

The B-List: 5/4-5/6

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}
Sunday, May 06 2007 7:00 PM -

Behind C.C. Sabathia, the Indians battled back yesterday to take one from the Orioles after disappointing losses on Friday and Saturday. In the Monday *B-List*, Buff takes a look back at all three games from the weekend in a way that only he can. It's funny. It's analytical. It's the best daily Indians column in existence. It's *The B-List*.

	FINAL	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	R	H	E	
Indians (17-9)					0							0			0
Orioles (13-16)				0								0			1

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W: C. Ray (3-2) L: Mastny (2-1)

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FINAL	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	R	H	E	
Indians (17-10)				0							0		0

Orioles (14-16)				3							3		0
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W: D. Cabrera (2-3) L: Sowers (0-2)

FINAL	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	R	H	E	
Indians (18-10)				0							1		0

Orioles (14-17)

0

0

3

W: Sabathia (5-0) L: Burres (0-1) S: Borowski (11)

Something tells me that giving up an average of 13 hits a game is going to be a counter-productive strategy for the pitching staff. I recommend we stop doing it.

1) Mutter mutter Paul Byrd mutter mutter

What was that? No, no, I'm not cursing Paul Byrd under my breath. I'm pointing out the statistical anomaly of the young season:

Paul Byrd is our best starting pitcher.

Well, okay, no, he's not. I'm pretty sure Paul Byrd would tell you that. (Actually, as self-effacing and willing to shoulder blame that wasn't even his last season, he'd probably insist so rather forcefully.) C.C. Sabathia is our best starting pitcher by virtually any objective and every single subjective measure there is. But right now, from the list of any Indians pitcher who has started a game this season, the owner of the lowest ERA is Paul Byrd, 2.92 to 3.45 for

Sabathia.

How does he do this? I have no idea how he does this. I have seen it with my own eyes and I don't know how he does this. Friday night, Byrd was matched up with Erik Bedard, who retired the first 11 in a row and took a no-hitter into the fifth. Byrd responded by putting a man on base in each of the first two innings, then induced double plays to erase them. After giving up a solo shot to Jay Payton, Byrd basically coasted, never giving up more than a hit in an inning, but giving up a hit in every inning except the 4th. He didn't walk anybody and was never in much trouble, but it never seemed like Byrd was "mowin' 'em down," rather "poking them with a stick." Byrd had his good command, though, with 73 strikes in 104 pitches, and hey, 6 2/3 innings of 6-hit, 0-walk, 3-K, 1-run ball is a very fine start, regardless of aesthetics. Really, his performance only suffers in comparison to Bedard's, who left with a deficit, as opposed to Byrd, who deserved a better result.

2) I dispute your assertion

All right, Sabathia's the best starter. Seriously. Although obviously not perfect and objectively not really in the "Best Pitcher in the AL" final pool, it's hard to argue that Sabathia "hasn't pitched well enough" for the Indians. At 5-0 with 6 Quality Starts in 7 outings, a K:BB ratio of 53:9 and a K/9 of 10.15, the only real complaints you could make against Sabathia are:

- a) He's given up 7 HR in 7 starts, more than 1 every 7 innings

- b) He's only gone 6 innings in 3 of the 7 starts

The other thing that's a little worrisome is that after looking so great in starts 2 and 3, in which he went more than 6 innings and gave up only 1 earned run both times, he's given up at least 3 earned runs in each of the last three starts. Just as with last two times out, against the Blue Jays (3-run 1st) and the Rangers (5-run 6th), Sabathia was victimized by one exceptionally

poor inning. In the bottom of the 3rd, Sabathia gave up two quick singles, and after retiring the next two hitters, gave up an infield single and a bases-clearing double to Ramon Hernandez. There's nothing to really hang your hat on here: he doesn't have universal problems with runners on base, he is missing plenty of bats, he just seems to have one inning's worth of crap to get out of his system.

3) Badness simple and complex

Jeremy Sowers' start Saturday was pretty much hopeless top to bottom. He was knocked out after the Westbrook, er, 2nd, giving up 5 hits (including a three-run homer), 3 walks, and 6 runs with nary a strikeout to be had. This lowers Sowers' almost inconceivable K/9 rate to 2.35, and further plunges his K:BB ratio under 1 (8:12 = 0.67).

Now look: I'm not equating K-rate with success. Byrd's is 4.74, and he leads the rotation in ERA. Carmona has everyone salivating with back-to-back fine starts (and a 3.76 overall ERA), and his K/9 isn't any better (3.08). And there are plenty of pitchers who can be effective without striking out a lot of guys.

