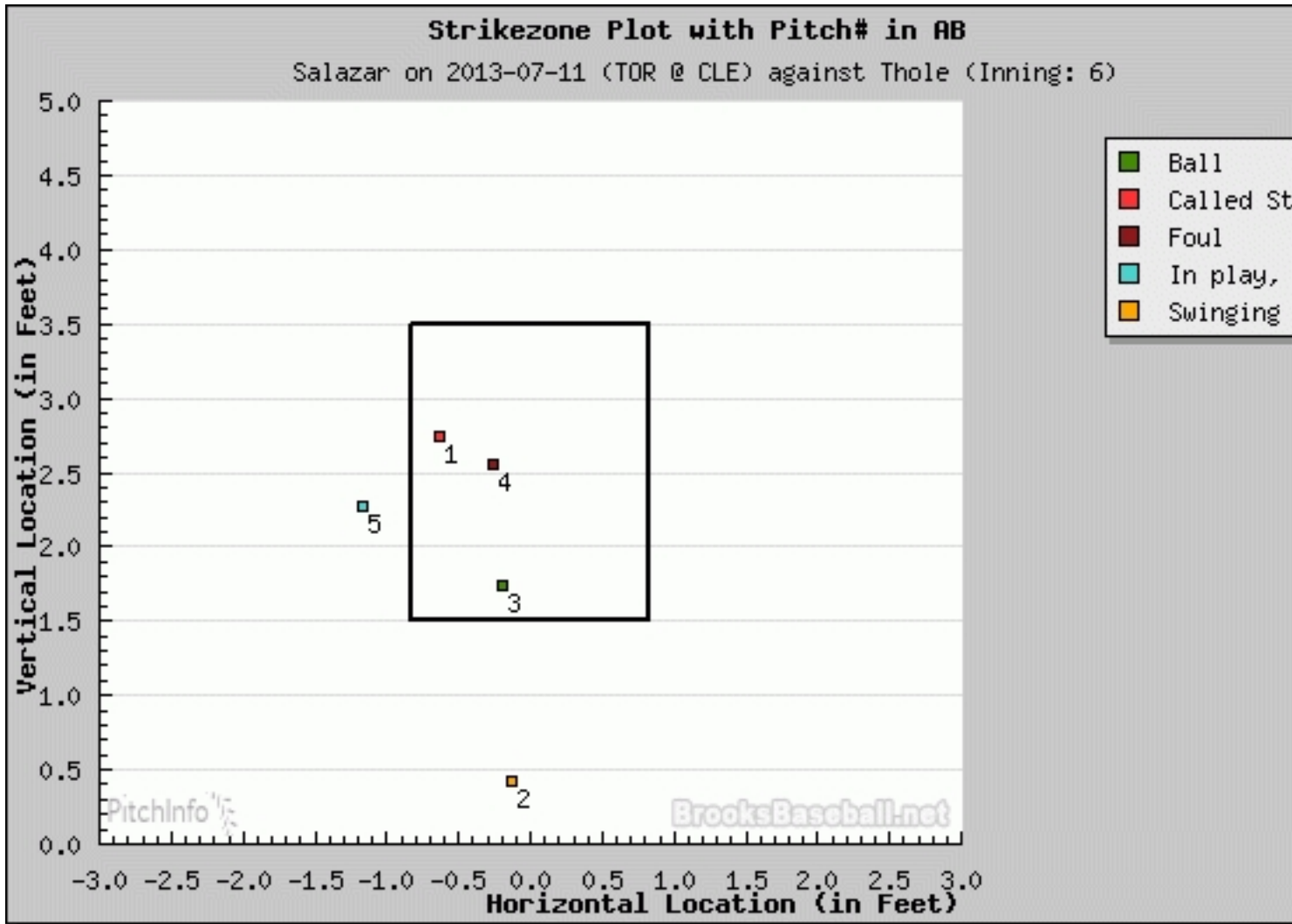
, let's go a little deeper inside Salazar's gem. He threw 89 pitches in the game, and 64 of those pitches were strikes. All seven of his strikeouts were of the swinging variety. Salazar worked

primarily off of his fastball, throwing 51 4-seamers (39 strikes). Of those 51 4-seam fastballs, a whopping 35 were at or above 94 MPH. His AVERAGE fastball velocity was 96.58 MPH. Velocity isn't everything of course, but a fastball with that kind of giddyup both allows for greater freedom within the strike zone and does an excellent job setting up one's offspeed pitches. When you look at this strike zone plot of Salazar's outing, pay special attention to the yellow squares down and out of the zone. Those are swings and misses, and they're on pitches that aren't particularly close to being strikes. Hitters have to make their mind up pretty early when looking at a 96+ MPH fastball, and less time for pitch recognition and selection can result in hitters offering at some pretty bad pitches.



Interestingly, Salazar threw 26 changeups (19 strikes, 6 of which were swinging) and just 5 sliders. Coming into 2013, Salazar was seen as having two potential plus pitches in his fastball and slider. His changeup was a developing offering that he was going to have to improve upon in order to have a long-term future in a major league rotation. It appears that Salazar put a lot of work in on his changeup, possibly even at the expense of his slider, because the change has been getting a much higher grade this season than his slider. If he can regain the feel for his slider and keep his changeup diving down and out of the zone, than the Indians will really have something in the young righty. He was my #6 prospect in the organization coming into the season and outperformed even that lofty ranking, going 5-5 with a 3.08 ERA, 100 K and 23 BB in 76 innings between AA Akron and AAA Columbus this season. He's one of the most talented pitchers in the organization, and if the Indians are going to make a run at a playoff spot this season, Salazar will likely be a part of it. He's not going to pitch like he did on Thursday every time out, but he has the physical and mental game to succeed at the big league level right now.

If you'll allow me a brief umpire tangent; the first hit (and only run) allowed by Salazar never should have occurred. Leading off the 6<sup>th</sup> inning, Toronto backstop Josh Thole fell behind 0-2 after chasing a changeup down in the dirt. On pitch 3, Salazar came back with another change that fooled Thole, and it crossed the plate pretty much right down the middle, thigh high. It was called a ball. Again using the Brooks Baseball chart below, you'll see what I'm talking about; pitch #3 is a green square, indicating that it was inexplicably called a ball by home plate umpire Tony Randazzo. As usually happens, Thole singled later in the at bat and eventually came around to score on Jose Bautista's RBI double.



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