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In trying to qualify why Jason Davis drives me crazy, it might help to qualify what Jason Davis actually is. (Not the guy, the fan commodity. The guy seems nice enough and has never actively done anything even remotely annoying to me.) So far, Davis is a guy who has been throwing starter's innings in Beefalo in order to build arm strength and repetoire, but whose future has been thought to be at the back end of the bullpen. Why is that? Well consider this scouting report from STATS INC.:

*Davis is a power pitcher who throws a fastball, slider and splitter. He throws between 92-100 MPH, most frequently around 94-95 MPH. As a starter, Davis had difficulties maintaining his stuff into the middle and late innings. He was prone to walks, balks and wild pitches. The Indians think they can reduce his margin of error in the bullpen, where he can throw between 95-100 MPH for one or two innings. In his seven appearances as a reliever (in 2004 - ed.), Davis had a 1.23 ERA.*

The scouting report goes on to characterize Davis' two and four-seam fastballs as excellent velocity and above-average movement on the two-seamer (&quot;good running action&quot;). His slider is a &quot;plus&quot; velocity with above-average movement, and the split is also &quot;plus&quot; but below average in movement (&quot;inconsistent, mostly sinks&quot;). Basically, a guy who can Throw Real Hard and Pitch Not So Well. But look, David Riske had *one* pitch, and he was a pretty damned useful reliever. And Riske didn't even throw that hard: maybe Davis can impersonate David Riske. (Note: the low ERA is true of 2004, but in 2005, Davis' relief stints were Very Bad: 16 runs in 19 2/3 IP is a 7.32 ERA.)

For the purposes of this analysis, I'm going to look at six stats: Equivalent ERA (because I need to pull Davis' numbers from Beefalo), Eq. WHIP/9, Eq. K/9, Eq. BB/9, Eq. HR/9, and GB/FB (when I could find them). These aren't the only numbers that define a pitcher, but they ought to give us a better idea of who's a similar *kind* of pitcher to whom.

Davis' numbers (ERA, WHIP/9, BB/9, K/9, HR/9, GB/FB):

2003 (23): CLE: 5.13, 12.3, 2.5, 4.6, 1.3, 1.40

2004 (24): BUF: 4.58, 12.4, 3.4, 5.1, 0.8,

2004 (24): CLE: 4.74, 13.8, 3.6, 5.1, 0.9, 1.88

2005 (25): BUF: 4.64, 12.5, 2.8, 5.4, 1.0,

2005 (25): CLE: 4.61, 13.8, 4.4, 7.0, 0.9, 1.91

Here's what sticks out to me: how can a guy who throws 95+ strike out 5 guys an inning? How is that possible? Perhaps that "above-average" movement isn't really that good. Perhaps he falls behind in the count (that's not a particularly good walk rate) and throws fastballs people look for: remember, it does no good to

throw Real Hard to guys who hit Real Hard pitches Really Far. Casey Blake did not hit 28 home runs for no reason. (The reason is, he is channelling Jeff Manto.) The K rate is higher in Cleveland (so is the walk rate), but maybe something interesting is happening here. And he's inducing ground balls, which may keep balls in the park.

Riske's numbers:

2001: 9.54 K/9, 0.93 GB/FB

2002: 11.4 K/9, 0.73 GB/FB

2003: 9.75 K/9, 0.80 GB/FB

Okay, stop. I don't have to look at the other numbers to tell that Davis is nothing like Riske. I'm not making a value judgement here, just a common sense one: Riske is a strikeout extreme-flyball pitcher, and Davis is nothing of the sort. Let's try something else.

He's got a fastball and a splitter, maybe he's like Paul Shuey. (He's got the same bass-fishing mentality, let's

check the pitching:)

1996: 2.85, 11.91, 4.36, 7.37, 1.0

1997: 6.20, 16.00, 5.60, 9.20, 1.0

1998: 3.00, 12.17, 4.41, 10.24, 1.1

1999: 3.53, 11.90, 4.41, 11.37, 0.9

2000: 3.39, 11.44, 4.24, 9.75, 0.6

Hey, I already know why Paul Shuey drove me crazy: he pulled his groin every year, and he walked a guy every two innings. But those K rates are a lot better than Davis, although there's hope: Shuey was 27 in 1998 when he "turned the corner." I dunno, still doesn't feel right.

Well, last time I mentioned Eric Plunk: he even looks a little like Plunk without the glasses:

1986 (22): 5.31, 14.44, 7.63, 7.33, 1.0

1987(23): 4.74, 14.49, 5.87, 8.53, 0.8

1988 (24): 3.00, 11.65, 4.50, 9.12, 0.7

1989 (25): 3.28, 12.60, 5.35, 7.33, 0.9

(skip)

1992 (28): 3.64, 12.43, 4.77, 6.28, 0.6

1993 (29): 2.79, 11.54, 3.80, 9.76, 0.6

1994 (30): 2.54, 12.42, 4.69, 9.25, 0.4

He got *better* after that. A few things jump out:

1) Great googly moogly, Eric Plunk couldn't find the plate with both hands as a youth!

2) Plunk's K rates are significantly higher and the ERAs are significantly lower at similar ages (and role changes).

3) I was shocked to see low HR rates (they go up in 1997): I always thought of Plunk as the guy to give up the

homer, but he was actually the guy to walk the other team blind.

4) Man, Eric Plunk was good with the Indians. You forget that.

Really, to become Eric Plunk, Davis would have to raise his K rate dramatically and cut down the homers. Given the 7.0 K/9 with the Indians in 2005, maybe that's starting to happen. Not bad.

I wonder if we can do a little better, though. We need a guy whose composure on the mound is a little questionable ... a guy who has started but is really more effective out of the pen ... a guy who's thin, induces ground balls, and gets by striking out only about 5-6 batters per 9 innings. Maybe this guy:

1996 (23): 5.36, 13.71, 2.45, 5.13, 1.0, 1.33

1997 (24): 3.87, 12.74, 3.47, 3.87, 0.6, 2.84

1998 (25): 3.80, 13.93, 3.80, 5.49, 0.5, 2.57

(skip years miscast as starter or Rockie)

2003 (30): 3.66, 10.97, 2.90, 4.19, 0.1 (!), 3.35

2004 (31): 2.38, 10.64, 2.66, 6.72, 0.1 (!), 1.75

2005 (32): 3.43, 11.92, 2.60, 6.44, 0.8, 1.69

A little more extreme on the ground balls, and the extreme low home run rates look more like luck than any innate skill, but those first three years look a lot like Davis' with respect to WHIP, BB, and K rates. The later years are included to sort of see where that pitcher (who does not improve the K rates but marginally improves control and keeps the ball in the park) ends up.

He ends up Julian Tavaréz.

Frankly, I would rather have Eric Plunk.