

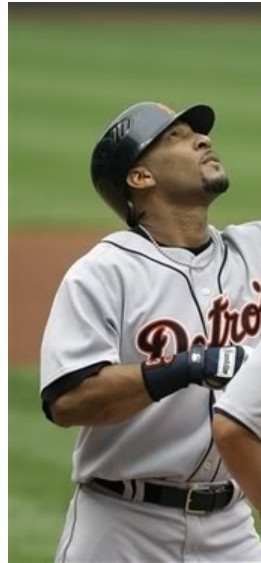
## The B-List: 6/1-6/3

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Sunday, June 03 2007 7:00 PM -

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Friday night's thrilling come from behind win over the baseball team from Detroit proved to be very good karma for Saturday night's hoops game. Unfortunately, the Tribe dropped both the Saturday and Sunday contests, allowing the Tigers to come back and split the series. In the Monday version of The B-List, Buff takes a look back at the weekend set with Detroit.



<b>FINAL SCORE</b>					
<b>Tigers (30-24)</b>	2	0	0	1	
<b>Indians (34-19)</b>	0	0	0	1	

W: R. Hernandez (3-1) □ L: Todd Jones (1-3)

<b>FINAL SCORE</b>					
<b>Tigers (31-24)</b>	0	1	3	0	
<b>Indians (34-20)</b>	1	0	3	0	

W: Durbin (5-1) □ L: C. Lee (2-3)

<b>FINAL SCORE</b>					
<b>Tigers (32-24)</b>	2	1	0	2	
<b>Indians (34-21)</b>	2	0	0	0	

W: Bonderman (5-0) □ L: Sowers (1-6)

The euphoria of Friday night was literally unbelievable, but ultimately, a month with no days off is a long time, and the pitching staff sure played like it.

## 1) Starters, schmarters

Is there a compelling reason to start by analyzing the starting pitching over the weekend series? Like the Grinch, it ran the gamut through stink, stank, and stunk. There are interesting points to make, but they sure aren't the ones I want to start with.

No, the truly magical game was Friday night, when the Tribe was not competing with the Cavaliers for the city's attention. Fausto Carmona and Mike Maroth locked horns in a battle of who could be more pointlessly inept, which resulted in two hornless pitchers and little displayed skill. Had it been a mating display, let us simply say that neither of their genes would be propagating this season, as each gave up 5 runs in 6 innings.

Tom Mastny came in and pitched like an idiot. Aaron Fultz came in and pitched like a very *smart* idiot, perhaps simply a moron. Fernandolm Cabrera blundered his way through a great inning and a wretched one. Oldberto Hernandez got an out after allowing an olmish run to score.

Not to be outdone, the Tigers brought in their nominal replacement for last year's Jamie Walker, left-hander Wil Ledezman, who, by the standards of the evening, was almost gifted, looking like the only pitcher to be able to defeat the fifth-grader on television. And then, with an injury-ravaged bullpen, closer Todd Jones came on in the 8<sup>th</sup> to pitch like Detroit's answer to the brother in "My Name Is Earl."

Look, let's be honest: after the 4-run 6<sup>th</sup>, I thought the Indians were in pretty good shape. I believed our bullpen to be better than theirs, so I thought we'd finally wear them down and pull away. But Mastny had zero control and less command, and the four-spot in the 7

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made it 9-5, Tigers. I stuck with it through the 8<sup>th</sup>

, but when David Dellucci stranded runners on second and third to end the inning, I was less optimistic. Once Cabrera olmified, I turned off the computer and read a book. They brought in Oldberto Hernandez with the bases loaded to save the day.

### **They brought in Oldberto to SAVE THE DAY**

. Come on, isn't that tantamount to conceding?

Here's what I missed: a single by Blake, a walk by Hafner, and a opposite-field 3-run shot by Victor Martinez. Now, had Cabrera been, say, Rafael Betancourt, that would have won the game and felt pretty good. Instead, we were still down a run, and the most reliable offensive threats had already been extinguished, especailly after Ryan Garko struck out with a runner on second (Peralta had doubled, and Rouse came in to run). So this means we were depending on Trot Nixon with two outs.

Now, I really appreciate what Nixon has added to the team. I underestimated the value of his &quot;intangibles,&quot; which appear to have had a net positive effect beyond his ability to miss left-handed pitching, hit for no power (.371 SLG), or hit with runners in scoring position (.245/.310/.347, or .200/.310/.200 with RISP and two out, or .212/.297/.303 with men on and 2 out). The fact remains that there are few hitters I am less confident seeing at the plate with two outs needing a baserunner to extend an inning, and one of them was already

standing on second base. (One of the others followed Nixon in the lineup.)

Naturally, Nixon was intentionally walked.

