

The B-List: 4/25

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}
Wednesday, April 25 2007 7:00 PM -

What a scene last night outside the Jake. As 21,000 of us poured out of the Cavs win over the Wizards, we noticed that the Tribe game was still going on next door, and was tied in the 11th. Two to three thousand people chanting "let us in!" Buff wasn't one of those people. He lives in Austin, TX. But he IS the best damn Tribe journalist in the land.



	FINAL	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	R	H	E	
Rangers (8-12)						0							0			0

Indians (11-7)					0								5			0
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W: F. Cabrera (1-0) L: Eyre (1-1)

Last night's game was kind of ugly, but it was also the kind of game we'd lose last year. Heck, it was three of the games we would have lost last year. Luckily, Texas is the kind of team that can out-inept you, so it'd go back to only one.

1) We interrupt this program to bring you this train wreck

I know this is a Cleveland Indians column, bear with me here. ESPN was showing the Chicago-Detroit game, where Chad Durbin (Char Durbin!) was simply unhittable. The Tigers waltzed into the ninth inning with a 6-0 lead: Durbin had thrown 8 innings of 3-hit, no-walk, 9-K ball, and the White Sox were simply done. It was cold and raining in Chicago, and Leyland called in Joel Zumaya.

Now, if you haven't seen Joel Zumaya pitch ... well, shoot, why the heck are you reading this column? You clearly don't like baseball. The man was in the World Series, fer crine out loud. Joel Zumaya does not get cheated on the mound. He throws approximately nine thousand miles per hour by using every muscle in his body except his left eyelid. He is very good, and normally fun to watch.

Now, he can miss the zone now and again: he's one of those Randy Myers type guys who seems to go 3-2 on everybody. Sure enough, first hitter, Tad Iguchi, goes ball, swinging strike, ball, swinging strike, ball, single. But then Paul Konerko bounced into a double play, so two outs, no one on, 6-0 lead.

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Then we get this sequence:

A.J. Pierzynski: Strike (swinging), Strike (looking), HBP

Hey, anything that ends with A.J. Pierzynski being struck is a good outing, right? Okay, back to being serious.

Joe Crede: Ball, Ball, Ball, Ball

Okay, he's missing a bit, looks a little out of synch.

Andy Gonzalez, in his second career major-league AB: Ball, Strike (looking), Strike (foul), Ball, Foul, Foul, Ball, Ball

Hm, made him work, nice job by the kid. But you know Zumaya is not worried about this guy hitting, he just can't put it over.

Pablo Ozuna: Ball, Ball, Ball ...

Okay, at this point, Zumaya has clearly lost his shit. On top of this, the umpire is squeezing

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him: apparently the strike zone goes from the bottom of the knee to the top of the knee. I hate the off-angle camera. You know, they had that center-field camera last year, and although disorienting, I really grew to prefer it. Okay, back to the game.

Ozuna, 3-0 count: Strike (looking), Ball

Now it is 6-1 and Zumaya is nearly insane. I mean, Zumaya is already Al Hrabosky's Hispanic Nephew when he pitches, but there is smoke coming out of this man's ears. Actual smoke.

Juan Uribe: Ball, Ball, Ball, Ball

And thus ends Joel Zumaya's night, as Leyland brings in Todd Jones to retire Brian Anderson to end the game, 6-2, as the tying run at the plate.

It was fascinating to watch and gruesome at the same time: Zumaya just kept coming, and coming, and coming, and could ... not ... throw ... a ... strike. I'm not talking Rick Ankiel to-the-screen wild, he never missed by more than 6 inches. But he just ... kept ... missing. It was awesome in the literal sense of the word.

Now, back to the game.

2) We interrupt this program to bring you this car accident

I lied, you still have to wait.

Tim Hudson threw 8 sparkling innings last night against Florida. I mean, the Florida offense is no great shakes, but Hudson was *on*. Bobby Cox let him come out to try to get the complete game since they had a 3-0 lead, and hell, Hudson looked fantastic. This prompted Braves fans everywhere to say, "Tim Hudson pitches for us? Since when?" (Braves fans aren't the most rabid.)

