

The B-List: 6/22-6/24

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Sunday, June 24 2007 7:00 PM -

Outside of a Victor Martinez game winning home run Saturday night, the Indians offense was impotent in the nation's capital this weekend during their three game set with the scrappy Nationals. Long time B-List readers know, while almost getting swept by one of the league dregs is tough to watch, it makes for an entertaining column the next day from Buff. Buff revisits the weekend series with the Nats in the Monday B-List. **FINAL SCORE**

Indians (42-30)	0	0	1	0
Nationals (31-42)	0	0	0	1



W: S. Rivera (2-2) L: Carmona (8-3) S: C. Cordero (12)

FINAL SCORE

Indians (43-30)	0	0	0	0
Nationals (31-43)	0	0	1	0

W: Mastny (5-2) L: C. Cordero (1-2) S: Borowski (21)

FINAL SCORE

Indians (43-31)	0	0	0	0
Nationals (32-43)	0	1	0	1

W: Simontacchi (5-5) L: Westbrook (1-3) S: C. Cordero (13)

I considered putting as much effort into this column as the offense put into the games this weekend, but my editor insisted on at least three sentences.

1) We're all out of "triumphant," would you settle for

"encouraging?"

Jake Westbrook scared the bejeezus out of Tribe fans during his rehab, where he gave up a lot of hits and runs to A-ball hitters and generally looked thoroughly unlike a guy who deserved a pricy extension. However, a lot of those hits were ground ball singles through inexperienced infields, so at least there was a certain element of Westbrooking going on there.

Jokes about the nature of the Washington offense aside, Westbrook's first start since returning from the DL was a pretty happy thing, lasting 7 full innings with only 3 runs and 7 hits allowed. Westbrook was efficient, needing only 88 pitches and throwing 60 of them for strikes: he was lifted for a pinch-hitter and could easily be seen finishing the game in an AL park. Westbrook induced 13 ground ball outs (against 6 flies) and struck out two. The two long doubles he allowed both resulted in scores, so there is still work to be done, although it should be pointed out that both runs scored on outs. With a little better command, Westbrook would have had a very fine game instead of a simply solid one.

The idea of Dmitri Young hitting an infield single boggles my mind.

2) Phaedrus would approve

There are no two ways about it: Paul Byrd has been awful. Not for the entire season, where his ERA is hovering around league average at 4.74, but over the past several ballgames, which featured double-digit hit totals in an average of 5 innings per start. Walks and strikeouts are rendered largely moot when you're simply giving up two hits an inning: when 3 of the hits are home runs to boot, it goes a long way toward rendering Byrd himself moot as well.

The Nationals do not have a powerful offense, and their home park is not conducive to "shootouts," but Byrd's 6 2/3 quality innings on Saturday

showed a marked improvement over his recent fare. Byrd gave up 7 hits and a(n intentional) walk, striking out 4 and generally working the strike zone. His strike percentage of 69% was a bit low by Byrd's standards, but on the other hand, so was one hit per inning. There may be a correlation, although the normal caveats about sample size clearly apply (if applied clearly).

Byrd ended up with a no decision because of the preposterous Cleveland offense, and ended up giving up a third run because of the preposterous Cleveland defense. Brandon Watson scored from third on a "wild pitch" from Rafael Perez, who threw three strikes in three pitches, meaning his wild pitch was a strike. Uh huh. Right. They should have gotten Watson at home, anyway.

Anyway, that's a Quality Start from Byrd, and I'll take it. Whether lessons carry over to the Oakland series or not remains to be seen.

3) Revenge of the Ordinary

Fausto Carmona gave up 3 runs on 10 hits and a pair of walks in 6 innings. He induced 11 ground ball outs, including 3 double plays. It was not a very good start by Carmona, although it was certainly a quality start by Carmona. Its interest factor was low. I'm already tired of talking about it.

4) The name's Martinez. Victor Martinez.

Let us consider the Cleveland offense this weekend: in twenty-three of the twenty-seven innings, it scored zero runs. In three of the twenty-seven innings, it scored one run. And in one of the innings, it Victor Martinezed.

Victor Martinez didn't actually have a great weekend. He did reach base in all

three of the games, something only one other Indian could boast. However, he only had two hits, while drawing three walks and striking out twice. He lowered his batting average five points from .319 to .314. And he grounded into a double play.