This was interesting for a couple reasons: one, because Nixon has been terrible in those situations. Two, because Nixon has been terrible in those situations. And three, the baserunner at second represented the tying run, but Nixon represented the *wi nning* run. What percentage of the time is it a good idea to intentionally put the winning run on base, when said winning run is represented by a player who isn't Magglio Ordonez or Manny Ramirez? Like, negative 30? Yes, Nixon is left-handed and Jones is right-handed and Barfield is right-handed and Jones is a fungus, but have I mentioned that Trot Nixon has been terrible in those situations?

Anyway, Nixon was walked, and Barfield came through with an opposite-field single than may have fooled Ordonez, because it sure didn't fall a whole lot in front of him. A good piece of hitting by Barfield there, although a more attentive right fielder probably ends the game right there. (I understand not diving for the ball once the initial step wasn't there: you miss that ball, you lose the game right there.)

This brings up David Dellucci. Remember when I said there were few players I felt less confident about than Nixon? How about a guy with numbers that compare thusly to Nixon's: .175/.255/.250 with RISP, .136/.174/.182 with RISP 2 out, .179/.233/.214 men on 2 out. Awful. Terrible. And also not good. To be fair, Dellucci has been on a bit of a hot streak, with 7 hits in the previous 6 games, only one of which was hitless. But it's still bad. Barfield got to second on fielder's indifference (and really, it's hard to imagine a situation calling for more indifference: Nixon on third was the winning run at that point, and Sizemore would have followed Dellucci). And Dellucci stroked the game-winning single on a 2-1 count.

Now, let's recap: the Indians needed 4 runs to tie that game. In order to do this, they needed Trot Nixon to get on base with two outs AND Josh Barfield to get on base with two outs. To win the game, they needed this AND David Dellucci to get on base with two outs. On a scale of 1 to Likely, this was about a 1.2. But it was darned cool, I'll say that: not quite Seattle double-digit deficit erasing cool, but still very cool.

## 2) Good news and bad news

There's really only a couple of things you ask from Fausto Carmona: keep the ball down and induce ground balls. You don't ask him to strike a bunch of guys out, you don't ask him to

pitch a complete game, you just want your Quality Start in your pocket and huzzahs all around.

Carmona certainly had the ground ball part of it down Friday: 12 GB outs to 1 FB out. And Carmona uncharacteristically struck out 5 hitters in 6 innings, tying a season-high. Carmona walked zero and induced three double plays, including a 1-4-6-3 double play that I wish I'd seen, because I can't even visualize it. 1-4-6-3? What the heck is that? Carmona tried to get the out at first-and-a-halfth base, but the throw was late?

No, the problem was that although there were no walks, there were ten hits, and three of them were for extra bases: a double by Ordonez (who scored), a triple by Granderson (who scored), and a two-run homer by Craig Monroe (who scored twice \*). It is one thing to have the extreme groundball pitcher give up a bunch of hits: this is the price you pay for exchanging long flies and Ks for ground balls. But if you're going to pay this price, you have to actually make the exchange that prevents the long flies, or the payoff is Real Low. The 5 strikeouts are a neat thing, but if they come at the expense of X-Treme Hits, I'll pass.

*\* okay, that's not true, but he did score*

### 3) Jerriff Sowerlee

Is there a functional difference between Cliff Lee and Jeremy Sowers at this point? Both are left-handed. Both are on the thin side. And both are atrociously worthless and I want to close my eyes when they're on the mound.

It wasn't supposed to be like this. I was worried about Sowers last season, and unfortunately, my impressions appear worryingly correct: with neither a strikeout nor a groundball pitch, Sowers' "guile and pitchability" (showing that I'm not the only sportswriter to make up words) just isn't enough to win consistently in the big leagues. His good performances have come against weak offenses having bad stretches (Chicago, the Angels, Minnesota, KC). He has had exactly no good outings against a good offense (Boston, New York, Suckcinnati, Detroit). Will he have a long, Paul Byrd slash Jamie Moyer type career? Why? Because he's very smart and is fun to interview? No, there has to be something else there. I'm not saying it will never be there and we should trade him immediately for the ghost of Wade Miller's shoulder, but I am saying that right now, Jeremy Sowers is not a good major-league pitcher. You can argue sample size or counterexamples like Moyer or anything else you want: I am telling you it is so.

