

The B-List: 4/2

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}
Monday, April 02 2007 7:00 PM -

It's back! The B-List is back! It was the column that put us on the map last year, and it is hands down, the best daily Cleveland Indians column in existence. In his maiden voyage of the '07 season, Buff goes inside the numbers (as only he can) on C.C.'s start. He also examines Joe Borowski's Indians debut, hits on encouraging beginnings for Grady and Honny, and laughs at A.J. and Thome for a combined 0-7 effort. Baseball is back bay-bee. And so is Buff.



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You know what's great about listening to the Chicago TV guys announce an Indians-White

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Sox game? Well, truthfully, there is absolutely **nothing** great about hearing the Chicago TV guys do **anything** that involves sound coming out of Hawk Harrelson's mouth, but it is still nice to hear the Indians whale on the Sox while Harrelson is relegated to mumbling about aliens or space stations or whatever the holy hell he was muttering about by the third inning.

1) It's only a flesh wound

C.C. Sabathia's last start lasted exactly two pitches. Arguably, you could say the same about Jose Contreras' start Monday, but Sabathia's two-pitch limit was more literal than figurative: after a number of expletives, Sabathia was removed from his final Spring Training start after taking a line shot from Brady Clark off his pitching forearm. There were a couple things notable about this:

a) Sabathia's reflexes were keen enough to get his arm in front of his face, preventing a horrific blow

b) His reflexes were not so good as to consider using the **arm with the glove** instead of the one he uses to make his living

Still, in case you're wondering what the big deal about pitching with an "arm contusion" is, consider this Gestalt Experiment: hold your arm in front of your face, then let a carpenter you know strike it with a two-pound hammer. If your arm didn't break, all you'd have would be a "contusion." (It would feel bad.) Sabathia insisted he'd be ready for his Opening Day start, and by golly, there he was. Remember the flap he took a couple years ago for admitting he hated the Twins? Well, my guess is that he's not overly fond of the White Sox, either, and is taking this Staff Ace thing pretty seriously.

It seems almost greedy to speak of the actual pitching performance, but really, except for two bad pitches (and seriously, did anyone think Darin Erstad could actually hit the ball over the wall at this point?), Sabathia's outing was quite good. It is true that 8 hits in 6 innings, including 3 for

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extra bases (2 for home runs) isn't very sharp, especially when you're only striking out 2 guys despite getting to pitch to Jim Thome three times. I'm tellin' you, though: pitching that game seemed to mean a lot to Sabathia, and that means a lot to *me*. Minor nitpick: the man induced three swings-n-misses. Three. Fourteen foul balls, ninety-one pitches ... and

three

swinging strikes. Hopefully C.C.'s stuff will miss more bats when his left arm has a more similar shape to his right.

2) News flash: I like strikes

If you've never read *The B-List* before, you should realize that I take a few things for granted. I like when baserunners are not thrown out doing tremendously foolish things on the basepaths. I prefer early innings that go buntless to those featuring bunts. And I really, really, really, really, *really* prefer relief pitchers who throw strikes.

To this end, Raffy Betancourt was often one of my more favored relievers last season: the man usually does not piddle around with setting up this or nibbling on that. See ball, throw ball, leave mound, potentially drink beer. I don't know what Mr. Betancourt does after a game. Were I in the clubhouse, I would have offered to buy him a beer.

There is nothing more I can write to add insight to the horror of the 2006 bullpen, but it's hard to imagine the 2007 bullpen being much of a success without guys like Betancourt having actual runs of success. To this end, I give you Raffy himself, with 8 strikes in 12 pitches and 1 K in a perfect IP. Oldberto Hernandez was not quite as accurate, but just as effective in a 14-pitch 1-K perfect inning of his own. If Hernandez really has something in the tank, it would go a really long way toward making this a Very Good Team instead of a Pretty Good one.

3) News flash: I like STRIKES

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And this would run counter to Titar Closer Joe Borowski's strategy of closing out a game, which would appear to involve various incarnations of Brownian Motion to induce the opponent to eventually wander off the field out of disinterest. How do you give up a pinch-hit double to That Brian Anderson? The man hit .224/.290/.358 last season. To give up an extra-base hit to That Brian Anderson is tantamount to yielding a stolen base to David Ortiz. Yes, it happens. No, it shouldn't.