Well, until the three straight singles. Okay, tough break, bring in Really Big Bob.

Now, I don't have to remind you how Really Big Bob "closes." He doesn't mess around, he generally throws strikes, but he's not above putting a couple guys on en route to the save. Same thing here, a bombed double and it's 3-2. An intentional walk, a strikeout, then a bloop job, and Hudson's no longer the pitcher of record. So bases loaded, Wickman throws a sinker, and this appears to surprise the catcher. Really? How long have you caught Bob Wickman? That is the man's pitch! That's all he's got! He throws THAT PITCH, the one you JUST FLAT-OUT MISSED. That's right, passed ball, run scores, game over.

After Rivera and Wickman, and now Trevor Hoffman gagged one last night and Houston made Pittsburgh play an extra seven innings ... I'm telling you, this just seems like a weird season for last-inning shenanigans.

Okay, back to the game. (No, really.)

3) We interrupt this dominant start to bring you this inexplicable meltdown

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C.C. Sabathia is our best starter, hands down. I'm not sure who is going to argue with you on that one. And he just made Texas look flat-out ridiculous last night through the first five innings:

1st: bunt single, double play, 3 men faced

2nd: 1-2-3

3rd: 1 walk (to Gerald Laird! Hitting .113! Might want to concentrate harder there)

4th: flyout, swinging K, swinging K

5th: popout, swinging K, swinging K

Okay, at this point, he has faced one over the minimum because he forgot where he was for a batter and somehow walked the potted plant that is Gerald Laird. He has 6 strikeouts, the last four swinging. The only hit was a well-placed bunt, who got erased with a double play. If you are asking for more from your starting pitcher, you're an idiot. This is a goddam cakewalk.

Until it's not, of course. The wheels didn't just come off for Sabathia in the sixth, they exploded and peppered pedestrians with shrapnel. It's kind of hard to explain what happened here: Laird (!!!) got a hit, and then it's single, homer, single, single, double, 6-5. And then the aliens replaced the abducted Sabathia with the real one and he got Blalock and Cruz to strike out swinging. Whoosh!

It would take some very serious (and disingenuous) second-guessing to say that Wedge should have pulled Sabathia: there may POSSIBLY have been time for someone to warm up

quickly between the homer and the double and come in to face Sosa with two on, but ... it would have been a really fast warmup, and c'mon, it's C.C. Sabathia! The man can obviously pitch, he just *didn't*. Just weird, if also disheartening.

4) The bread is outstanding, but what's in the middle of this sandwich?

The first reliever out of the pen was B-List favorite, Tom Mastny. You can check the archives, but long story short: we got him for John McDonald, he had very good numbers, I couldn't figure out why he didn't get more attention, people told me he didn't have the "stuff," I latched onto him, it's worked out.

Now, Mastny's calling card is throwing strikes: he wasn't really all that great at that last night (12 in 19). However, since three of the 12 strikes were strikes 3, I would have to say that Mastny's outing was successful, since he faced three batters. (Do the math.)

And then there's Ferd Cabrera.

WOW!

I'm sorry, I'm channeling an earlier column. Seriously, Cabrera came into the game in the 10th and ...

WOW!

Ahem. Really, it's absolutely possible for me to be objective about ...

WOW! I LOVE FERD CABRERA! AHOOOGAH! AHOOOGAH! WOOOOOO!

Okay, it's not. Cabrera struck out 5 in two innings of 1-hit ball to get the win. I like when Ferd Cabrera pitches.

5) No, really, what's in this sandwich?