Lee, on the other hand, is simply pitching poorly and I can't tell you why without resorting to arcane Fan Jinx Technology. Eight hits in 4 1/3 IP is bad. Three walks is really bad. The fact that TWO of the EIGHT hits were SINGLES is really, really, truly, really bad. You gave up a double to Sean Casey, sport! That blows! The five doubles and a homer suggest that Lee is throwing too much soft or non-moving stuff up in the zone, and the three walks suggests he has no command of his (supposed) signature pitch, the curve. I know he was on the DL and I can't ask for diamond-cutter-precision yet, but great googly moogly, how 'bout something better than &quot;sucky?&quot;

#### **4) It's only a flesh wound**

That is, as long as one considers all one's internal organs to be &quot;flesh.&quot;

I think it is safe to say that Tom Mastny is going through a rough stretch. Friday night's blowup (3 hits, 2 walks, 4 runs, 1 out) was ultimately rendered meaningless, but Sunday's outing wasn't appreciably better (1 IP, 2 H, 2 BB, 2 R, 2 K). Mastny had been so good this season for so many outings that this is disturbing: until Fultz became a run-walking-in machine, the bullpen consisted of three reliable guys (Betancourt, Mastny, Fultz), and the right-handers' calling card was pounding the strike zone. Betancourt had a &quot;get some work in&quot;



inning Sunday (10 strikes in 12 pitches), but Fultz has a head problem and now Mastny could not be pitching worse. And Mastny's real trouble has been what had been his greatest strength: throwing quality strikes. Those four walks really suggest some sort of egregious problem: I don't know if Mastny needs a week off or something, but that's really troublesome, especially given the other right-handed options. Paging Eddie Moo ...

## 5) Keystone Kops

Rafael Perez' ERA remains a pristine 0.00 this season despite allowing a two-run single and a one-run single in the 6<sup>th</sup> inning Saturday. This is because both halves of the middle-infield combo of Josh Barfield and Jhonny Peralta managed to botch routine ground balls in the same inning. The defense hasn't been exemplary this season, but it had been better: this was simply awful play.

This having been said, Perez was nothing special that inning, either. Yeah, he deserved better, but he gave up three solid singles to go with the errors. Perez had gotten Lee out of the fifth with no additional runs, and pitched a perfect seventh (2 K, 0 BB overall), but he wasn't entirely blameless, either.

## 6) A modest proposal

Do not let Aaron Fultz come into the game with the bases loaded. Please. I'm begging you. Please. I will commit a crime. Please. Don't. Think of the children.

## 7) Every time I get out, they pull me back in

Fernando Lirio Cabrera was maddening Friday, pitching very well (3-pitch K, first-pitch popup, 2-pitch groundout) in the 8<sup>th</sup> and very poorly in the 9<sup>th</sup> (single, K, IBB, BB, K, 4-pitch BB to backup catcher no one has ever heard of ever). In the 8<sup>th</sup>, Cabrera threw 5 strikes and 1 ball: in the 9<sup>th</sup>

, he threw 15 strikes and 18 balls. (4 of the balls were intentional to Ordonez, which I do not begrudge.)

So, given two meaningless innings Sunday after Mastny's second botch-up, Cabrera threw two

hitless innings with a walk and an strikeout.

I refuse to get excited by Ferd's arm any more: it is great, it is excellent, it inspires awe. But it is not dependable, and really, what one skill does a reliever need more than any other? Can you think of a situation where Cabrera would come into a game and you'd say, "All right, everything is fine now, Ferd Cabrera is on the mound?" I mean, honestly, any? Not me.

By the way, Oldberto must die.

## **8) Hey, we played too, y'know!**

In a three-game stretch in which the opponent scores 11, 9, and 9 runs on 15, 14, and 16 hits, it seems kind of pointless to talk about the offense.

However, there were a bunch of fine individual performances, including:

- \*) Victor going 2-for-5 with 4 RBI Friday, 2-for-5 Saturday, and 2-for-4 with 2 RBI Sunday
- \*) Jason Michaels hitting a two-run blast Friday to go 2-for-2
- \*) Jhonny Peralta getting a pair of late-inning doubles and a 6<sup>th</sup>-inning homer Friday, then another double Saturday
- \*) Travis Hafner drawing at least one walk in all three games and getting two hits Saturday
- \*) Casey Blake and Grady Sizemore hitting their 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>

HRs respectively Saturday; Sizemore went 4-for-5 with 3 runs scored

- \*) Josh Barfield collecting three hits Friday, including the big hit in the 9<sup>th</sup>
- \*) Franklin Gutierrez getting a hit Sunday

\*) Mike Rouse only struck out two times in four plate appearances

## 9) Ho Hum Dept.

Betancourt had the aforementioned scoreless inning.

In contrast, Joe Borowski came into a game in a non-save situation, so he pitched incredibly poorly, giving up 4 hits and 2 runs in 1 worthless inning, surprising exactly no one.

Aaron Fultz walked in a run.

My spleen exploded.

## **10) Completely False Statement for the Google Search Engine**

Mark Shapiro has bet the family 401K fund on the San Antonio Spurs to sweep the Cavs in the NBA Finals. I don't believe Shapiro gambles significant sums, and the penalties for withdrawing 401K funds are likely sufficient to render this statement entirely false. Fire Eric Wedge.