Now, this having been said, Borowski's inning was more an "inning of work" than "display of mad closing skeelz." We all remember Really Big Bob, after all. And look: in a close game, I expect you wouldn't have seen JoBo pumping ... "stuff" (it did not look like "heat") at Gumby Molina (the long-lost eighth third-cousin catching Molina) with runners on 2nd and 3rd. So instead of:

G Molina hit sacrifice fly to left, A Contron scored, B Anderson to third

J Uribe grounded out to shortstop, B Anderson scored

You could easily envision:

G Molina intentionally walked

J Uribe grounded into double play

Depending on the urgency, Rouse could have come home or (with a two-run lead, say) taken the 6-4-3 double play. Anyway, it wasn't like we needed to go overboard with the defense at 12-3.

But I would like Borowski to do more like “throwing strikes” and less like “making That Brian Anderson look like a major-league hitter.”

4) So much for Spring Training numbers

Grady Sizemore hit the second pitch of the season over the right field wall. When asked, Sizemore reportedly thought it would look too much like “showing off” to do it on the first pitch. Privately, he noted that the first pitch was awful and unhittably bad.

Sizemore finished the day 2-for-4 with a walk and 3 runs. He is considered “good.”

5) That round white thing has red threads on it!

Jhonny Peralta spent part of the off-season recovering from Lasik-type eye surgery to correct his myopia. After spending much of last season trying to hit major-league pitchers with the equivalent of Fuzzy Third Line-O-Vision, Peralta now can tell a slider from a fastball and may actually act accordingly. The initial results are encouraging: 2-for-3 with a walk, 3 ribs, a run scored, and a role as the middleman in a 4-6-3 double play in the fifth. Peralta’s first hit came on an 0-2 pitch: his walk took up 6 of the 10 pitches Nick Masset threw in the 4th inning as his teammates decided that 11-3 was no time to use a good batting approach, or at least that it was terribly overrated.

Anyway, Peralta has been suggested as a pivotal player this season, and this start is certainly more encouraging than, say, David Dellucci’s.

6) Welcome to the club!

Trot Nixon's first game in a Cleveland uniform featured hits in his first three plate appearances (including a double), a walk, and three runs scored. Also, the gritty guttiness coefficient, especially in the first inning when combined with that of Darin Erstad in the other dugout, threatened to engulf the city of Chicago.

Josh Barfield's first plate appearance ended with two runs scoring an Barfield standing on third base. (His other four plate appearances ended with Barfield being incredibly out, but this wasn't really "welcome.")

Oldberto Hernandez and Joe Borowski pitched with varying degrees of success, the variance being from "successful success" in the case of Hernandez to "rationalized but really quite absent success" in the case of Borowski.

Mike Rouse ... eh, he made a play. How much impact are you asking your utility infielder to have in a 12-5 nailbiter?

David Dellucci was not stripped naked, not immolated, and not reduced to indentured servitude because of usury. On a scale of One to Good, however, his performance was about a "Two." He did draw a walk, but it was an intentional walk given before his basic David Dellucciness had come to the fore (in the form of a pair of strikeouts). That was pretty bad.

7) Ho Hum Dept.

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Travis Hafner had a pair of hits and scored three runs.

Victor Martinez had a pair of hits, including a double, that drove in three runs. He also walked once.

Andy Marte had five plate appearances. The Thumper Rule prevents me from saying more, although his current OPS rhymes with "Nero."

Casey Blake is on the team.

8) Okay, that was flip

Casey Blake had a tremendously Casey Blake day: with a runner in scoring position in the first, Blake made the first out of the game, although he did come around to score on Barfield's triple. With a runner in scoring position and two out, Blake struck out swinging. And with the game well in hand, Blake hit a sacrifice fly that scored the 12th run. In all, Blake did hit a double off Masset to go 1-for-4 with 2 runs and an RBI, but only Dellucci was more piffulous with runners on base.

Which is still pretty "ho hum" for longtime fans, quite frankly.

9) I may have mentioned "Neener," but did I mention "neener?"

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Jim Thome and A.J. Pierzynski combined to go 0-for-7 with 3 Ks. (Rob mACKowiACK whiffed twice in two plate appearances, but really, it's Rob F#@king mACKowiACK: how much vicarious pleasure are you going to take in a struggling Rob mACKowiACK?)