

## The B-List: 6/14

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The Indians polished off the Marlins after an extended ninth-inning rain delay, giving them the series win. In today's B-List, Buff recaps Jason Stanford's return to the big leagues, varying degrees of relief pitching, Victor Martinez's stellar season to date, Ryan Garko's recent struggles, and Dan Uggla's improbable neck.



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|------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| <b>FINAL SCORE</b>     |   |   |   |   |
| <b>Indians (39-26)</b> | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| <b>Marlins (32-35)</b> | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

*W: Stanford (1-0) L: Willis (7-6) S: Borowski (19)*

So we threw our worst remaining starter, a reconstructed elbow, and Fausto!™ at the Marlins, and lost the game where the

**good**

pitcher pitched? How bad is the NL that the Marlins are (essentially) a .500 team?

### 1) Welcome back!

Jason Stanford made his first major-league appearance since 2004 and

won his first game since 2003 as the Mystery Pitcher to be named later, surprising exactly no one. Was there a purpose to that bit of subterfuge, to not announce the starter until Thursday? Wasn't it pretty self-evident from the moment Eric Wedge ruled out Rafael Perez, who had started in winter ball and some at Beefalo? Anyway, Stanford was called up to make the start and will stay in the rotation for now while Jake Westbrook continues to not recover from his oblique injury. Once Westbrook does return, there will be a nice bit of shenaniganization necessary to either move Stanford to the pen, send down Cliff Lee, trade a pitcher, or airlift Paul Byrd to Thule and pretend he's on some sort of non-roster list involving his not being in the country.

Until then, Stanford does a fair approximation of a major-league starter: he was never exactly a fireballer before his injury, and remains not one today, but did show exceptional command against a tailor-made Florida offense that had put up three runs in each of the first two games of the series. Stanford baffled the Marlins for six full shutout innings, giving up only four hits (all singles) and no walks while striking out seven. He was actually in such control of the game that he was allowed to lead off the seventh with a 3-0 lead because he had thrown only 82 pitches (58 strikes). Of course, this blew up when he yielded a single and a double to start the bottom of the 7<sup>th</sup> and was replaced by Oldberto Hernandez, but this was a fine decision. He was really pitching That Well. (Hernandez mde the sensible trade of a DP for a run, so Stanford ended up giving up 1 run on 6 hits.)

Stanford struck out at least one batter in each of the first six innings, the first five swinging, so although he was not untouchable (24 foul balls), he was very effective and arguably in control until the very end. Although only two of the innings

were 1-2-3, the double by Josh Willingham in the seventh marked the first time a Florida player had gotten as far as second base. Stanford's repertoire doesn't seem like high-K type of stuff, but this was kind of High End Jeremy Sowers stuff: given that he is replacing the Low End version, this should do quite nicely. Still, I have to believe that at Age 30 and without knockout stuff, Stanford is auditioning for his next job: certainly as long as he pitches like this, he is welcome, and it wouldn't be inconceivable that he could get Lee's spot if he continues, but the more likely scenario is that he is moved to a large-parked NL club in exchange for, say, someone that will turn into a corner outfield bat. Frankly, I don't know how his stuff would play out of the pen: I think his value is tied up heavily in his ability to make Quality Starts. But he certainly had a nice start, and with the Tigers losing again, it was nice to add a little distance with what amounted to our eighth starter.

## **2) You can't spell MVP without Victor Martinez' initials**

I actually haven't done a lot of research as to what other players from other AL teams are having MVP-calibre seasons. Alex Rodriguez is obviously hitting very well, leading the league in home runs. There are others hitting over .350 and racking up other &quot;counting stats&quot; like RBI and runs and such. But with a 2-for-4 night in which Victor Martinez hit his 13<sup>th</sup> homer AND his 13<sup>th</sup>

double, driving in a run and scoring twice in a 3-2 game, Martinez raised his average to .326, drove in his 56<sup>th</sup>

run, and is generally the kind of offensive force one normally associates with first basemen and DH's. Except that Martinez is a catcher who has thrown out over 26% of would-be basestealers and has made only two errors for a .993 fielding percentage. He has also played error-free first base on those days on which he does not catch.

Martinez stands at .323/.386/.558, ranking in the top ten in both homers and RBI. And oh, by the way, we would have lost the game without his contributions last night.

### **3) Spelling relief**

Stanford's night ended prematurely after a long double and a solid single, so Oldberto Hernandez was summoned from the pen. With Miguel Slowlivo at the plate, Hernandez showed him a ball out of the zone, then induced a nice double play to dampen the threat. This rendered Aaron Boone's subsequent infield single moot, as pinch-hitter Jason Wood grounded out harmlessly to

third to end the inning. In all Hernandez finished a one-hit inning on 12 pitches, giving up only Stanford's run on a reasonable exchange (reasonable with a three-run lead, I mean, but that's what he had, why not take advantage of the situation?).

Rafael Betancourt pitched the 8<sup>th</sup>, and frequent readers will likely not be shocked to hear that he threw 9 strikes in 10 pitches to retire the side in order. The #1 and #2 hitters, Reggie AAbercrombie and Dan Uggla struck out swinging, each on three pitches. Hanley Ramirez saw a ball on 0-2 before grounding out.

