

The B-List: 5/15

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I hate the Twins, just as any self-respecting Tribe fan should. And last night's bare bottom 15-7 spanking of the Twins was great theater. Buff hates the Twins too, and he's understandably giddy in today's B-List. Buff touches on the offensive explosion, the Twins decision to go with retreads Sidney Ponson and Ramon Ortiz over talented farmhands, his growing concerns with Ferd Cabrera, and The Return of St. Grady. Enjoy!



FINAL SCORE				
Twins (18-20)	2	0	0	0
Indians (22-14)	6	3	0	0

W: Byrd (3-1) L: Ra. Ortiz (3-4)

Interesting stat: the Indians are now 1-0 in games in which they score at least 15 runs, or have two innings of scoring at least six runs. In other news, Antarctica is still cold, and "Finnegan's Wake" still makes no sense.

1) A madness to the method

Last season, the Minnesota Twins were reluctant to start the season with a lot of young players in their infield. Although players like Jason Bartlett and Nick Punto were arguably ready to play, the Twins hauled out old warhorses like Tony Batista and Juan Castro to man the left side of the diamond, and when these players hit

much in the manner expected of, say, a Tony Batista or a Juan Castro, everyone reacted with great shock, unless they weren't in the employ of the Twins' front office at the time. Everyone else on Earth knew that Tony Batista was simply a bad idea: the only question was how long it would take the Twins' Brain Trust to make the determination that, yep, that round orange squash loitering around the third base bag really was a pumpkin and not some sort of rotund super hero lying in wait to leap up and claim the glory that was so rightfully his. (It could be argued that Batista did, in fact, claim exactly the amount of glory he had coming to him: that is to say, negative three.)

This season, the hitting positions were largely established, modulo a Jason Tyner here and there, so the only place in which to show Absolutely No Faith in the youth of America (or at least the Minnesota farm system) was on the pitching staff. Instead of going with the unknown (but actually talented) commodities such as Scott Baker, Kevin Slowey, or Glen Perkins, Minnesota GM Terry Ryan went out and added Sir Sidney Ponson and Trophy Head Ramon Ortiz to the rotation, hoping to ... uh ... well, frankly, I'm not sure what he was hoping to accomplish by this. To absolutely no one's surprise, arguably not even Ryan's, Ponson has been a Compleat Toad, pitching even worse in Minnesota than he had in St. Louis, which was even worse than in Baltimore, which was really quite poorly indeed. (What, exactly, is two steps down the ladder from "quite poor"? At this point, the ladder is submerged in filth, is it not? Craptacular? Extraordinecrable? Do you need the 11 dimensions of superstring theory to express all the different degrees of freedom the badness can expand into? Or can we simply say, "Sidney Ponson" and be done with it?)

To Ortiz's credit, through his first five starts, it appeared that Ryan had indeed caught the proverbial lightning in a bottle, or at least a spark plug in an aluminum can, as Ortiz pitched more than credibly: his average start was 7 innings with 3 runs allowed, a 3-1 record and a nifty 2.57 ERA. This would have made him Cleveland's best starter, at least in terms of ERA. That's a nice little pickup, especially seeing that Ortiz is making about 0.43 Paul Byrds this season. However, the problem with painting stripes on a horse and calling it a zebra is that eventually it rains, and people begin to notice that, in fact, it is simply a horse, albeit with Very Large Ears. Ortiz' last two starts were of the "lame" variety, giving up 5 runs in 4 and 6 innings respectively, absorbing two losses that

the still-offensively-challenged Twins could ill afford.

Ortiz did not pitch "lameley" last night. He pitched "Ponsonly." In one brisk 11-batter inning of work, Ortiz gave up seven hits, six runs, and threw more balls than strikes. He gave up a long home run to Jhonny Peralta, a two-run double off the wall to nine-hitter Kelly Shoppach, and not one, but two hits to the previously-slumping Grady Sizemore. In Baltimore, fans were confused because they thought Ponson had been DFW'd (designated for getting the wazoo); in the Greater Los Angeles Metroplex, they helpfully pointed out that, no, Ramon Ortiz was still on the squad.

Meanwhile, in Bozeman or Fargo or wherever the heck Minnesotans play minor-league ball, Kevin Slowey is wondering exactly whose car he has to wash to get a crack at starting a game in the bigs.

2) Dispensing with formalities

Paul Byrd's start did not get off to an auspicious beginning: after only one of the two would-be bunters reached base safely, Byrd threw a Beephus Pitch (float like a butterfly, look like a meatball) to Tribe nemesis Mike Cuddyer, and three batters into the game the Indians were down 2-0. Byrd bore down to throw a combined 8 strikes in 10 pitches to Justin Morneau and Torii Hunter and struck the both out to stem the bleeding.

Apparently, the combination of good results and being staked to a 6-2 (which soon became 9-2) lead led Byrd to conclude that, really, any pitch thrown out of the strike zone was a colossal waste of everyone's time. Byrd threw 71 strikes in 91 pitches, striking out 7 and walking zero. He gave up a solo shot to Morneau in the sixth, then pattered around with a couple singles, a hit batsman, and a couple groundouts to give up two more in the 7th (at which point the lead was cut to 15-5), but in between, Byrd basically said, "Look, I have a seven-run lead, if you hit a seven-run homer, more power to you." After perfect 2

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innings, Byrd gave up a single in each of the 4

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and 5

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with this approach: his ERA "ballooned" to 3.49, but this was every bit the Large Lead Start you'd expect from a veteran like Byrd.