But there aren't many who can walk 3 1/2 guys per nine innings while doing it. The home run was an anomaly for Sowers, only the second he's given up, and four of his six starts were Quality Starts. But that makes two real clunkers in six starts where we've had to run the bullpen out there in the 3rd inning and the game largely out of hand before we even get to the bottom of the order. I'm not sure what I want Sowers to do, but I've got a pretty good idea of what I want him NOT to do.

4) Mighty Casey at the bat

Erik Bedard could hardly have made the Indians hitters look more ridiculous Friday had they

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been dressed in clown suits. After mowing down the first 11 and carrying a no-hitter into the fifth, message board enthusiasts finally got their “mention the no-hitter” jinx to work as Jhonny Peralta singled on the second pitch of the inning. The next batter, Casey Blake, pounded a home run to left to basically start and end the productive part of the Cleveland offense. (There were those who noted that Peralta, being on first base, was not in scoring position, which explained how Casey could hit the home run.)

Blake had another hit Saturday and a two-run double with a walk Sunday, raising his average to .218 and his RBI to 11. We pick on the guy enough that he deserves mention when he is one of two players to get a hit in each of the three games this weekend. Bravo!

Note that this heading is not “Mighty Casey with the glove.”

5) It's only a flesh wound

So far this season, the bullpen has provided a real bright spot: with three starters sporting ERAs over 5.80 and several Westbrookian starts, and the offense having trouble getting untracked early, the bullpen has performed admirably to keep us in games and preserve what leads we've had. There may be the odd blowup performance here and there, and our most-often-used right-handers have pretty ghastly ERAs, but it's done a good job to this point.

Apparently, “this point” ended in the Bullpen Blowout Extravaganza last week when all seven relievers had to chip in to win the game in extra innings. Although Aaron Fultz was very good in getting out of Byrd's jam in the 7th Friday, Rafael Betancourt gave up three hits and a run to tie the game, and Tom Mastny followed a hitless, walkless inning with a outless 3-hit extravaganza that lost the game. And on Sunday, Ferd Cabrera and Betancourt each gave up enough runs and baserunners that the 9-3 gave turned into a one-out save opportunity for Joe Borowski (who came through, but not before adding a baserunner of his own).

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Now, usage is going to play a significant role here: Cabrera had been aired out in the Bullpen Blowout, and Betancourt has appeared in 13 games already. Raffy's overall stats are still quite excellent (WHIP 1.02, ERA 2.63, K/9 7.90, 0 HR allowed), but his last few outings have been crummy. The problem is, your only alternative to Betancourt is Oldberto, and I think you see where I'm going with this.

Anyway, I don't think the bullpen is as bad as its past few appearances, but it was probably overachieving a little before that, too.

By the way, Rafael Perez got into Saturday's game. He threw 3 scoreless innings allowing 3 hits, 1 walk, and struck out 3. He threw 34 strikes in 41 pitches and sported a 4:2 GB:FB ratio. Thank goodness we hadn't used him before that. Phbt!

6) For completeness' sake

Jason Davis pitched Jason Davisly under archetypical Jason Davis circumstances. And the crowd goes mild!

7) A notable day

Trot Nixon went 5-for-5 Sunday: Nixon had never gotten 5 hits as a Red Sok, which he was for a pretty long time. Although only one of the hits was for extra bases (a double), he drove in four runs and scored twice. With Travis Hafner's stretch of below-average production, Nixon actually has the second-highest batting average on the team.

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8) A contrast in style

Friday, we batted very poorly (6 hits, 2 walks, very low for us this season, 2 runs) and lost. We only left six men on base.

Saturday, we batted quite poorly (8 hits, 4 walks, 2 runs) and lost. We managed to overcome our increased number of baserunners by grounding into a pair of double plays. Victor Martinez deserves mention here, since he went 3-for-4 with a homer and produced the sum total of the offense against starter Daniel Cabrera, who is known for having excellent “stuff” and sub-excellent “control.” (Mike Rouse also deserves mention as the only other player with 2 hits ... I don't even have a punch line here, I'm so flabbered.)

Sunday, we hit the bloody bejeezus out of the ball (16 hits, 4 walks, 9 runs) and won. Sometimes analysis just isn't that earthshattering.

9) Completely False Statement for the Google Search Engine

Mark Shapiro replaced all sliding board surfaces in the Greater Cleveland public school system with flypaper, hoping to ensnare enough children to subcontract labor to Kathie Lee Gifford. Since children could simply remove their clothes and escape, the above statement is clearly untrue. Fire Eric Wedge.