

The B-List: 4/20-4/22

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}
Sunday, April 22 2007 7:00 PM -

In today's Monday edition of *The B-List*, Buff looks back on the weekend set with the D-Rays, a series the Indians won thanks to a ninth inning Sunday homer from Ryan Garko. Buff hits on the Indians problems with runners in scoring position, talks about Tampa running on us at will, and also touches on some of the teams minor injuries.



FINAL	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	R	H	E	
Indians (7-6)				0							0		2

Devil Rays (6-10)				0							0		1
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W: R. Hernandez (1-1) L: Salas (0-1) S: Borowski (6)

FINAL	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	R	H	E	
Indians (7-7)					0						2		0

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Devil Rays (7-10) 0 3 2

W: Seo (1-1) L: Byrd (1-1) S: A. Reyes (6)

FINAL	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	R	H	E	
Indians (8-7)					0							2	0

Devil Rays (7-11) 0 0 0

W: Mastny (1-0) L: Stokes (1-3) S: Borowski (7)

They often say that baseball is a game of inches (unless Travis Hafner is at the plate, in which case it is a game of parsecs), and the emotional ride of Sunday's game summed it up best for me: after blundering to a loss on Saturday and looking like Compleat Toads against James Shields for eight innings, the Indians did to the Rays what the Yankees did to the Indians, and now I'm left feeling okay instead of mired in deep despair. Is the team really that much better at 8-7 than it would have been at 7-8? Ah, who cares? We won two games because we scored runs in the ninth inning: surely that means ... um ... it's good that they play 9 innings instead of 8, I guess.

1) *-gressing to the mean

Paul Byrd's hopes for a perfect season came crashing down as he allowed Ty Wigginton to homer on the fourth pitch of the second inning: since he'd given up three outfield flyouts in the first, this wasn't altogether surprising. Byrd simply didn't have his best stuff, and completely waxed the old, discredited Paul Byrd Theory once and for all, as he threw 71 of his 93 pitches for strikes and still got walloped. Tampa Bay is kind of a free-swinging team (Friday 1 walk, Saturday zero, Sunday 2: in contrast, Cleveland drew 12 walks, and Mike Rouse, currently batting John BlutarSKI drew as many walks Friday as Tampa did as a team), so maybe throwing strikes is a Bad Plan against them, or maybe they hit non-strikes. It didn't really matter: basically, when you give up 11 hits in 6 innings (even if one was really The Worst Official Scoring Decision Ever), you're simply not pitching that well. Byrd was certainly victimized by his "defense," but he was also victimized by his "mediocre stuff." Hey, he's the fifth starter, not a viable twenty-game winner. Just a bad day.

Jake Westbrook, however, looked more like the effective pitcher of 2006 than the Big Bozo he had up to this point. He lasted over four times as long as in his last start, throwing 7 quality innings and giving up only 4 hits (but 2 walks, and one hit left the yard) and 4 runs (3 earned). Westbrook did not have his typical groundball stuff, giving up 8 flyouts against 9 grounders, but maybe that's a good sign that he could get by without his best weapon. On the other hand, it would be nice to note that the season started three weeks ago, and any time Jake wants to bring his A Game is both hunky and dory to me.

C.C. Sabathia had a nice start, probably deserved to win, and didn't. As he said, since the Indians won, it's not going to bother him much, so I'll join him in not being bothered. I should say, 8 Ks in 7 IP against 1 BB is very nice: he just needs to pass the memo on to Jake.

2) Ducks on the pond!

Well, this certainly doesn't apply to Sunday's game, when we left two guys on base TOTAL, Jhonny Peralta followed Casey Blake's two-out double with a homer, and Ryan F Garko blasted a three-run homer in the ninth. No, I'm referring more to the other two games in which:

Friday: of the 9 men left on base SEVEN were in scoring position

Saturday: although only four of the 9 left on base were in scoring position, we loaded the bases in the 8th in order to score exactly no runs

On Friday, for example, Tampa intentionally walked two men sandwiched around an error so that Casey Blake could bat with the bases loaded. Guess how many runs were driven in. Cleveland batters are now 1-for-18 with the bases loaded this season, and although it is untrue, I believe a significant percentage of Indians fans would tell you that Blake has made 17 of the outs. Admittedly, this is unfair to Blake, but then, watching him bat with the bases loaded is unfair to ME.

3) Mixed feelings yield epiphany

Because I have embarked on the quixotic one-man crusade to get Eric Wedge fired, it bears mentioning that I liked some of the things I saw and heard this weekend. I liked that he strayed from his normal "It's a long season, a marathon not a sprint, one game at a time, beep beep whirrrrrr click, long season, one game, beep" routine in acknowledging that Sunday's game was a bigger deal than Just One More Game. I found this to ring tremendously true, since it agrees with my pre-formed opinion. I also thought it showed a lot of that Player Trust and Veteran Leadership and Intangible Intangibility, or at least Testicle Size, to bring Borowski in to save Friday's game immediately after the Blowup From Hell. I liked that he brought Rouse in to pinch-run for Hafner in the ninth (although it ultimately didn't matter, I still liked the thinking behind the move), I appreciated him trying Nixon in the five hole on Friday, and generally liked the way he handled the bullpen. That seems like quite a lot, almost enough to reverse my ...

... aw, hell no! Did you WATCH any of the so-called "baseball" played this weekend? Did you see Travis Hafner running himself into multiple outs on the basepaths? Did you see Josh Barfield and Trot Nixon turn a popup into a double? Did you see our catching combo of Martinez and Shoppach combing to make a throwing error in EACH GAME? Have these guys ever watched Tom Emanski?