This marks Betancourt's 14th consecutive scoreless appearance. There is some discussion as to whether Betancourt would be better utilized as the closer, as he *is* easily our best relief pitcher (heck, he's gotta at least get consideration as best in the *league*

). However, he is being highly successful in his current role, his innings are of sufficiently high leverage, he has historically had trouble making three consecutive appearances, and for however

bananas Lord Joedemort might drive you, it's hard to argue that Betancourt as closer would have saved a lot more games than Borowski has (since Joe is 19 of 21 in save opportunities). I guess this is a long-winded way of saying that it isn't broken, so I'm loathe to try a repair. (Actually, my family has a three-generation history of being intensely bad at repairing things, so I may simply be gunshy here.)

This isn't to say that I wouldn't consider letting Betancourt pitch a ninth inning in October if it came to that, but there's no reason to tinker with the roles in mid-June.

**4) Taking relief, crumpling it into a tiny ball, soaking it in sulfuric acid, setting it on fire, and beating it senseless with a tire iron**

Joe Borowski walked out to the mound in the bottom of the ninth in a light rain to close out the

Marlins. He then did his best Ryne Duren imitation, throwing a warmup pitch in a more or less random direction, and the umpires decided that, you know what, maybe we should delay for a bit.

A full hour later, Borowski came back out and looked like he had sat for a full hour.

On an 0-2 pitch, Miguel Cabrera hit a ground rule double to center that would have been a home run many other places. After going 0-2 to Josh Willingham, Willingham was able to fight off several two-strike pitches before Borowski actually hit him.

Okay, so at this point, it may be the case that Borowski's command was not really "fine." This is not necessarily speaking ill of Borowski: it's tough to warm up, get mentally ready, then sit for an hour and have to do it over again. But it seems fairly descriptive.

Jeremy Hermidia helped with a failed bunt, but Borowski did go 1-2 to him before he flied out to left.

Up to the plate strides the mighty Miguel Olivo, proud owner of an average he has raised to .226. Strike one is missed. Strike two is watched. And then the third pitch is right in the middle of the zone, which Olivo lines into center for a run-scoring single. Now, I know that Joe's command was a little off, and I'm not advocating a closer who nibbles (I live strikes, it's true), but on an 0-2 count to a weak hitter, you gotta try to mix in something that's hard to hit solidly, right? Even if it's out of the zone? Because it's 0-2? Yes?

Fortunately, the next batter was O.F. Aaron Boone, who missed two very hittable sliders before fouling out. Then Alfredo Amezaga watched a curve drop into the zone (in my opinion, curves should drop OUT of the zone, not IN from ABOVE, but I do not

have 19 saves in 21 opportunities, so perhaps I am not the right guy to ask) and the game was over.

Ironically, Bob Wickman was throwing the same basic inning at the same basic time against Minnesota, except they aren't the Marlins and scored three runs to beat Atlanta 3-2.

**5) Here's the play: everyone but you run down the court, and you stand in the corner so you don't hurt yourself**

Ryan Garko took a collar last night, going 0-for-4 with a strikeout. In his past 11 games, Garko is hitting .034, getting a pinch-hit homer against Cincinnati June 8 for his only hit in 29 at-bats. (He does have 3 walks.) After a torrid .385/.439/.625 May, Garko is struggling something fierce in June: had it not been for a 3-for-5 game against the Tigers June 1<sup>st</sup>, he would not be hitting as well as his

.118/.211/.206 numbers suggest.

Thirty-two plate appearances is not a lot of plate appearances, and everyone has a slump over the course of a season. Garko's not a .118 hitter any more than he was a .385 hitter. But great googly moogly, 1-for-29 (including 0 for his last 15) is doubleplus ungood.

## **6) Who let Jim Riggleman back on the staff?**

With two outs in the 6<sup>th</sup> inning, Franklin Gutierrez singled in Victor Martinez for Cleveland's third run. At that point, the Indians had runners on first and second with Josh Barfield at the plate. Now, Josh Barfield is not a patient hitter (0 walks in June) nor a powerful one (2 XBH in June, both doubles), but he is a

hot one, batting .341 in June. After scraping by with a .117 average on April 25, Barfield has raised his season average to a respectable .257.

On the first pitch, Barfield singled up the middle into center field. Jhonny Peralta (whom I believe we've established resembles a fast baserunner in the same way he resembles a left-handed corkscrew: that is to say, in no way whatsoever) was waved around third and promptly thrown out at home to end the inning.

Now, in a sense, I understand this move. Stanford was due up next, and having him bat with the bases loaded and two outs is not really any more likely to score a run

than it was for Peralta to beat the throw. In fact, you could argue quite credibly that the chance of a bad throw from AAABercrombie or a drop by Olivo was greater than Stanford getting on base. And there was little chance that Stanford would have been lifted for a pinch-hitter, not being so effective with a 3-0 lead.

However, that's the third guy thrown out at home in a week. Can we stop doing that? Pleeeeeeeeeeeeze?

## **7) Credit Where Credit Is Due Dept.**

Gutierrez' RBI single was one of two hits

collected on the day. Barfield Not RBI single was also one of two for him.

Casey Blake extended his hitting streak by making outs when it would have helped to get a hit and getting a hit when it made no difference whatsoever, except to pad Jhonny Peralta's GIDP stats.

The team left only 5 men on base, two in scoring position.

## **8) Box Score Follies**

With runners on first and second, Ryan Garko lifted a fly ball to center that allowed Victor Martinez to tag up and go to third. However, Garko was not credited with a sacrifice fly.

Is this at the discretion of the official scorer, who somehow gauges the "intent" of a fly ball? I say that any time you hit something that allows Victor Martinez, who has never beaten anyone but Ryan Garko in a footrace, to tag up, you deserve a sacrifice fly.

[Dan Uggla](#) took the Golden Sombrero with 4 Ks in as many trips to the plate. He celebrated by growing his neck even wider.