3) I believe concern is appropriate at this point

I've touched on my recent concerns about Ferd Cabrera: last night crystallized those concerns into simple bowel-loosening terror, as Cabrera gave up a pair of solo shots, a third hit, and walked a man while recording exactly one out in the 8th inning. Not only did this force Oldberto Hernandez to bail him out on a night when he shouldn't have been required to do anything more strenuous than nap, but it sucked raw eggs. Both homers were on three-ball counts: the only reason Garrett Jones, whom I wouldn't know from an abalone, didn't join them is that he got a fourth ball to walk instead.

In complex terms, Cabrera's "out pitch" is a nasty slider that hitters can't lay off when they're behind in the count. This requires Cabrera to actually BE ahead in the count: the pitch is not always in the zone to be called a strike. Cabrera has to spot his fastball to get to the point where the slider is a credible option, much like, say, Brad Lidge 2005.

In simple terms, outs good, home runs bad. Get more outs. Give up fewer home runs. You can't get away with that: you're not Aruban and have not been knighted by Queen Beatrix or whomever it is these days.

4) Who are you, and what have you done with ... er, everyone?

The Indians had 17 hits and 4 walks, resulting in 23 baserunners (there was an HBP and an error). They scored 15 runs and left 6 on base (one was erased on a double play, and Jason Michaels was very, very out at third base trying to advance on a single). They left **two** runners in scoring position at the ends of innings. Two! At one point, the Indians batted 8-for-10 with runners in scoring position: they finished 11-for-15. With two sac flies and a walk. Think about that. This is the Cleveland Indians we're talking about. The Indians came into the game hitting what seemed to be about .000000000006 with runners in scoring position. Last night they hit .733.

And yes, it still counts that the first 5-for-6 stretch was off Ramon Ortiz.

5) The return of St. Grady?

Grady Sizemore went 4-for-5 last night with a double, a homer, and two runs scored and batted in. This raises Sizemore's average back up to .259, but is more important for two reasons: it gives fans reason to think that Sizemore is ready to bust out of his May slump (which has been ghastly), and it ostensibly lessens the inclination to give Franklin Gutierrez plate appearances.

(It should be noted that if the right-handed Gutierrez starts against Super Lefty Johan Santana today, this wouldn't be a *priori* a foolish move. But it's unlikely to be a particularly successful one, either.)

6) Everybody hits!

Eight Indians players collected hits last night, including Ryan Garko in his only plate appearance replacing Victor Martinez after the game was safely in hand. Five players collected multiple hits, including the entire bottom third of the lineup (Michaels 3, Barfield 3, Shoppach 2). Jhonny Peralta added to the first-inning three-run homer with another run-scoring hit and scored two runs. Every player with more than one plate appearance either scored or drove in a run.

The exceptions to the rule were Travis Hafner, who went 0-for-2, but walked and scored three times, and David Dellucci, who sucked. (He hit a sac fly. Big whoop.) After horrific starts, Peralta is hitting .252, Barfield .228 (okay, still bad, but no longer "what the heck is this guy doing in the majors?" bad), Michaels .282, and Shoppach .275.

This is beginning to feel like an offense. Yes, I know we're in the upper quartile of the league in runs scored, but it doesn't always FEEL like that, y'know? Seeing a lineup of decent averages just helps you FEEL better.

7) Credit Where Credit Is Due Dept.

Hernandez really did pitch well, giving up one hit and striking out one in 1 2/3 scoreless innings to bail out Cabrera from Compleat Ignominy. In fact, his first act on the mound was to induce a double play to erase Cabrera's walk and end the 8th before the Twins could get any ideas about a massive soul-crushing comeback. Nice work, perfectly-aged man. (1964 was a tremendous year in which to be born.)

8) Box Score Follies

Jesse Crain gave up four hits, including a two-run home run to Sizemore, hit a batter, and had to be relieved with 2 outs in the 6th after giving up six runs. However, since the first batter reached base on an error, and all six runs scored after the second out (a sac fly by Dellucci), it was determined that Crain gave up zero *earned* runs.

Now, I've said this before: if you give up a home run, I don't care how many balls your defense misplayed behind you before that, you gave up a **home run**

. Home runs are not "unearned." Home runs are about as bad as a pitcher can possibly perform. He

deserves

that run. I understand the scoring rules, and I'm not going to petition the league or anything, but Jess Crain did not give up six unearned runs. He gave up six runs because he pitched awfully. That's just bad, "earned" or not.

9) Completely False Statement for the Google Search Engine

Mark Shapiro flew to San Antonio, threw on a Spurs jersey with the number 5 on it, and hip-checked Steve Nash into the scorer's table, hoping to cause a bench-clearing brawl. Anyone who would mistake Mark Shapiro for Robert Horry needs some serious help with his or her vision, since this statement is clearly untrue. Fire Eric Wedge.