Rafael Betancourt used to be one of my favorite relievers for the Indians because, by golly, the man threw strikes. (He also kept a lowish ERA and struck guys out, which I like in a reliever.) And the box score will tell you he threw strikes (8 in 12 pitches) and has a low ERA (now 2.25), but ... well, let's just say he was not "on" last night. He gave up two singles sandwiched around a runner-advancing groundout, and gave back one of the two runs we led by at the time. (He also took approximately 6 hours to do so: I think Betancourt is part monitor lizard.)

Aaron Fultz came in, and ... ah, Aaron Fultz. Warm fuzzies. 1.29 ERA. Just induced a great player to ground into a double play the previous night. No ...

... um, Aaron? The plate would be that big white thing Vic's crouching behind. Yeah, five sides, that's the one. Fultz came in to retire Blalock (who had, to that point, struck out three times) and walked him instead. Then he walked Nelson Cruz. How bad did he look? With the left-handed Brad Wilkerson coming to the plate, Eric Wedge summoned Oldberto Hernandez to face him. Now, note that Hernandez has a long (well, 12-PA) history of getting Brad Wilkerson out, so this was not a total condemnation of Fultz' outing ... but 't'wasn't good.

Now, hidden in the middle of the lousy bits of the sandwich was a real pearl, because Hernandez, facing his first batter with the bases loaded in a one-run game, whiffed Wilkerson to end the 8th. That, my friends, is serious relief pitching. Excelente'!

And then Lord Joedemort comes out and walks Gerald Laird to start the ninth.

Guys, look, it's Gerald @#%*ing Laird! The man can't hit his weight! The man can't hit my SON'S weight! Yes, he had a blind-squirrel single, but he's hitting .113! One thirteen! The man can't hit! To walk Gerald @#%*ing Laird on four pitches is just unconscionable. Inconceivable! Also very bad! Because Laird turned into Lofton turned into the tying run (on a BOMB to Young that was a double only because it went to the deepest part of center field). Yeah, Borowski had two more Ks and that's very nice, and many people give up hits to Michael Young, an All-Star calibre shortstop, but damn, you just can't pump four straight balls part GERALD @#%*ING LAIRD to open the ninth! You just can't. I have to sit down.

6) Oh, by the way

Jhonny Peralta won the game with a single in the bottom of the 11th. Peralta had two hits on the day, including a double off some guy named like a hockey player. I cringed a little when I read that he was going to swing at the first pitch he saw (an out might have brought Victor Martinez home, but Victor Martinez is not fast in the same way that air is not heavy), but he had the game-winning hit, so huzzah.

Now, this having been said, Peralta's greatest offensive contribution may have been to dodge Ian Kinsler on a bases-loaded ground ball by Shin-Soo Choo in the second inning. This appeared to fluster Kinsler, to the point that he threw the ball several miles off course and led to the 5-run outburst that seemed to give Sabathia all the cushion he could possibly need. Added to Trot Nixon's heads-up taking of the extra base when the outfielder threw to the wrong base and it was a good day on the basepaths. (Grady stole a base.)

7) Smallball, my ass

That is, I would rather be kicked in the ass than watch smallball. Casey Blake laid down a nice bunt in the 8th inning to put Sizemore in scoring position for Hafner and Martinez, but ... doesn't Hafner get a couple extra-base hits a year? Were we that concerned with Blake hitting into a double play? Playing for one run with a one-run lead may sound prudent, but I hate it, so stop doing it.

8) Box score follies

The Indians struck out 19 Rangers last night. Had they allowed Mastny to start and Cabrera to relieve, this number would have been 29.

The Indians drew 7 more walks last night.

Shin-Soo Choo got credit for driving in a run with the bases loaded. With his previous delivery with the bases loaded, this makes Choo more productive than ... the entire rest of the team. His 4 RBI are as many or more than the number of RBI collected by Casey Blake, David Dellucci, or Trot Nixon.

Joe Borowski gave up one run in one inning to **lower** his ERA.

9) Completely False Statement for the Google Search Engine

Mark Shapiro has modified his car to expel chlorine gas instead of carbon monoxide. This statement is as true as it is physically possible. Fire Eric Wedge.