However, after losing 4-1 in the opening game and falling behind 3-1 in the next, Victor Martinez strode to the plate with two runners on base in the ninth inning to face closer Chad Cordero. Cordero is actually quite good, saving both Friday's and Sunday's games and sporting a 2.57 ERA coming into Saturday's game. However, the first pitch from Cordero ended up umpteen feet away from home plate over the center field wall, as Martinez drove in as many runs with one swing as rest of the Indians would drive in all weekend. Although you could argue that Cordero should have pitched around Martinez, Victor had been 0-for-3 to that point, and heck, he may have been trying (it was the first pitch, and not a terribly fat one at that).

Martinez is not a player without flaws, but one wonders where this team would be without his consistently excellent performance at the plate.

5) Fear of a cursed planet

Here is the part of the column in which I exhort you to go look up Franklin Gutierrez' statistics to date.

Okay, I can't resist: in the past six games in which he's played, Gutierrez has at least one hit in each and a pair of hits in four of them. Although only one of the 10 hits was for extra bases (his solo shot Sunday represented the sum total of Cleveland's offensive output), the formerly power-challenged outfielder is slugging .479 on the season on the strength of three home runs. His OBP of .320 is poor for a player hitting .292, but ... hey, he's hitting .292. Is that better than Trot Nixon? (It's better than Trot Nixon.)

Anyway, Gutierrez is the "other player" I alluded to in the Victor Martinez section. He also stole a base Friday night and plays defense considerably better than any other outfielder not named Grady.

6) Acknowledgements of efforts

Josh Barfield had a pair of hits Sunday, representing half the team's total and half the team's extra-base hits (because he doubled).

Jason Michaels was 2-for-2 against Matt Chico Saturday before being lifted for pinch-gacker Trot Nixon.

Jhonny Peralta had a pair of hits Friday, including a two-out RBI, driving in roughly 100% of the team's runs.

7) The rest of the offense in summation

Sucked.

8) The human yo-yo

Eddie Mujica was called up so that he could be sent back down. I don't believe he actually exists.

9) Nailing the wheels back on

Part of the problem with the bullpen has been dependability: several of the players have good stuff and have had stretches in which the stuff has been effectively used, but without knowing which kind of outing you're going to get, actually placing the fellow on the mound can have a rather stressful effect. With the exception of Rafael Betancourt, the only other pitcher who has really looked effective on a regular basis has been Rafael Perez. Perez did strike out the only batter he faced, although he was somewhat responsible for Paul Byrd's third run.

Two of the more maddening players have been Tom Mastny and Ferd Cabrera, both largely due to the same reason: command. Mastny has been a virtual pitch randomizer, especially compared to his sparkling control in 2006, while Cabrera simply goes through stretches of complete piffle. Both players got some action this weekend, as Mastny threw two shutout innings and Cabrera gave up a solo shot in his inning.

However, Cabrera's outing featured 21 strikes in 29 pitches, and he struck out Austin Kearns with a man in scoring position after giving up a leadoff homer to Christian Guzman. Mastny was more efficient, giving up a single in each outing but requiring only 12 (7 strikes) and 15 (10 strikes) pitches to finish off each inning. Cabrera will not be the late-inning setup man I projected him to be in 2007, but if he can throw strikes and keep the ball in the park, he can be a guy that keeps Mastny and Betancourt from turning to mush by September. And if Mastny can be the first guy out of the pen, absorbing an inning without walking the bases loaded, that will bridge the gap nicely from the starter to Betancourt and Borowski. So, while the wheels appeared to have fallen off early this month, it's possible that the staff has found a way to reattach them, at least for the time being.

10) You owe me a stomach lining

How Lord Joedemort gave up a double to NOOK FREAKING LOGAN defies belief. However, it's nothing like the baserunning of Logan himself, who, on a ground ball back to the pitcher with the bases loaded, took a wide enough turn at

third to be **gunned down by Kelly Shoppach** for a 1-2-5 game-ending double play. I do not have the patience to look for the number of 1-2-5 game-ending double plays, but I have to imagine the number is small.

However, let me point something out here: to be gunned down at third, Logan had to have been on second base, and he got there by **hitting a double off Joe**

Borowski

. It's Nook Logan.

NOOK LOGAN

! You've got to be kidding me.

That we won that game was outright theft.