Here's the problem: there have been teams with non-good pitching still win the World Series. There have been teams with subpar hitting still win the World Series. In this decade alone I have seen Idiots win the World Series, a team with Jeff Suppan and Jeff Weaver playing major rotation roles win the World Series, and a Marlins team with average number of times having shaved about 100 win the World Series. But I have never seen or heard about a team that [P LAYS BAD BASEBALL](#) win the World Series. At some point, someone has to be held accountable for the KIND of baseball the team plays. That's my point.

4) Pronk smash!

Travis Hafner redefined the distance 440 feet with a titanic shot that travelled much, much further than 440 feet. I can't believe they even announced that. They realize these things are being taped, right? This isn't the '30s when you could tell people stuff and they had to believe it because there were only three newspapers and Mel Allen. Come on. Be serious. Boy, he hit that ball hard.

Hafner homered in both Friday's and Saturday's game to extend a streak in which he had homered in 6 straight games against the Devil Rays. In the previous 5 games against Tampa, he had 12 hits in 19 ABs. And in holding him hitless Sunday, they still managed to give him a walk that became the game-tying run.

He's good.

5) Terror on the basepaths

Tampa Bay manager Joe Maddon apparently was using "inhale" as the sign for baserunners to steal, as he inadvertently sent fifty-three runners in the three-game set. Well, not really, but in Friday's game, the two bases stolen by Carl Crawford and Delmon Young were offset by having Wigginton get caught at third and Akinori Iwamura get caught at second. On Sunday, Rocco Baldelli swiped a bag, but Wigginton was caught again (I have a suggestion at this point: has anyone mentioned to Mr. Maddon that Ty Wigginton is, in fact, not actually fast?) and Crawford was picked off by Jake Westbrook. Kelly Shoppach's presence on the lineup Saturday limited the steal attempts to 1 (B.J. Upton) success.

Now, this is not the end of the story, however: Young scored the tying run Friday when his steal of third resulted in Vic Martinez throwing the ball well into left field. On Saturday, the sixth (and ultimately winning) run scored on a groundout by Bosco Zobrist only because Upton had gotten to third when Shoppach's throw to second did not actually hit anyone in a glove. And on Sunday, the two runs scored by Tampa in the bottom of the 8th (which looked like the game-winners at the time) were direct results of Tom Mastny throwing hockey pucks or something. Seriously, two wild pitches? From a guy with 9 strikes in 13 pitches? One of which struck a batter out? Tom needs to harness that power for the good of mankind rather than ...
well, continuing to do *that*.

On the flip side, you have Hafner getting thrown out at second trying to stretch a (game-winning) single and closing off a potentially big inning, getting thrown out at third on an infield hit (that one made no sense), and Kelly Shoppach hitting a double, stumbling around like a drunk, having to disregard a “go!” sign to catch his breath at third after an error on the outfielder ... and then get sent home three pitches later on a line drive to Crawford as he was moving toward the plate to catch the ball. I ... I’m not sure if there’s any great conclusion to be drawn here, except to note that ... um ... Kelly Shoppach is not our best baserunner. On the other hand, he’s probably not our worst. Which is not good.

6) Gark smash!

Ryan Garko is hitting .278 thus far this season. He hit well last season, and in fact hit better as the situation got more “important” (like with runners in scoring position and with two outs). Of course, these were tiny little samples and didn’t really tell us anything more about Garko than to say that he could hit major-league pitching, which we were pretty sure of in the first place.

However, Garko, despite this .278 average, drove in three runs Sunday to raise his RBI total to ... four. Four! To put this in perspective, Josh Barfield, who is hitting .143 and has the power of an aardvark, has *six*. To hit a .278 as empty as Garko’s is really, really hard to do. Now, I’d rather see Garko play at first as often as possible (he hits better than Blake, and better than Shoppach if you wanted to flip him and Vic). But I don’t think it’s too much to ask my ostensible five-hole power-hitting corner infielder to get some of those hits with guys on base, eh?

7) Infirmary report

Trot Nixon is over the flu. His kids gave it to him, which makes him indistinguishable from every other parent in America, although he probably doesn’t have to watch as much Elmo. (On the other hand, there isn’t a lot to do in Tampa Bay.)

Andy Marte tweaked a hamstring. And I should point out: Casey Blake played some fine defense at third base in a pinch. Marte is “day-to-day,” which is baseball-speak for “not going to play.”

David Dellucci has “left calf tightness.” Since “running” is a nice skill for an outfielder to have, he’ll probably miss a series.

8) Credit Where Credit Is Due Dept.

Joe Borowski tallied two saves in close games with two separate perfect innings of work, including two swinging Ks Sunday. Borowski’s not a perfect pitcher, but a lot of our bullpen blowups last year seemed to be the result of a lack of mental fortitude as much as simple badness, so it’s encouraging to see Lord Joe display some here.

Oldberto Hernandez got the win Friday by throwing a perfect 8th, including 8 strikes in 11 pitches. I am still not an Oldberto fan, but that’s a terrific job.

Aaron Fultz struck out the batter he faced.

Ferd Cabrera struck out 2 more in 2 perfect innings of work. With either the right umpire (who will call his slider a strike) or the right team (who will swing at said slider), Ferd Cabrera might be the most unhittable pitcher in the Western Hemisphere.

9) Completely False Statement for the Google Search Engine

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According to falsified reports, GM Mark Shapiro was seen engaging Nobel Prize-winning physicist Stephen Hawking in an animated debate the weekend. Shapiro told Hawking that his blind adherence to the theory of general relativity, his insistence on believing the heliocentric theory of the solar system, and his failure to appear as a guest star on "Jackass" set a bad example for the youth of America. He then pushed Hawking down a flight of stairs, then fried him with leeks and shallots. Fire Eric Wedge.